

The Lord's Prayer

(Matthew 6:9-13)

Reflections for Lent



2026



What follows are a translation of the Lord's Prayer and seven reflections on the prayer, one for each week during Lent, starting on the Sunday before Ash Wednesday. It is suggested that you keep a journal of personal reflections on the Lord's Prayer and your prayer experience while reading them.

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The Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6:9-13)

Like good disciples, Jesus' disciples asked their Rabbi Jesus to teach them a prayer that expressed his concerns – just as John the Baptist taught his disciples (Luke 11:1). The prayer that Jesus taught them is the model for all followers of Jesus.

Pray, then, this way!¹

“Our Father, who is in heaven,
Your name be made holy!
Your kingdom come!
Your will come to be, as in heaven, even on earth [itself]²!

Give us today our bread of the day!
And forgive us our debts³ as even we [ourselves]⁴ have forgiven
our debtors!
And do not let us cross over to temptation,⁵ but deliver us from
the evil [one]⁶!”
(Matthew 6:9-13)

Notes on Translation

This is a new translation to give fresh insights for this series of reflections. You might wish to compare it to your favorite translations. Here it is formatted to show that, after the invocation addressing God, there are three petitions on behalf of God and then three petitions on behalf of ourselves. This basic structure of first God then people roughly parallels the Ten Commandments and the Greatest Commandment (first love God, second love you neighbor).

1. Exclamation marks have been included to show the imperative mood (commands). They are not necessary in a format of petitions but are included here to indicate an emphasis that could be missed.
2. “Itself,” is added, but captures the emphatic phrasing in the Greek
3. “Debt” rather than “trespasses” is more accurate, since it can refer to a moral debt and better communicates that all sin leaves a negative result as explained in Reflection 6.
4. “Ourselves” is added, but captures the emphatic phrasing in the Greek.
5. A more literal rendering is “do not carry/lead into,” but this is an idiomatic way of asking for help that is explained in Reflection 7.
6. “Evil” here has the definite article, “the evil” so it is probably used as a personal noun for “the evil one” as in Matt 13:19, 38 and probably Matt. 5:37. See Reflection 7.

Reflection 1

The Invocation: Our Father in heaven

It is good to pause on the first word, “our.” Jesus taught his disciples a communal prayer, not a for-me prayer. We come out of the womb focused solely on ourselves, and too often we go to the grave with the same preoccupation. The prayer for Jesus’ followers immediately teaches us we must reach out beyond ourselves. We are called to a new life-orientation. Jesus’ followers serve others (Mark 10:42-45). Being Jesus’ follower is not like participating in an individual sport. We are a team, a corporate identity, like an organic, living body. We care for each other (Hebrews 10:25). We intercede in prayer for each other.

I had a godly grandmother who turned a closet in her house into a prayer closet. She taught me one way to pray the Lord’s Prayer. Whenever she had been hurt by someone or had bad feelings toward someone, she would go into her prayer closet and pray the Lord’s Prayer. However, she would replace the first-person plural pronouns (our, we, us) with the name of that person. After praying it that way, she felt reconciled in her heart to the other person.

“Our Father in heaven,” in distinction from our parents¹ on earth, launches us into the unfathomable depth of God’s desire for intimacy. “In heaven,” is a way of picturing the sovereignty of God spatially. Doing so overwhelms me. I am but a speck in the town of Boone, which is but a speck on Earth, which is but a speck in our solar system (1.3 million Earths would fit in the Sun), which is but a speck in our galaxy, and so on to the ends of the cosmos. Yet, somehow, the Creator of all this desires a family-like relationship with me, with you. I cannot comprehend it. All I can do is worship in response.

This Creator condescends (“comes down”) to us. The Creator humbly seeks to relate to us like an ideal parent to a beloved child. This Creator walks and talks in the Garden of Eden. This Creator encounters people individually. This Creator becomes incarnate in the flesh. This Creator humbles Himself to death on a cross. A “god” like this could not be respected in the pagan world. Such a god was not comprehensible in that world. The pagan world wanted powerful gods on their side, sometimes against others. However, the true God loves me and you. The true God does not loftily remain above the chaos and suffering in our lives. Our Lord and God understands our pain, sorrow, and suffering and willingly enters into it with us. Jesus tells us to say, “Our Father” and realize what that means.

Journal Reflections

1. What does Jesus' assumption of praying communally for others mean to you?
2. Try replacing the first-person pronouns with the name of someone with whom you are having difficulty. Does that help you to be better reconciled to that person and to God?
3. I get a kind of "brain freeze" when I try to imagine how something so insignificant in time and space as myself can be loved by my Creator. How are you moved when you realize that Jesus tells you to pray to your Creator as "Father"?
4. During Lent we reflect on the unimaginable humility and compassion of the Creator of all becoming flesh among us. What is your response? How does this impact your prayer life?

Prayer quote:

"What a person is on their knees before God in secret, that is what they will be before people: that much and no more." (Fred Mitchell, *Royal Exchange*, p. 24. Edited for gender neutrality.)

Note:

1. I have used "parent(s)" because our culture does not assume the patriarchal/matriarchal distinctions of the original audience. Although the biblical culture had this distinction, the Scriptures also portray God with what they would consider feminine attributes, such as mercy and compassion. Whenever we speak of the undefinable God, we, like the biblical composers can but only use the frail metaphors of our time and place like father or parent.

Reflection 2

1st Petition: Your name be made holy!

The first three petitions put us in a right relationship with God. They are made on God's behalf. Praying them puts us in our rightful place, in submission to God.

In regard to the first one, interestingly, we often miss the fact that this sentence is a petition in the imperative mood and not a statement about the nature of God. God is holy, of course. However, Jesus is telling us that the primary desire of our hearts is to long for God to be made known as holy. These words are to be the first prayer out of our lips! This is our first petition.

Let's develop this petition a little more. "Name" in the culture behind the text is easy to grasp. It represented the person. In that world, the spoken word was something vital, almost tangible, because it comes into being by one's life breath. So, to proclaim one's name invoked the vital character of that person. For example, if a king's courtier were to come up to a group of peasants, hold out the king's signet ring, and say, "In the name of the King, come!" they would jump up and come. The name of God, known to Israel as "YHWH,"¹ references the full character of the one true God.

"Make holy" is a hard concept. Holiness is as hard to grasp as gravity. It refers to the absolute transcendent distinctiveness of God -- One without spot, blemish, imperfection, etc. As such, God is sanctified, that is recognized as set apart as holy. God is totally other than you and me. Isaiah says that as the heavens are higher than the earth, God's thoughts and ways are not comparable to ours (Isa. 55:8-9). Recognizing the holiness of God, God's totally pure "otherness," is the starting point to a right relationship with God. It makes a good first petition.

However, lest we speak this first petition complacently, there is a stunning, astounding twist about it. Throughout Scripture, God puts the responsibility for revealing God's holiness back on you and me, on God's people! The disciples knew that. Israel was called to be a blessing to all nations by being God's holy people. When Isaiah condemns people of Israel for calling evil good and good evil, for calling darkness light and light darkness, the charge is that they are spurning the Holy One of Israel (Isa. 5:20-24). We, the Church, are called to be holy. Over and over, "Be holy! Be holy! Be holy!" (See, for example, Lev 19:2; Matt 5:48 which precedes our text; 1Thes 4:7; 1Pet 1:14-16.)

Like the illustration that pointing a finger at someone points three back at ourselves, we cannot pray, “Your name be made holy” without pointing at ourselves. Jesus calls us to be holy so that others will know the holiness of God. This is an imperative. This is who we are to be as followers of Jesus. I look at myself, my example, and cringe. Still, the Holy One says to us, “For I am YHWH your God, holding you by your right hand, saying to you, ‘Do not be afraid, I will help you’” (Isa. 41:13). The Holy Spirit can work God’s holiness into even me.

Journal Reflections

1. The primary desire of our hearts is to see God revealed as holy. Is it? What does this say about me, my heart? About you?
2. What are some ways that you, like me, have become accustomed to unholiness?
3. If we are to accept the charge to be holy, what is one thing about you today that you need the Holy Spirit to address?
4. During Lent, we reflect on how the holy life that Jesus lived, how everything he did glorified the Father. What does that reflection mean to you?

Prayer quote:

“He [God] encourages us to ask as freely for the impossible as for the possible, since to him all difficulties are the same size – less than Himself.” (J. Oswald Sanders, *Effective Prayer*, p. 26.)

Note:

1. When God gives this name YHWH (from Hebrew) to Moses (Exod 3:14; often spelled “Yahweh” or rendered “LORD”), that answer is a word play on the Hebrew verb for “to be/to exist.” For Moses, who was from a polytheistic cultural setting, it was necessary to know the name of a god in order to know what particular function that god had, as well as to be able invoke it magically. The name God gives in response, in a sense, is no name, because God is no lower-case “god” that is limited and manipulable. God is who God is, the sovereign God. This is what Moses and the people in slavery in Egypt learn as they learn about following the God of Abraham, YHWH.

Reflection 3

2nd Petition: Your kingdom come!

The first three petitions put us in a right relationship with God. They are made on God's behalf. Praying them puts us in our rightful place, in submission to God. When prayed consistently, the first petition sets the primary desire of our hearts on seeing the holiness of God revealed to the world through our lives.

The second petition, unfortunately, reveals how the gospel ("good news") has almost been forgotten in our pop-Christian culture. If I were to ask the average person – maybe even a church-goer – "What was Jesus' main message?" I imagine most people would say "love." Maybe some would say "the Beatitudes." However, in the Gospel of Mark, the first and most important words out of Jesus' mouth would have been quite shocking to his audience

The [appointed]¹ time is fulfilled. The Kingdom of God has approached.

Repent and believe in the gospel! (Mark 1:15).

The presence of the Kingdom of God is what Jesus proclaimed and what Jesus sent his disciples out to preach.² Moreover, Jesus' signs and wonders provided the proof that this divinely appointed time had indeed come.

We need to understand the background. Many Jews of Jesus' day believed theologically that they were living in an imperfect age of chaos but that, at the appointed time, God would begin a new age. This would be an age of God's perfect rule, the age of the Kingdom of God. Many of them believed that the God's Messiah (Anointed One) would usher in this age in one great, complete movement. Jesus shockingly announced that with his presence, that age had now arrived. However, Jesus, through his teachings, taught something different about the coming of this new age. He taught that God's Kingdom, which was initiated with his presence, would not be fully completed until he died and came again, a message virtually incomprehensible to his disciples.³

Therefore, in his prayer, Jesus instructed his followers to pray for the kingdom, or reign, of God to become increasingly realized in the present. That is our second petition. This is to be another consuming desire of our hearts. Once again, though, God turns the onus back on us. This is where "love" comes in. By our love people will know we are Jesus' disciples (John 13:34-35). Our character will display the marks of the Beatitudes (Matt 5:3-10). We will be practicing righteousness (Matt 25:31-46). Through the Holy Spirit, we will do even greater works than Jesus did (John 14:12). You and I

are to reveal God's reign, God's Kingdom to the world.⁴ This commission is what we accepting when we pray, "Your kingdom come!"

This petition influences my prayers. Early each day I pray, "Jesus, what are you doing around me today in Your Kingdom? I would like to be a part of it." I am trying to think and live as a kingdom person. I am slowly learning and slowly being reoriented.

This petition also confronts the Church. The 8th century prophets in the Old Testament had to warn the people of God about praying for the "Day of the LORD" to come as if God would come to eliminate their so-called ungodly enemies. Rather, the prophets announced that God's righteous justice would first be applied to the people of God. God would first address their failure to obey, their ungodly behavior. Is the Church ready? Are you and I really ready for the completion of the Kingdom of God when Christ comes again?

Journal Reflections

1. How does thinking about Jesus' gospel as the proclamation of the presence of the Kingdom of God influence how you see yourself as a Christian? Your calling?
2. Are there aspects of how you approach life that do not fit with proclaiming the Kingdom of God?
3. This week try praying something like the prayer mentioned above, asking what is happening in the Kingdom of God around you so that you can participate in it and be of service. Does praying that influence your relationship with Jesus?
4. During Lent, we are reminded that our King was willing to suffer for us His servants. We are reminded that by dying and rising, Jesus was ushering in the coming age of Kingdom of God in a way unfathomable to the powers of our world. What does that mean to you?

Prayer quote:

Is it not strange that in spite of our conviction of its [prayer] privilege and necessity, we are all plagued with a subtle aversion to praying? We do not naturally delight in drawing near to God. We pay lip-service to its value and potency and yet so often fail to pray. 'When I go to pray,' confessed an eminent Christian, 'I find my heart so loath to go to God, and when it is with Him so loath to stay.' Is it here that self-discipline comes in... Here is an area in which we can avail ourselves of the Spirit's promised assistance in our weakness. (J. Oswald Sanders, *Effective Prayer*, pp.8-9)

Notes:

1. "Appointed" has been added to the translation because the idiom here shows that Jesus is referring to a divinely anticipated event in history.

2. If you have access to a concordance, you might like to look up the many references to “kingdom” and “gospel” in the Gospels.
3. For an example, see the “Parable of the Weeds” and its explanation in Matt 13:24-30, 36-43.
4. Perhaps a note of caution should be added to avoid a misunderstanding that has taken place throughout Christian history. Jesus made it clear before Pilate that his kingdom is in this world but not of it; that is, God’s rule does not come about by human powers or governments. Followers of Jesus do not lord themselves over people; they get under them as servants and care for them (Mark 10:42-45).

Historical note: One reason that our culture may have lost sight of the gospel in terms of the Kingdom of God is because that frame of thinking was particularly Jewish. As Christianity spread to a Gentile audience, that language shifted to that of participating in the eternal of life of God in the present. We can see this shift taking place in John’s presentation of Jesus’s dialogue with Nicodemus (John 3:1-16).

Reflection 4

3rd Petition: Your will come to be, as in heaven, even on earth [itself]

The first three petitions put us in a right relationship with God. They are made on God's behalf. Praying them puts us in our rightful place, in submission to God. When prayed consistently, the first petition sets the primary desire of our hearts on seeing the holiness of God revealed to the world. The second petition changes our perspective to see life in terms of spreading the reign of God, God's kingdom on earth.

The third petition addresses the core of our lives' expression, what we will, our volition. When we pray for God's will to be done in our earthly realm, we are subordinating ourselves to God. We are moving from seeing how God might advance God's kingdom within our sphere of influence – a change of perspective – to actually submitting our hopes, plans, and actions to living out God's hopes, plans, and actions. Being born again/from above¹ is rather literally taking place in us as this petition moves from our hearts to our lips and is vocalized before the throne of God.

I observe, evaluate, and respond to all of life through the perspective of "me." From the moment of birth our sense of self, "I," is embodied in our sensory awareness in distinction from what lies outside of us. Everything we think and do emerges from that embodied sense of self; everything, that is, until we give our lives to Jesus. Then that orientation begins to change. Our identity, indeed our consciousness changes. I find that I often do not just think thoughts to myself, but I am speaking them internally to Jesus. You and I are now embodied in God. God is embodied in us through the Holy Spirit. Jesus is the vine and we are the branches (John 15:5). We are no longer our individually embodied selves. We are organically members of the living Body of Christ. Our identity, our "self," has a new, broader dimension that shapes our will.

Nowhere do we see more clearly what this exchange of willful identity means than in the Incarnate Jesus, God's embodied will "as in heaven, even on earth." And this new self's will/volition is no more clearly seen than when Jesus is in the Garden of Gethsemane. There Jesus prays to the Father with a self (soul) deeply grieved almost to death (Mark 14:34). He pleads that his pending trial, beating and crucifixion would not take place, that this hour would pass unfulfilled, "Take this cup from me!" But as his breath continues, Jesus adds, "however, not what I will, but what You will" (Mark 14:35-36). In his humanity, Jesus' first inclination is to demur in the face of crucifixion. That is significant to me. Jesus knew. He was not Superman with bullets

bouncing off his chest. Jesus deeply knew what was pending. However, in his completely-submitted-to-God humanity, Jesus willed God's will. That is the new, willful identity which we are allowing to be molded in us, when we pray, "Your will come to be, as in heaven, even on earth."

Journal Reflections

1. My head knowledge of what God desires of me and my heart's submission are quite at odds. I want God to show me one thing today in which Jesus wants more of me, of my will, my identity. What would that be for you?
2. As part of Christ's larger Body, the Church, what form would that submission be in terms of your local church and the role you play?
3. During Lent, we are reminded that being obedient to death was not a light matter for Jesus. But, Jesus' obedience to death to advance the Kingdom of God was for you and me. What would you like to say to Jesus?

Prayer quote:

Whether you like it or not, read and pray daily. It is for your life; there is no other way: else you will be a trifler all your days, and a pretty, superficial preacher. (John Wesley, Letter to John Trembath, August 17, 1760; in *The Letters of John Wesley*, Volume 4, edited by John Telford [Epworth Press, 1931].

Note:

1. The Greek adverb that is used in Jesus' discussion with Nicodemus in John 3 (verses 3 and 7), which leads up to John 3:16, can have two different meanings "over again" or "from above." Given that the Gospel of John frequently uses wordplays such as double entendre and puns, it is likely that both nuances were meant to come to mind: to be born again is to be born from above.

Reflection 5

4th Petition: Give us today our bread of the day!

The first three petitions put us in a right relationship with God. God's honor and agenda is primary. The second three petitions turn attention toward ourselves, but they still require that we put God first. Moreover, since these petitions are made corporately, they are not just on behalf of myself as an individual, but for others as well.

The precise meaning of the qualification of bread by "of the day" (Greek *epiousios*) is not known because the word is so rare, but the general sense of this petition is clear. "Bread" generically refers to what is needed for life, and the qualifying Greek word refers to something that is necessary in the present.¹ Therefore, we are to pray just for our immediate needs. This point is developed in Jesus' teaching that follows: we are not to store up treasures and serve wealth rather than God (6:19-24); we are not to worry about the future necessities of life, because that is a sign lacking faith (6:25-34). In other words, the fourth petition takes deeper into daily reliance on God our Father. Worrying about the future drags us away from listening to Jesus now and obeying now for the sake of the Kingdom of God.

I am reminded of a proverbial saying surely known to Jesus, a prayer of an unknown wise man Agur:

Put far away from me poverty, and do not give me wealth. Give me my allotted portion of bread. Otherwise [if rich] I become self-satisfied and disavow [God] and say, "Who is the LORD?" Or, otherwise I become impoverished and steal and abuse the name of my God (Prov. 30:7-9).

When we focus only on our current need, we avoid the temptations of the two extremes that Agur prayed to avoid; both wealth and poverty tempt us to forget God. Indeed, these are the two points that Jesus makes in the following teachings of 6:19-24 and 6:25-34.

Once again, this petition is not as simple as it looks at first glance. Spoken before the throne of God, this petition shines the light of Christ on our relationship with our material world. Do we relate to it in such a godly way that we do not need more? Are our material goods received from God such that our free use of them in turn honors God? Do we pursue material gain, or do we pursue God? Can I pray without material attachments for myself, "Give me my bread of the day"? Can I pray corporately without material attachments, "Give them their bread of the day"? This petition is a prayer of transparency before God. And, it is effectively a prayer for me, for us, to grow in faith, to grow in dependence on God and not on the material world and ourselves.

Journal Reflections

1. This petition challenges me to look at my attachment to material things, to my so-called “needs.” I find it hard to pray, because Jesus wants me to pray it honestly. What is your response to this petition?
2. For the most part in our American culture we live submersed in wealth and constantly tempted not to rely on God moment by moment. How are you doing with this temptation?
3. Are there needs of others that you think you should pray for? Do something about?
4. During Lent, we are to focus on our dependence on God. People often give things up for Lent as a spiritual discipline. Is there any particular material desire/thing that you think Jesus might want you to relinquish for Lent – or longer?

Prayer quote:

There might not always be time to eat, but always He made time to pray. (J. Oswald Sanders, *Effective Prayer*, p. 60.)

Notes:

1. The Greek word (epiousios) appears three times: here, in Luke’s version of the prayer (Luke 11:3), and in an early Christian instruction that cites the Lord’s Prayer (Didache 8:2). Attempts to explain it etymologically and/or as a translation of part of a Hebrew or Aramaic phrase suggest it refers to either a need at hand for subsistence or as a time word, something that is for today or tomorrow. As I mention above, further teachings on themes from Jesus’ prayer immediately follow (e.g. forgiving, God as Father, putting God first). One such developed theme is that of not worrying about the necessities of tomorrow, including food (6:25-34). Given this context, it makes sense to translate our text as “bread of the day,” understanding “bread” generically as what is needed for life and our qualifying Greek word as referring to something that is immediately pressing. Interestingly, there is a Jewish saying from Rabbi Eliezer, about the time of Jesus, that has a resemblance to what Jesus says in Matt 6:30-31 and that fits the tone of our petition. That text states that a person who has a piece of bread in his basket and still worries about food for tomorrow is “one of little faith” (Babylonian Talmud, Sotah 48b).

Reflection 6

5th Petition: And forgive us our debts as even we [ourselves] have forgiven our debtors!

The first three petitions put us in a right relationship with God. God's honor and God's agenda are primary. The second three petitions turn attention toward ourselves, but they still require that we put God first. The 4th petition is essentially a prayer to grow in faith, to grow in dependence on God and not on the material world.

The 5th petition, while for ourselves, effectively transforms us to grow in God's characteristic of mercy. In the first clause we plead for forgiveness. Now we Methodists, along with Anglicans, Lutherans, and English-speaking Catholics tend to use the sin word "trespasses" rather than "debts" in our translations. This tradition apparently goes back Tyndale's translation of 1526, and it is likely that he used "trespasses" because that term fits well with the sin word that follows in Matt 6:14-15, which itself might be better translated, "transgression."¹ Still, the Greek word here more properly refers to a debt. I prefer to use this term because to me "trespass" or even "transgression" might not communicate well. They miss the concept of sin words and forgiveness words backgrounded in the Old Testament, particularly in the Temple sacrificial system.

Sin, like a debt, always produces the reality of a negative consequence. We should think of sin as leaving something "tangible" behind. It creates an impediment of chaos in our relationship with God and is often compared to a burden upon us. God forgives, not because one offers a sacrifice but because one remorsefully repents. The main Old Testament term for "forgive" (Hebrew *nasa'*) communicates that God lifts or bears that burden. The sacrifice that follows symbolizes the removing of the "stain" or "pollution" of sin, showing that a right relationship with God is restored.

Shockingly, whereas the first clause is quite rational from a human perspective – seeking forgiveness – the second clause is not. Here our words impose upon ourselves a condition for receiving our own forgiveness, "as even we have forgiven our debtors." I do not like saying that. It places a weighty obligation on me. Here is a facile but hopefully helpful illustration. If someone walked up to me and stomped on my foot, I would know that I have the right to stomp back on their foot. To forgive that person, however, I must in a sense bear or lift the weight of their sin. That understanding about forgiveness incredibly amplifies the nature of God's mercy. God lifts our sins against God's honor and will. Therefore, in the second clause of

this petition, we are asking that we will receive the mercy of God in direct relationship to the mercy we show others. That is a difficult petition for me!

The goal of this petition is really about transformation. Yes, the 5th petition first does move me to repent and ask forgiveness. However, the main thrust, of this petition is not about me turning to God for forgiveness. It is focused on the “as even we” clause. It is about me and you expressing a desire before the throne of God to be so transformed that we become merciful as God in our ability to forgive others.

Journal Reflections

1. This petition first confronts us with the need repent and ask forgiveness. Before voicing this petition, you and I might ask the Holy Spirit to show us the matters over which we need to repent.
2. More deeply this petition challenges us to examine how merciful we are. Just as God’s mercy is offered regardless of whether I repent and accept it, so our hearts should be merciful to others, whether they are sorry or not. Is there anyone toward whom you feel bitter? You might try praying Jesus’ prayer while putting their names in replacement of the first-person pronouns.
3. During Lent, we look at Jesus on the cross. When Peter says, “Who our sins he himself bore in his body on the wood [cross]” (1Pet 2:24), Peter is employing the language of the Old Testament about God lifting/bearing our sins. What does this reflection mean to you?

Prayer quote:

The power of prayer has never been tried to its full capacity in any church. If we want to see might wonders of divine power and grace wrought in the place of weakness, failure and disappointment, let the whole church answer God’s standing challenge: ‘Call unto me and I will answer thee, and show thee great and might things, which thou knowest not.’ (J. Hudson Taylor, Royal Exchange, p. 30.)

Note:

1. In Tyndale’s culture, “debt” might have seemed like too much of a financial transaction, as it might in our culture; however, we can also use it figuratively as something intangible, as even a moral debt. Tyndale’s wording was adopted in the 1549 Book of Common Prayer and became traditional.

Reflection 7

6th Petition: And do not let us cross over to temptation, but deliver us from the evil [one]!

The first three petitions put us in a right relationship with God. God's honor and agenda is primary. The second three petitions turn attention toward ourselves, but they still require that we put God first. The 4th petition is essentially a prayer to grow in faith, to grow in dependence on God and not on the material world. Although in the 5th petition we seek forgiveness, its focus is more about us desiring to become as merciful as God.

The purpose of the 6th petition, the third in regard to ourselves, turns from offering ourselves in deeper submission and transformation. Instead, here we imploring our Father for protective help from all that would disrupt our relationship with God.

This intention of this text is difficult to translate accurately because it employs a poetic structure with which we are not familiar. The first clause of this petition is easy to translate literally, "Do not carry/lead us into temptation." However, that requires clarification. It would be wrong to think that God wants or even causes us to be tempted to sin. [It is true that God tests people, but that is different.] What we need to realize is that both the first and second clauses make the same point but dramatically through the use of what is called "antithetical parallelism." They states a point from the negative perspective and then states it from the positive. For example, without knowingly being poetic, a child might say to a parent, "Don't leave me here, but take me with you," without implying that the parent desired to leave the child behind. A biblical example would be Prov 10:12:

1st clause: "Hatred rouses up strife" (negative perspective)

2nd clause: "But love covers all transgressions" (positive perspective)

Our text's structure is:

1st clause: "Do not do negative X (tempt)"

2nd clause "But do positive Y (deliver from evil)."

If one were to translate the verse in simple synonymous parallelism – both statements positive – it would be, "Take us away from temptation and deliver us from evil." The translation given above attempts to keep both the sense and the dramatic parallel contrast. God's role is not to bring us across the threshold of temptation, but to deliver us from evil. Our petition is for divine protection.

Our petition to be delivered from "the evil [one]"² means that we must take evil most seriously. The basic Old Testament word for evil, *ra*, refers to that

which is contrary to God's creational order and will, which is "good" (tov). That which is evil disrupts our relationship with God and brings chaos, sin, and suffering into our lives. In Matthew's Gospel, the "devil," "the evil one," or "Satan" (Hebrew for "adversary") is the entity that actively seeks to draw Jesus and others into the chaos of a ruptured relationship with God and the suffering that brings. As biblical Christians, we accept both seen and unseen dimensions of reality. Moreover, it is wise for followers of Jesus to avoid extremes of either discounting the reality of such evil or of holding an unhealthy preoccupation with it. I like the adage, "As an infection is to a cut, so is evil to our normal weaknesses and flaws."

Jesus faced temptation (Matt 4:1-10). We face temptation. The spiritual battle is real (Eph 6:12). It takes place in the mind in which every thought must be taking captive to obey Christ (2Cor 10:3-5). Otherwise, the temptation gives birth to sin and death (James 1:14-15). For this we need God's help. We pray.

Journal Reflections

1. What does temptation mean to you?
2. How have you learned spiritually to confront temptation?
3. How can the church teach and help young Christians to be delivered from evil?
4. During Lent we look at how Jesus in his humanity was tempted as we are (Heb 4:14-15). We also learn from John's Gospel that when Jesus was "lifted up" (a pun for crucified and glorified) that he drew all people to himself and so defeated "the ruler of this world" (12:30-33). What does this reflection mean to you?

Prayer quote:

Satan dreads nothing but prayer. His one concern is to keep the saints from praying. He fears nothing from prayerless studies, prayerless work, prayerless religion. He laughs at our toil, mocks our wisdom, but trembles when we pray. (Samuel Chadwick, source: J. Oswald Sanders, *Effective Prayer*, p.13.).

Notes:

1. The purpose of testing is to make known the state of one's heart. For example, when the Israelites were "tested" in the wilderness, the event revealed the weak state of their faith and served as a call to faithfulness (Deut 8:1-10). Admittedly, another translation possibility is that the Greek word for "temptation" can be used to translate the Hebrew word for "test." However, in the context here "temptation" is negative. The noun and verb forms of this word occur eight times in Matthew. One time the verb is used of an honest test. All other uses are negative, such as religious leaders trying to trap Jesus (e.g. 19:3;

22:18). Most importantly, previously in Matthew 4 it was used twice to refer to the behavior of the devil (4:1, 3).

2. “Evil” here has the definite article, “the evil” so it is probably used as a personal noun for “the evil one” as in Matt 13:19, 38 and probably Matt. 5:37.