

Love and the Lord's Prayer

By Will Messenger,
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Matthew 6:9-13

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your Name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins,
as we forgive those
who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial,
and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours, now
and for ever.*

** The most ancient manuscripts do not
include the last sentence*

I'll bet you've heard part of today's Bible reading before. It's usually known as the Lord's Prayer, the words that are on the screen now. If you go to church a lot, you say it all the time. If not, you may still be familiar it. It's probably the most famous passage in the Bible. But have you ever wondered, exactly what *is* the Lord's Prayer is?

I think the Lord's Prayer is a love manual. A manual or pattern for loving God, and a template for interacting with people in a loving way.

	Start with him
Our Father in heaven,	1. Facts: say what's wonderful about him
hallowed be your Name, your kingdom come, your will be done,	2. Action: agree with what he intends to do
on earth as in heaven	3. Vision of the result out loud
Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins,	
as we forgive those who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial,	
and deliver us from evil.	
For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours, now and for ever.	

First of all, the Lord's Prayer is a template for loving *God*. Here's how it works.

The Lord's prayer starts with God. "Our Father in heaven." The first line observes something wonderful about God. God is Father and God is in heaven. That's a wonderful combination of the intimate and the infinite. "Father" is an intimate term someone who knows you and loves you, while heaven is "where" the blueprint for all of creation comes from. (Jesus knows that in real life fathers can be pretty bad sometimes, but he's referring to God, not human fathers.) God is both your closest lover and the source of infinite creation. That's pretty wonderful. The Lord's Prayer starts by expressing what's wonderful about God.

Second, the Lord's Prayer moves to action. It agrees with what God intends to do in the world. God intends for his name to be holy, for people to plug to God's spiritual power. God intends for his kingdom to come, for God's justice and peace to fix this world of corruption and war, and bad jobs and broken hearts. God intends for his will to be done, for people to choose to do what God created us to, to care about other people. This stage of the Lord's Prayer states what God intends to do and agrees with it.

Third, the Lord's Prayer envisions what the result of God's action will be: "on earth, as it is in heaven." God's plan is that our place — earth — would become as full, as meaningful, as fun, as God's "place" — heaven.

Do you see these three stages: The facts of God's wonderfulness; Agreement with God's action; Vision of God's outcomes? I realize I'm moving quickly through the details, but I'm trying to focus on the template, the pattern.

	Start with him
Our Father in heaven,	1. Facts: say what's wonderful about him
hallowed be your Name, your kingdom come, your will be done,	2. Action: agree with what he intends to do
on earth as in heaven	3. Vision of the result out loud
	Move to yourself
Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins,	1. Facts: say what you need
as we forgive those who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial,	2. Action: say what you commit to do
and deliver us from evil.	3. Vision of the end result
For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours, now and for ever.	Put the outcome in God's hands

Now the Lord's prayer repeats these stages, but it applies them to you. First the facts — you state the facts of what you need. You need bread, so you ask God for. You need to be forgiven, so ask God to forgive you. God already knows what you need, of course, but by stating the facts, you get real with God. Are you with me?

Then the Lord's Prayer moves the second stage again — action. This time you name *your* intended actions. "I will forgive those who sin against me. And by God's help, I intend to stay away from temptation I can't handle. By saying these out loud, you let God know what your commitment is.

Then you move on the third stage — envisioning the result out loud: "Deliver us from evil." The vision is that your life is not bound up in evil. You see that if you follow God as you intend, the result will be that you are neither the victim of evil or the perpetrator.

So now the Lord's prayer has moved through the three stages of Facts, Action and Vision with respect to both God and yourself. The last thing is to return to God and put everything in God's hands. "For the kingdom, the power, and the glory, are yours, now and forever." I can't do this on my own, God, but I'll come keep coming to you as the source of justice (or kingdom) and power and your presence (or glory). I commit to my part, but I know I need your help.

Do you see what I mean by this pattern? Do you see how it works? How it brings together facts, action and vision as a way of loving God and being loved by God? Now you can pray the Lord's prayer literally, and focus on the facts, actions, and visions specifically mentioned by Jesus. And you can use it as a template for new prayers every day. What's wonderful about God today; what actions does God intend; what is God's vision for the outcome? What do I need today from God; what actions do I intend as a response to God; what is my vision for the outcome? How can I put things in God's hands?

Start with him	Ted
1. Facts: say what's wonderful about him (be truthful)	Impressive research. Amazing guts
2. Action: agree with what he intends to do	
3. Vision of the result out loud	
Move to yourself	
1. Facts: say what you need	
2. Action: say what you commit to do	
3. Vision of the end result	
Put the outcome in God's hands	

The Lord's Prayer is a way of loving God. But could it be a template for loving other people? Could you apply the Lord's Prayer to everyday life? Let's take a situation that happened to me when I was an engagement manager at McKinsey. Some of you have heard me talk about this episode before, but I have so few successful times when I applied my faith to my work, that I have to recycle it today. The situation was that I had a member of my team from the client company, who wanted to debate whether McKinsey was qualified to lead the project, rather than to get to work on it. In fact, at the kickoff meeting, he stood up and said to the senior McKinsey partner, "Before we start, I've done some reading that suggests that firms like McKinsey don't really add long-term value to their client companies, and I think we should discuss whether McKinsey should even be leading this project." As leader of his sub-team, I faced the prospect of getting him on board or getting him kicked off.

When I met with Ted, I started by focusing on him. I tried to start with something wonderful about him. Now I don't mean something false or flattering. I mean something true, and wonderful. If the person is a giant pain, you might not have much to work with, but keep trying, but you can't know them, until you've tried to see the best in them. In Ted's case, I said, "I'm impressed how you researched consulting firms' effectiveness so deeply, and I'm amazed you had the guts to oppose the McKinsey senior partner directly. That was true, I was amazed when he said it.



“Our plan was to just come here and win the game. It doesn't make a difference who gets what.”

-Deion Branch

The part about looking for something wonderful in the other person is so important that I just have to give another example from the New England Patriots.

Deion Branch is Patriot's star receiver. He was named the Most Valuable Player in this year's Super Bowl, and he set a record for the most receptions in Super Bowl — 11. But he didn't get a crack at the one thing all receivers dream of, catching the ball for a touchdown in the Super Bowl.

For instance, the Patriots' second touchdown came on a pass to Mike Vrabel, who is an offensive linebacker. (That's a position that blocks the opponent, not one that catches passes.) It was only the second time all the ball was thrown to Vrabel. Deion Branch could have looked for something negative to say about that play. “How come you threw that pass to Vrabel. I'm the top receiver on this team. That should have been mine,”

Instead, he looked for what was wonderful about Vrabel — a linebacker catching a touchdown pass, and what was wonderful about the whole team's versatility. What Deion Branch said was, “Our plan was to just come here and win the game. It doesn't make a difference who gets what.”

Start with him	Ted
1. Facts: say what's wonderful about him (be truthful)	Impressive research Amazing guts
2. Action: agree with what he intends to do (to the degree possible)	Desire to achieve the company's goals
3. Vision of the result out loud	See your perspective benefiting the company
Move to yourself	
1. Facts: say what you need	Need you to contribute, not object
2. Action: say what you commit to do	Help you succeed if you agree, or else remove you from the team
3. Vision of the end result	See you bringing creativity to the solutions
Put the outcome in God's hands	

Moving back to Ted, then next step was agree with his action and intentions *to the degree possible*. Again, you don't want to agree with something you believe is wrong. But I could truthfully say to Ted, "I know you want to help this company achieve its long-range goals, and that's why you're raising these objections. And that's good." Finally, I tried to envision the future as he saw it. "I can see how the kind of perspective you're bringing, could really benefit your company."

Then the pattern of the Lord's Prayer shifts the focus to yourself. I stated the facts from my perspective. "Ted, I need you to contribute to this project, not question its existence. The decision for McKinsey to lead it has already been made by the Board of Directors." Then I moved to actions from my perspective. If you decide to contribute, I'll help you with the tools and methods you need to make a significant contribution And I'll stick up for you if you have concerns you can document with facts. But if you keep obstructing progress, I'll have to get you removed from the team." And then I tried to express my vision for the future. "I can see that this team will probably come up with better solutions if you are willing to channel your creativity in positive ways."

And then I had to turn the situation over to God. The kingdom, and the power and the glory are *yours*, God, not *mine*. It's funny how much energy I spend trying to control outcomes that are beyond my control. Ted could have defied me and gotten himself kicked off the team, a so-called "career limiting move." Sticking up for him could have gotten me kicked off the McKinsey team, another "career limiting move." You just can't know in advance how things will turn out. So I prayed. And I had to trust that God would see me through whatever happened.



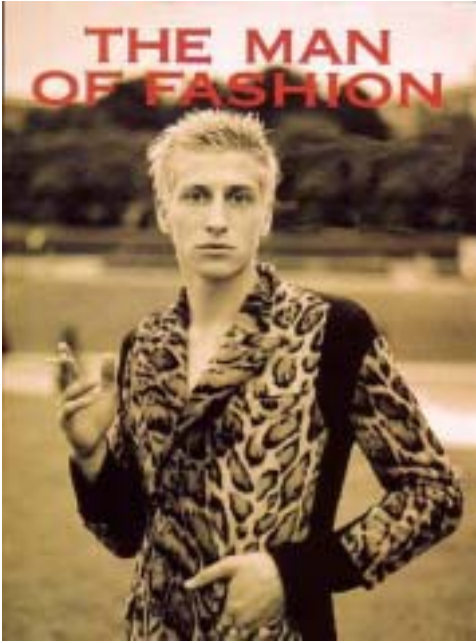
And that's good news! That the result of all our actions is governed by God, not by ourselves, is good news! God will bring a better result out of your life, than you could do on your own. The apostle Paul said it this way, "We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him." (Romans 8:28). Do you believe that? Do you believe that God can make more out of your life, than you can make yourself? If you're looking for something to think about during communion time, think about that!

I want to apply the template of the Lord's Prayer to one more aspect of daily life — love. You want so much to find the love of your life — I'm talking about romantic love, a husband or a wife, eventually. Can the Lord's Prayer be applied to romantic life?

I don't have a successful application of the Lord's prayer to romantic life, but I can tell you a romantic prayer disaster story. After I graduated from HBS, I met an incoming student from overseas that I fell completely in love with. Let's call her Naomi. And she fell in love with me too, or so I thought. But as weeks turned into months, Naomi began to have less and time for me. Until in the last month we were going out, I only saw her once. Finally I realized it was over. I asked her, "What was that all about?"

"Well," she said, "I knew I wanted to marry a Christian, "but over the years none of my boyfriends were Christians. So before I came here, I prayed, 'Lord if you'll give me a Christian boyfriend when I get to Boston, I'll go out with him.'" And a week later you asked me out. You were a direct answer to prayer. What could I do — I had to go out with you."

But she didn't love me.

Start with the other person	
1. Facts: say what's wonderful about them (be truthful)	
2. Action: agree with what they intend to do (to the degree possible)	
3. Vision of the result out loud	
Move to yourself	
1. Facts: say what you need	
2. Action: say what you commit to do	
3. Vision of the end result	
Put the outcome in God's hands	


I wish now that Naomi and I had thought to use the Lord's Prayer as the pattern for our relationship. I wish Naomi had observed something wonderful that was *true about me*, instead of fantasizing things she *wanted* in her boyfriend.

For instance, she wanted a high-fashion boyfriend. Get real, I'm not it. If she'd looked for what was truly wonderful about *me*, she would have realized I wasn't what she wanted from a boyfriend, and it would have been a lot easier on me. I wish she'd said something like, "Will, it's wonderful the way you make me feel at home in America, but I'm looking for something else."

Now, since we got the first stage of the relationship wrong — we didn't look for what was truly wonderful about each other — we never even got to the second stage. We never talked about the actions we wanted from each other, and the actions we were offering in return. We just made assumptions. I assumed that since she was my girlfriend, I would see her several times a week. She assumed that since I was a student, I'd understand she didn't have much time for our relationship. She assumed I'd take her fashion makeovers of me as a compliment. I took them as evidence I was too ugly to be lovable.

It's the most depressed I've been in my life. I felt like there must be something horribly wrong with me. If you are in a relationship that makes you feel worthless, ask yourself, "is this relationship based on the pattern of the Lord's prayer?" If it's not, change it or get out. You don't have to be a Christian to use the Lord's Prayer as a template, and neither does your boyfriend or girlfriend. You just have to want your relationship to be like the relationship Jesus wanted to have with God.

Start with the other person
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Put the outcome in God's hands

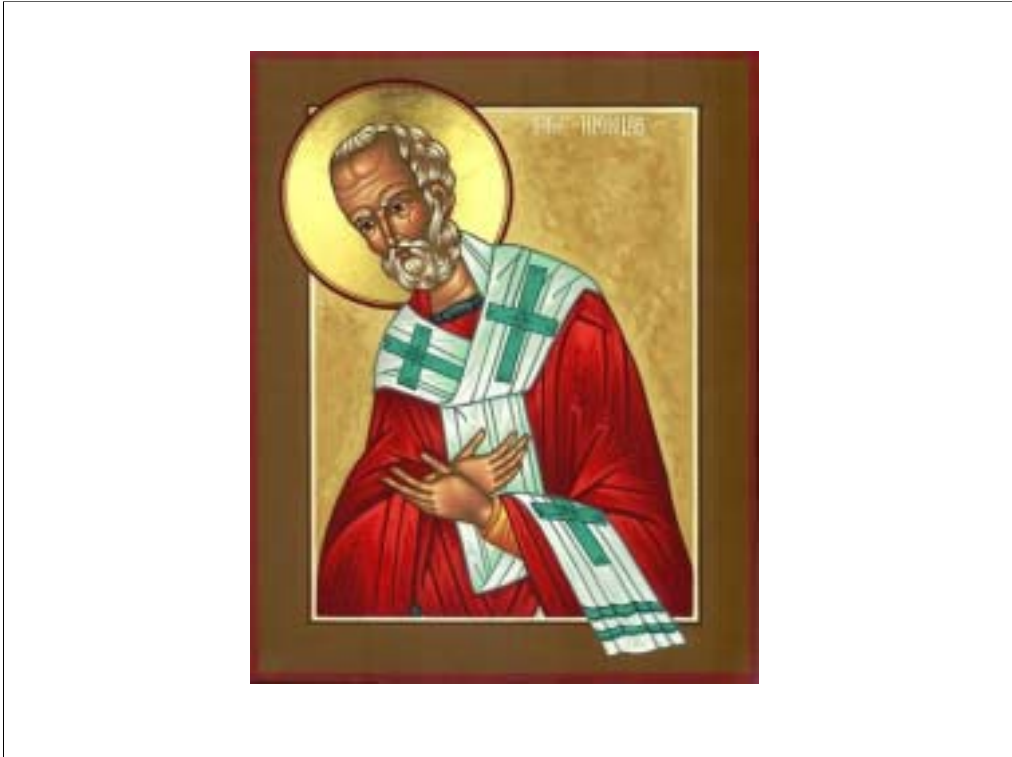


Fortunately, Naomi and I were rescued by what I now recognize as the third stage of the Lord's prayer pattern: envisioning the future. As she described the future she wanted for herself, I could see I wasn't part of it. "I want to marry someone who's going to change the world," she said. Clearly she meant that wasn't me. She went on to change the world herself actually. Naomi is known around the world as an expert on microfinance. She travels all over Africa and Asia to train organizations in poor countries how to make loans to the poorest people to start small business like sewing, and making charcoal, and raising goats. (Marie Koch is going to show us a lot more about microfinance next week, based on her experience in South Africa.) On the other hand, my vision was to make a deep and sustained difference in the lives of the people around me, not in Africa and Asia. And that's what God is giving me the privilege of doing. It just wouldn't have fit Naomi.

Whatever mistakes we made, Naomi and I did turn the outcome over to God. "I think I need to re-pray about whether you're the one God has in mind for me," Naomi said one day at the end. "You do that," I said. And when I turned my sense of worthlessness over to God, he released me from the infatuation over Naomi that had been gripping me. Within two months I met Kim, and I knew quickly that Kim was the one God had in mind for me.

Actually, it turned out that one of these stages in the Lord's prayer was what won me Kim's heart. It was the stage of Action — telling her the facts of what I really wanted from her. On one of our first dates, she came to my apartment, and for some reason I asked her if she would make the dinner. Later she said, "I was so moved that you could directly ask me for what you wanted, instead of manipulating me or pretending, that I knew I could let myself love you." Who knew?

It also turned out that Naomi and Kim were friends. So I got the last laugh when I got to see the look on Naomi's face the first time she came to a party and saw Kim and me together. (Pretty lame, huh?)



I'm trying to say that the Lord's Prayer is a great way to love God, *and* a great pattern for loving other people. It's handy, too, since it's one of the first things to learn when if you start following Jesus. Once you know the Lord's prayer, it's always with you, ready to be used. On the spur of the moment, when you have to decide how to treat a colleague, or a friend or an enemy, or a sales clerk, or a boss, the Lord's Prayer is there, waiting to guide you. When you're in love, or not in love, or confused about love, the Lord's prayer is there waiting to help you.

Where is the Love? that's the question the Harvard Veritas forum was asking last week. Where is the love? Don't ask me. Ask the Lord's prayer.

Some reflection questions

- The line that means the most to me in the Lord's Prayer is...
- A question I have is...
- I think (or don't think) you can apply the Lord's Prayer to my love life.