

“Praying with Jesus Around our Neighbourhoods”

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A series on Practicing God's Presence

Matthew 6:7-13 and Romans 8:14-17

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See the Scripture by clicking [here \(Matthew\)](#) and [here \(Romans\)](#).

It was one of *those* neighbourhoods that always make the news, for wrong reasons. Drugs, prostitution, gangs. Danger on every corner, trouble in every house. That sort of place.¹

A group of 8 people, who lived outside that neighbourhood, started walking around that neighbourhood every evening. They prayed. They prayed around each home, business, alleyway, empty lot, street corner. They prayed that Jesus' presence would become powerful there, that he would defeat the violence, addiction, brokenness, abuse, the evil oppression.

A woman stopped them. “*What are you doing here?*” “*Praying,*” they said. “*Pray for me,*” she asked. So they did.

After many months they started meeting together as a church there. Eventually, they all moved into that neighbourhood. (Prayer can mess up your life, to give you better life!) All the while, they kept praying around their neighbourhood.

A couple years later, the statistics: no homicides, no robberies, no reported sex crimes, and only one assault in that neighbourhood.

My definition of “neighbourhood” includes a physical place of streets, homes and businesses. But it's bigger. We have many neighbourhoods. They might be your workplace, school, some group you belong to, or team you play with, your family. They might include a place far away you've made a connection with.

What if you and others began praying around your many neighbourhoods?

II

“How do we pray?” Jesus' followers asked him. “Pray like this,” he says. And he teaches us his prayer, our Lord's prayer. To pray like Jesus, we start there.

Central to everything I'm saying about prayer is this: **when we pray as Jesus' people, we are praying with him.** He is not just a figure from long ago. Jesus is with us. He arose from the dead. Weeks later, he ascended to his Father, returning to the realm of God. The realm of God is everywhere. So Jesus is with us now as certainly as he was with those first

¹ David E. Fitch, Faithful Presence: Seven Disciplines that Shape the Church for Mission (Downers Grove: InterVarsity 2016), 172f.

disciples two thousand years ago. Jesus is with us when we're together, his church. And he is already in your many neighbourhoods. You don't bring him there. He is calling you to be with him there.

III

A guy, Mike Breen, taught me this. He uses a hexagon — a shape with six sides — to teach Jesus' Prayer.² (I've changed it a bit.)

We begin at the centre: ***Our Father***.

"Our!" Praying is not just about us. Even when we are by ourselves, we are praying alongside sisters and brothers. We are such a diverse, divergent and sometimes disagreeable bunch, all praying together because we are all children of . . .

. . . our "Father." "Father" is not about God being a man; God is not confined to our ideas of genders. It's about the relationship Jesus brings us into. When Jesus wanted to describe the relationship he has with the One he so intimately shared everything with, Jesus chose the word *Abba* (Dad) and called himself the "Son" of his "Father." Remarkably, Jesus brings us into that relationship. The first Bible reading, from Romans, said we are "adopted" as God's children. We pray, not to some distant overlord, but to our Divine Parent, who welcomes and enfolds us more than any mother or father can.

From the centre, we move out: ***in heaven, hallowed be Your Name***.

This is God's *CHARACTER*. God is heavenly. God is holy.

Heaven is the realm of God. It is beyond our senses, alongside our physical world. It is not a far-off place. Heaven is everywhere, and right here (though behind the scenes). Heaven is different from everything else we know. The Prayer reminds us that the Heavenly One is not like us.

The Heavenly Father is holy. ("Hallowed" means to make something holy.) Jesus' Prayer is that the holiness of God — God's goodness, God's purity, God's authority, God's trustworthiness, especially God's love — God's holiness will be known to be true. How will God's holiness be known in our world?

God's *KINGDOM*.

Your kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as in heaven.

God's kingdom comes when God establishes God's rule of self-giving love, of justice and peace, of mercy and healing. "*Do this now!*" we pray. We call on God to make us

² I first learned this approach in Mike Breen and Walt Kallestad, *The Passionate Church* (Colorado Springs: Cook, 2005), 157-63. I've recently been re-introduced to it in Mike Breen and the 3DM Team, *Building a Discipling Culture* (3DM, 2011), chapter 11.

a people who live within God's rule, together and in our many neighbourhoods.

When God rules, God's will, God's desires, God's plans are carried out. Praying this means putting aside our plans, desires, wills. Prayer isn't about getting what we want. It is about bending our wants toward what God wants.³ We pledge our cooperation with God.⁴

God's *PROVISION*.

Give us today our daily bread.

When God rules, our needs get simple. food, also water, shelter, clothing, health. Also hope, meaning, love, trust, faith. "Ask!" Jesus says. Ask, and receive.

When God rules, there is enough for today. Of course, many don't have enough. Why? Is it because we who do have enough don't trust God, so hoard tightly for tomorrow? When we do that, we are not living within God's rule. In God's economy, receiving and sharing go together.

God's *FORGIVENESS*.

Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us.

When God rules, relationships are healed. God's way to this healing is justice filled with forgiveness. God's justice is not retribution, but restoration. It's not about "getting back at them," but "getting right with them." For restoration to happen, truth must be told, wrongdoing grieved, and grace given. "*Forgive our sins*" . . .that's our hope.

"*As we forgive*" . . . that's us living out God's hope for others. We submit our need for retribution to God's promise of restoration. Of course, forgiving is not easy. We need God's help. So we pray.

Save us from the time of trial.

Living in God's rule is tough. Other "kingdoms" are vying for our allegiance. What they offer is tempting. We will be tested. So we depend on God's *GUIDANCE*.

And, God's *PROTECTION*.

Deliver us from evil.

Our Master who teaches us this prayer was crucified.⁵ There are malevolent forces, even a destructive personality, at work in this world. It seizes power and jealously clings

³ William H. Willimon and Stanley Hauerwas, Lord, Teach Us: The Lord's Prayer and the Christian Life (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996), 22.

⁴ Fitch, 170.

⁵ Willimon and Hauerwas, 15.

to it. It commandeers people and communities, institutions and nations. One time, Jesus called this power “the Strong Man.” He has come to chain it up, take away its power, and deliver us from that evil.

IV

When Jesus taught the Prayer he said “*When you pray, say.*” Not just “*when you pray in church-worship.*” “*When you pray. . .*”⁶ Whenever you pray.

Our Master’s Prayer is like a trellis. We use these in gardens or on walls, so plants can grow up them. Jesus’ Prayer is the trellis, a framework on which we can grow all our prayer. We can move around the six sides of the hexagon. Each theme — the Father’s character, kingdom, provision, forgiveness, guidance, protection — can be a theme in our prayer. (I’ll show you this when we move into the Prayers of our Community in a few minutes.)

Something is missing, though. Did you notice?

The ending. “***For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are Yours, now and forever. Amen.***”

Many Christians say that at the end of the Lord’s Prayer. But, when we hear Jesus teach the Prayer in the Bible, that’s not in there. Still, it’s very ancient. Christians added it on a couple of generations after Jesus.⁷

It is a big, lofty, final shout of praise and trust. We finish our prayer, not by asking for more. We proclaim the truth. Basically we’re saying, “*these are Yours, God: kingdom, power, glory. So we trust our prayer to You.*”

Remember, however . . . Jesus’ Kingdom —the Realm of God— starts mustard-seed sized. Jesus’ power —the might of God— he uses to serve. Jesus’ glory —the fullness of God— was revealed on his cross.

Praying Jesus’ Prayer opens us into his already-presence —his glory, his power, his Kingdom— here as we are together, and everywhere around our neighbourhoods.

What if you and others began praying around your many neighbourhoods?

⁶ The Gospels tell of two times when Jesus taught the prayer. We’ve been using Matthew’s account, but here I’m referring to Luke 11:2.

⁷ The “Doxology” does not appear Luke’s version, nor in the earliest manuscripts of Matthew’s Gospel. It’s earliest reliable version of it is in the *Didache*, a Christian document from the late first-century. See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lord%27s_Prayer#Doxology and <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Didache>. The Doxology echoes 1st Chronicles 29:11-13. Protestant Christians usually finish the Lord’s Prayer with this doxology, while Roman Catholic Christians normally do not (but say it later in the 1970 version of the Mass.)