

Kingdom-Focused Prayer

This article on Matthew 6:9–13 is edited from the Ligonier Ministries

Teachings on prayer in the Old Testament show that God brings His sovereign will to pass through the means of our prayer (Gen. 18:16–32) and that prayer should be selfless and reflect a concern for His people (1 Sam. 2:1–11) — in today’s scripture passage we will see that in the New Testament prayer fulfills these same elements.

Clearly, the Lord’s Prayer teaches us to pray for personal needs. Included is the petition that asks God to supply “our daily bread” (Matt. 6:11), which is another way of asking our Father to supply all of our needs. Jesus also shows the appropriateness of praying for personal needs in giving us petitions that lead us to call upon God to forgive us our individual sins and be with us in temptation (vv. 12–13). Selfless prayer is not incompatible with prayer for individual needs, so we need not ever think that it is wrong to ask the Lord to grant personal requests, knowing that He will do so when they are in line with His sovereign will.

Still, Jesus does not make personal needs the focus of the Lord’s Prayer but rather the kingdom of God. This is where He starts the prayer, linking the petition for the kingdom to come with a request that God’s name be hallowed (vv. 9–10). As Dr. R.C. Sproul has pointed out on many occasions, Jesus is using the kingdom of God here to refer specifically to that realm where people do His will freely and joyfully. Because God’s will is done freely and joyfully in this kingdom, His name is hallowed or regarded as holy by the kingdom’s citizens. Our Father, of course, is King of creation, but this reign is not yet universally acknowledged. To pray that people would regard the name of the Creator as holy is to pray for them to submit to His rule and for His kingdom to come. To pray for His kingdom to come is to pray for His name to be hallowed.

John Calvin comments, “The substance of this prayer is, that God would enlighten the world by the light of his Word — would form the hearts of men, by the influences of his Spirit, to obey his justice, and would restore to order, by the gracious exercise of his power, all the disorder that exists in the world.” God’s kingdom is the focus of the Lord’s Prayer, so we pray rightly only when we ask for His kingdom to come.

Praying for God’s kingdom to come does not mean we must literally say “God, may your kingdom come.” When we pray for the conversion of others, we are praying for them to bow willingly to His rule; thus we are praying for His kingdom to come. In asking God to supply funds for the church’s teaching ministry, we are praying for people to learn His way and thus for His kingdom to come. Today, how might we pray for the kingdom to come?