

Bible Reading Plan

WEEK OF JUNE 14, 2020

WEEKLY READING: MATTHEW 6-10

PASSAGES REFERENCED: JOHN 16:13; MATTHEW 6:9-15; PSALM 143:10;
PHILIPPIANS 2:13

In times of war, natural disaster, and persecution, the church suffers together and witnesses to a watching world by showing the reality of Christ's love. – Dr. James C. Wilhoit

In this week's reading, Jesus is already knee-deep in the sermon of all sermons, "The Sermon on the Mount." Starting with this profound message and continuing through Matthew 11, Jesus is announcing the Kingdom through teaching, preaching, and healing. One of the key moments in this section is the Lord's Prayer. Jesus describes a way to pray that helps us grasp God's character and His relationship with the world. Prayer, in the way Jesus describes, changes us and frees us to show the reality of His love to a suffering world.

Before exploring the Lord's Prayer, let's pause and reflect on the practice of Bible reading and study. While we often treat Bible reading as a practice that is separate from prayer, Bible reading assumes we are praying and seeking the Spirit's guidance. We need the Holy Spirit to illuminate God's Word for us. We need the Spirit to take what we read to speak to our hearts and give us insight as to how what we read affects us, changes us, and helps us orient to the situation of the world around us (see John 16:13). The Word of God is timely when we engage with it prayerfully, open to the Spirit's help.

The Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6:9-15) also helps us orient to whatever situations we face in the world around us. It has been used by Christians since the church came into existence. As Wheaton professor James Wilhoit says, "Martin Luther used the Lord's Prayer as a structure for long prayer times, going word by word or phrase by phrase, speaking with God about the significance of the words in his life." The Lord's Prayer includes (at least) four important emphases: Trust, Forgiveness, Persistence, and Community.

Trust – "Our Father"

At the beginning of the prayer, we are called to reach out to the God of the Universe in personal terms. He is our Father and we are His children. What better way to start than to orient around the truth that He is not distant and impersonal? He cares deeply for us, all of us.

Forgiveness – "Forgive us our sins, as we forgive"

Building on our understanding of God as a loving father, we are prompted to ask Him for the forgiveness we need. All of us are fallible. We sin. We neglect to love our neighbor. And with Him, there is forgiveness and a challenge to mirror His forgiveness in our lives.

Persistence – "Give us this day our daily bread"

We are encouraged to seek Him daily, or as often as we realize our need for Him. Because He is the most trustworthy and most able to help, we should depend on Him for everything we need to live another day. This is not limited to our physical needs; we depend on Him to guide our thoughts, our words, and our actions.

Community – "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil"

Throughout the prayer, Jesus encourages the disciples to pray corporately (as a whole). The model for prayer is that the church together seeks God and learns to depend on Him together. When our brother or sister is struggling, we pray to our Father just as much to lift them up as ourselves. He is faithful to lead us (as a body) away from temptation, protect us from evil, and guide us toward accomplishing His will on earth.

Prayer changes us. God often uses it to form and prepare us to act as ambassadors of His love in this world. In the book *Experiencing God*, Henry Blackaby says, "Prayer is designed more to adjust you to God than to adjust God to you." We see several phrases tied to present action in the Lord's Prayer: "your will be done on earth," "give us this day," "forgive us, as we forgive others," and "lead us." When we see phrases like this, we hopefully realize that prayer is not simply about giving concerns to God and sitting idle. God has a plan and a mission in this world and we have a part. Yet, there isn't a one-size-fits-all task for us. Instead, we are taught to pray to prepare us to face whatever challenges we encounter in our lifetimes. So, we are called to pray in the spirit of Psalm 143:10, "Teach me to do your will, for you are my God; may your good Spirit lead me on level ground." And we pray with the truth of Philippians 2:13 at the forefront of our minds, "For it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose." – *Nate Metler*