Lesson 44: Questions 106 and 107

106–107

The preceding lesson established the nature of Christian prayer. Yet knowing ***what*** prayer is leaves a practical question: ***how*** should we learn to pray? Our desires do not naturally arrange themselves according to God's priorities. Even sincere believers need instruction concerning what to ask and how to approach the God Who hears them.

Questions 106 and 107 direct us to God's provision for that need. The whole of Scripture instructs our prayers, and within Scripture Christ gives His disciples a pattern for prayer. Before examining its petitions, we must consider its opening address. Those words establish both the privilege of the people praying and the majesty of the Father they approach.

Question 106: How does God tell us to pray?

Q. What rule has God given for our direction in prayer?
A. The whole word of God is of use to direct us in prayer; but the special rule of direction is that prayer which Christ taught his disciples, commonly called the Lord's prayer.

FIRST, the whole Word of God directs prayer.

- Its ***commands*** identify duties for which we need grace.
- Its ***promises*** teach us what God has pledged.
- Its ***warnings*** expose dangers we should resist.
- Its ***revelation*** of God's character teaches us Whom we address.

Thus, reading Scripture should reshape the desires we bring before Him.

And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us. (1 John 5:14, ESV)

John grounds confidence in asking according to God's will. This does not mean that we must discover His ***hidden purposes*** before praying. His ***revealed will*** supplies our direction: we may confidently seek what He commands and promises, while submitting requests about particular circumstances to His wisdom. Scripture trains us to desire holiness, seek forgiveness, love the church, and pursue our neighbors' good.

This direction extends beyond passages explicitly about prayer. A ***command*** against bitterness gives us reason to confess resentment and ask for grace to forgive. A ***promise*** of God's sustaining presence supplies grounds for seeking endurance. The Word does not merely furnish religious language for sinful desires; it corrects and re-shapes those desires.

SECOND, the Lord's Prayer is Christ's special rule within that comprehensive instruction. It does not replace the rest of Scripture. Rather, the One Who authoritatively teaches God's will gives His disciples a ***pattern*** by which their prayers may be ordered.

"And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.
"And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him." (Matthew 6:5-8, ESV)

Within the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus first exposes two corruptions of prayer. Hypocrites seek the approval of an audience; Gentiles (pagans) imagine that multiplying words will secure a hearing. Both misunderstand the Father. Prayer is ***neither*** a performance before spectators ***nor*** a technique for overcoming divine reluctance. The Father already knows His children's needs.

Pray then like this: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. (Matthew 6:9-13, ESV)

Christ's pattern answers these errors. Its direct address turns attention toward God rather than an audience. Its petitions express dependence without attempting to manipulate Him. Brevity itself is not the rule, nor is length the problem. The issue is whether we sincerely seek our Father or place confidence in our performance.

Now Jesus was praying in a certain place, and when he finished, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples." And he said to them, "When you pray, say: "Father, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread, and forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone who is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation." (Luke 11:1-4, ESV)

Luke presents the prayer in response to a disciple's request for instruction after Jesus has been praying. Matthew emphasizes praying according to this pattern; Luke also presents words the disciples may say. Together, these settings support both using the prayer's actual words and allowing its content to shape other prayers. Thoughtful recitation is not empty repetition. Neither does Christ require every acceptable prayer to reproduce this wording.

The modest differences between the two passages tell us two important things:

1. This wasn't a one-time request from the disciples. Jesus likely had this encounter with them multiple times. Like the disciples, we also will not master prayer in a single lesson, a single year, or even in this lifetime.
2. Christ gives an authoritative pattern, not a verbal mechanism. We should neither neglect His words because they are familiar nor speak them without attending to their meaning.

THIRD, the prayer orders our priorities. Its preface identifies the God we approach. Its opening petitions concern His name, kingdom, and will; the remaining petitions bring the needs of His people before Him. Our dependence is not neglected, but it is ***framed*** within the larger purpose of God's glory.

This order does not forbid beginning an urgent prayer with a cry for help. It teaches us what should govern even that cry. We ask for daily provision, pardon, and protection as people whose deepest concern is that our Father be honored. Subsequent lessons will examine the petitions individually. Here we must first learn what kind of approach their opening words establish.

Question 107: What does the preface mean?

Q. What does the preface of the Lord's prayer teach us?
A. The preface of the Lord's prayer, which is Our Father which are in heaven, teaches us to draw near to God with all holy reverence and confidence, as children to a father, able and ready to help us; and that we should pray with and for others.

The preface is the prayer's opening address, before its requests begin. **Matthew 6:9**, considered above, joins the language of family belonging to the acknowledgment of heavenly majesty. Neither should be allowed to silence the other.

FIRST, "Our Father" expresses the privilege of adoption. God is the Creator of every person, and every person owes Him worship and obedience. But the redemptive privilege of approaching Him as an adopted child is not simply another name for being human. It belongs to those united to His Son. Though often repeated, it is ***not*** true that we are all children of God.

For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!" (Romans 8:15, ESV)

Paul contrasts slavery marked by fear with the Spirit of adoption. In the surrounding argument, those who belong to Christ receive the Spirit and are acknowledged as God's children and heirs. Their address to God arises from a relationship He has graciously established, not from a confidence they have manufactured.

Adoption means that believers do not approach God as strangers seeking admission to His household. Through Christ, they have been ***received*** as children. This does not remove the need to confess sin; it gives them reason to confess honestly rather than hide. Their Father's holiness exposes their sin, while His grace assures them that returning to Him is not futile.

Paul's expression *"Abba, Father"* conveys genuine filial intimacy. *"Abba"* is an Aramaic address meaning "father"; "Daddy" is not its necessary or exhaustive English equivalent. Nevertheless, "daddy" can sometimes help communicate a child's affectionate confidence when used reverently. The pastoral test is whether such language expresses trusting love toward our holy Father or encourages casual familiarity that diminishes His majesty. Neither tenderness nor reverence requires the loss of the other.

The Trinitarian shape remains essential: we ordinarily approach the Father through the Son by the Holy Spirit. This pattern explains our access without implying that prayer may never be addressed to the Son or the Spirit. (See last week, where we discussed the ***normal*** pattern of praying ***to*** the Father ***through*** the Son ***by*** the Spirit.)

SECOND, "which art in heaven" teaches holy reverence. Heaven is not merely God's location. The expression directs us to His exaltation: He is holy, sovereign, and immeasurably greater than His creatures. We are not addressing a better version of an earthly parent, but the Lord over all creation.

Yet His heavenly majesty does not make Him inaccessible. The prayer itself joins these truths: the ***exalted God*** is ***our Father***. His greatness gives substance to our confidence, because His ability to help is not restricted by the weaknesses that limit earthly parents. His fatherly love, in turn, prevents reverence from becoming the terror of a slave uncertain of welcome.

This union corrects two distortions.

Familiarity without reverence treats God as a genie.

Reverence without familiarity treats God as a despot.

Jesus teaches neither presumption nor withdrawal, but humble, assured access.

> *What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will instead of a fish give him a serpent; or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!" (Luke 11:11-13, ESV)*

Jesus compares earthly fathers, who are sinful yet know how to give good gifts, with the heavenly Father. His argument moves from the lesser to the greater: the Father's goodness exceeds theirs. He is not less willing to give what is good than the imperfect parents His hearers know.

The promised gift receives particular emphasis: the Holy Spirit. We should not turn this passage into a guarantee of whatever temporal benefit we request. Jesus directs confidence toward the Father's generosity, supremely displayed in giving His Spirit. His children need His gracious presence and work, not merely improved circumstances. And how often do we long for, desire, and request things that would be our downfall or ruin us?

The Father is therefore both able and ready to help. His readiness is never detached from His perfect wisdom, and His ability does not obligate Him to grant our chosen outcome. A refusal of one requested benefit does not overturn His fatherly goodness.

THIRD, "Our" teaches us to pray with and for others. The prayer's plural language places our needs within the fellowship of God's people. Even when praying alone, we approach the Father as members of His household, not as isolated claimants upon His care. Private ***prayer*** remains fitting; private ***self-absorption*** does not.

> *So Peter was kept in prison, but earnest prayer for him was made to God by the church. (Acts 12:5, ESV)*

While Peter was imprisoned, the church earnestly interceded for him. The passage shows believers bringing another member's danger before God together. Their fellowship expressed itself in shared dependence upon the Father, not merely in sympathy or discussion.

> *First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. (1 Timothy 2:1-2, ESV)*

Paul broadens the field of intercession beyond immediate Christian companions. Believers are to pray for all kinds of people, including kings and others in authority. Political distance or disagreement does not cancel that duty. Those who influence public life belong among the people whose needs we bring before God.

Praying ***with*** others means joining in a common approach to God; praying ***for*** others means making their welfare the subject of our requests. These responsibilities overlap without being identical. We can intercede privately, and gathered prayer should reach beyond those present. "Our Father" teaches us to make room in our petitions for needs other than our own.

Conclusion

God has not left His children to invent their own direction in prayer. The whole Word instructs them, and Christ's special pattern orders their desires toward God's glory and their true good. Its preface teaches them to approach their heavenly Father ***reverently***, ***confidently***, and ***corporately***.

106. ***The biblical pattern of prayer:*** All Scripture directs prayer, and the Lord's Prayer supplies Christ's special pattern. Our desires must be governed by God's revealed will, not merely expressed before Him.
107. ***The preface to the Lord's Prayer:*** The preface teaches reverent confidence before our able and gracious Father, together with prayer for others. Adoption grants access without diminishing His majesty.

Take This Lesson With You

1. ***Turn a passage into specific petitions.*** Identify one command, promise, or warning in your Bible reading. Let it shape a request, and consider how that request fits the priorities of the Lord's Prayer.
2. ***Pause over the opening address.*** Before your next private prayer, consider both your adoption through Christ and your Father's heavenly authority. Let those truths correct either careless familiarity or fearful hesitation.
3. ***Widen your intercession.*** Bring a particular church member's burden and a civil ruler's responsibilities into prayer. Join another believer in asking for their good.

The Father's majesty calls for reverence.
His adopting grace invites confidence.
Christ teaches His household to draw near together.