

# A COURSE IN PRAYER

TAZEWELL PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH



# **Part One**

## **Desiring Prayer**

**The Necessity of Prayer**  
**The Greatness of Prayer**

# **Part Two**

## **Understanding Prayer**

**What is Prayer?**  
**Conversing with God**  
**Encountering God**

# **Part Three**

## **Learning Prayer**

**Letters on Prayer**  
**The Prayer of Prayers**  
**The Touchstones of Prayer**

# **Part Four**

## **Deepening Prayer**

**As Conversation: Meditating on God's Word**  
**As Encounter: Seeking God's Face**

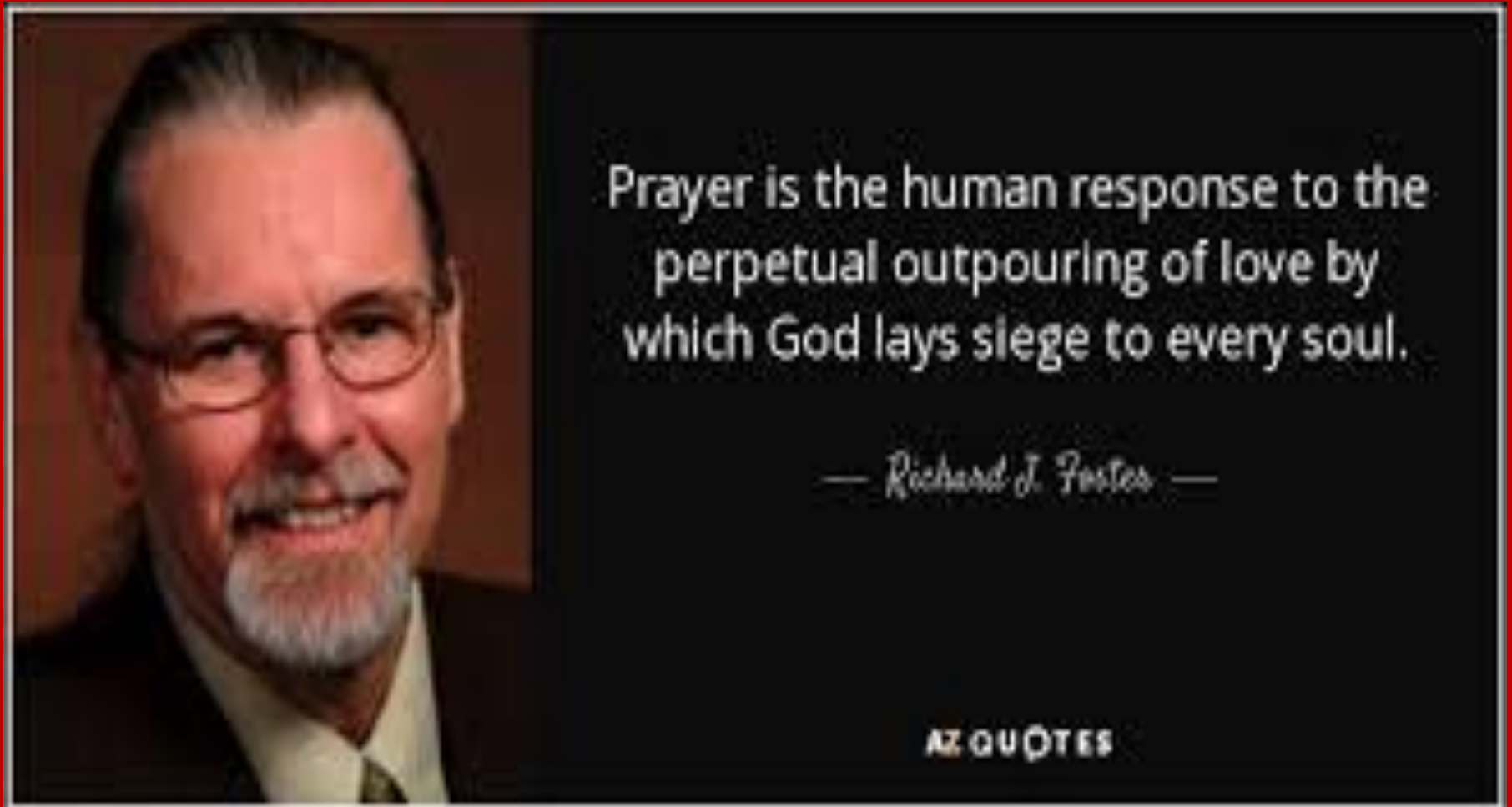
# **Part Five**

## **Doing Prayer**

**Awe: Praising God's Glory**  
**Intimacy: Finding God's Grace**  
**Struggle: Asking God's Help**  
**Practice: Daily Prayer**

## Review: A “theology of prayer”

Prayer begins with God



Prayer is the human response to the  
perpetual outpouring of love by  
which God lays siege to every soul.

— Richard J. Foster —

AZ QUOTES

## Review: A “theology of prayer”

The character of prayer is determined by the character of the God we are reaching toward.

The God to whom Christians pray is TRIUNE.



## *From here on in . . . Practical Questions*

- How do we actually build on this foundation?
- In God and the gospel we have the spiritual resources to pray, but how do we actually do it?



# Part Three

## Understanding Prayer

Letters on Prayer  
The Prayer of Prayers  
The Touchstones of Prayer



# 1. Letters on Prayer

*Saint Augustine*



*Martin Luther*



- *letters to individuals on prayer*

# Augustine on Prayer

- *Anicia Faltonia Proba (died AD 432)  
Roman noblewoman/ Christian*
- *2 letters of Augustine to Proba*
- *the first (Letter 130) is his only writing  
wholly devoted to the subject of prayer.*
- *Proba wrote Augustine because she was  
afraid she wasn't praying as she should.  
He responded with a brief, practical essay.*





## First Principle:

Before you know what to pray for and how to pray for it, you must become a particular kind of person.

You must account yourself “desolate” however great the prosperity of your lot.

The scales must have fallen from your eyes and you must see clearly that no matter how great your earthly circumstances become, they can never bring you the lasting peace and happiness that are found in Christ.

Unless you have that clearly in view, your prayers may go wrong because our heart’s loves are “disordered.”



## Second Principle:

What should you pray for?

“Pray for a happy life.”

What however will bring you a happy life?

Augustine turns to Psalm 27:4:

“One thing have I desired of the Lord,  
one thing will I seek after:  
that I may dwell in the house of the Lord  
to behold the beauty of the Lord.”

This is the fundamental prayer for happiness from a mind that the Spirit has cleared of illusions. Augustine writes, “*We love God, therefore, for what He is in Himself, and ourselves and our neighbors for His sake.*”



That doesn't mean, he quickly adds, that we shouldn't pray for anything else but to know, love, and please God.

However, if we have made God our greatest love, and if knowing and pleasing him is our highest pleasure, it changes both what and how we pray for a happy life.



## Third Principle:

### Study the Lord's Prayer

Once you have learned to pray  
in the full awareness of both:

- (1) the disorderliness of your heart
- (2) where true happiness is found,

you can be guided by studying  
the Lord's Prayer

- the order and form of the petitions
- how your own appeals fit it



Fourth Principle:  
prayer in the dark times

Even after the first three principles. . .  
*“we [still] know not what to pray for as we ought in regard to tribulations.”*

*“Tribulations . . . may do us good . . . and yet because they are hard and painful . . . we pray . . . that they may be removed from us.”*

Should we pray, then, for a change in circumstances or just for strength to endure?

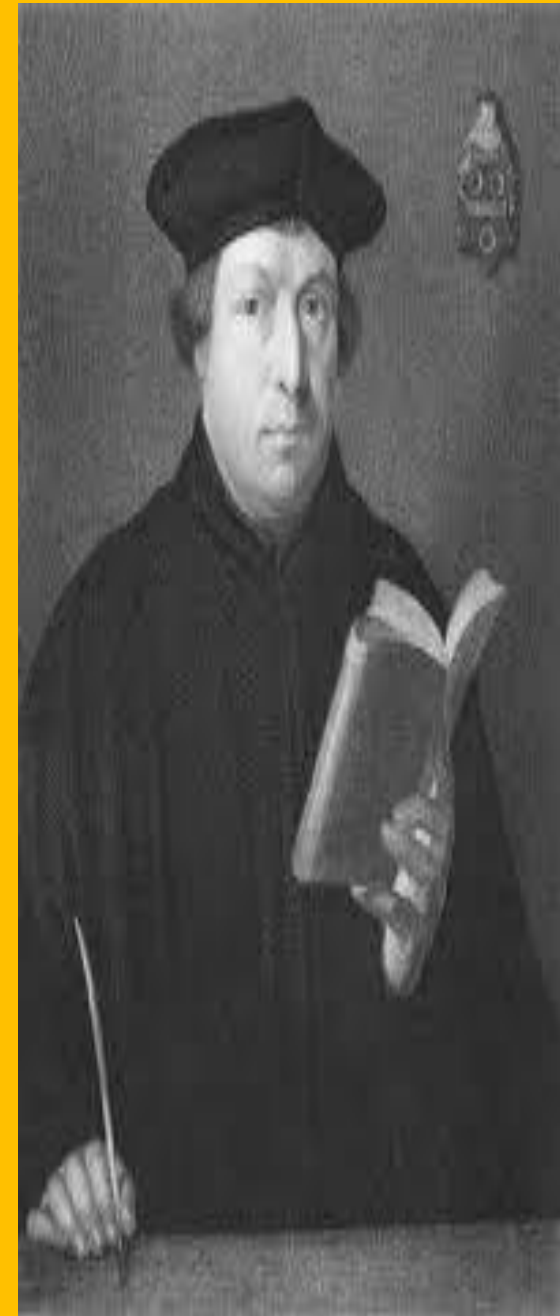
Augustine points to Jesus' prayer in Gethsemane, which was perfectly balanced between honest desire and submission to God.



# Luther on Prayer

Of Luther's prayer life, Veit Dietrich, one of Luther's friends, wrote:

*"There is not a day on which he does not devote at least three hours, the very ones most suitable for [work], to prayer. Once I was fortunate to overhear his prayer. Good God, what faith in his words! He speaks with the great reverence of one who speaks to his God, and with the trust and hope of one who speaks with his father and friend."*



## *Peter Beskendorf:*

- Luther's barber: devout, but flawed
- While intoxicated at a family meal, he stabbed his own son-in-law to death.
- Partly through Luther's intervention Peter was exiled rather than executed, but he endured difficult final years.
- However, he took with him one of the great texts on the subject of prayer in all of Christian history. Luther gave Peter a rich but practical set of guidelines for prayer. ***"A Simple Way to Pray"***



## First Principle:

Cultivate prayer as a **habit** .

Pray twice daily, whether you feel like it or not.

*“It is a good thing to let prayer be the first business of the morning and the last at night. Guard yourselves against those false, deluding ideas which tell you, ‘Wait a little while. I will pray in an hour; first I must attend to this or that.’”*





## Second Principle:

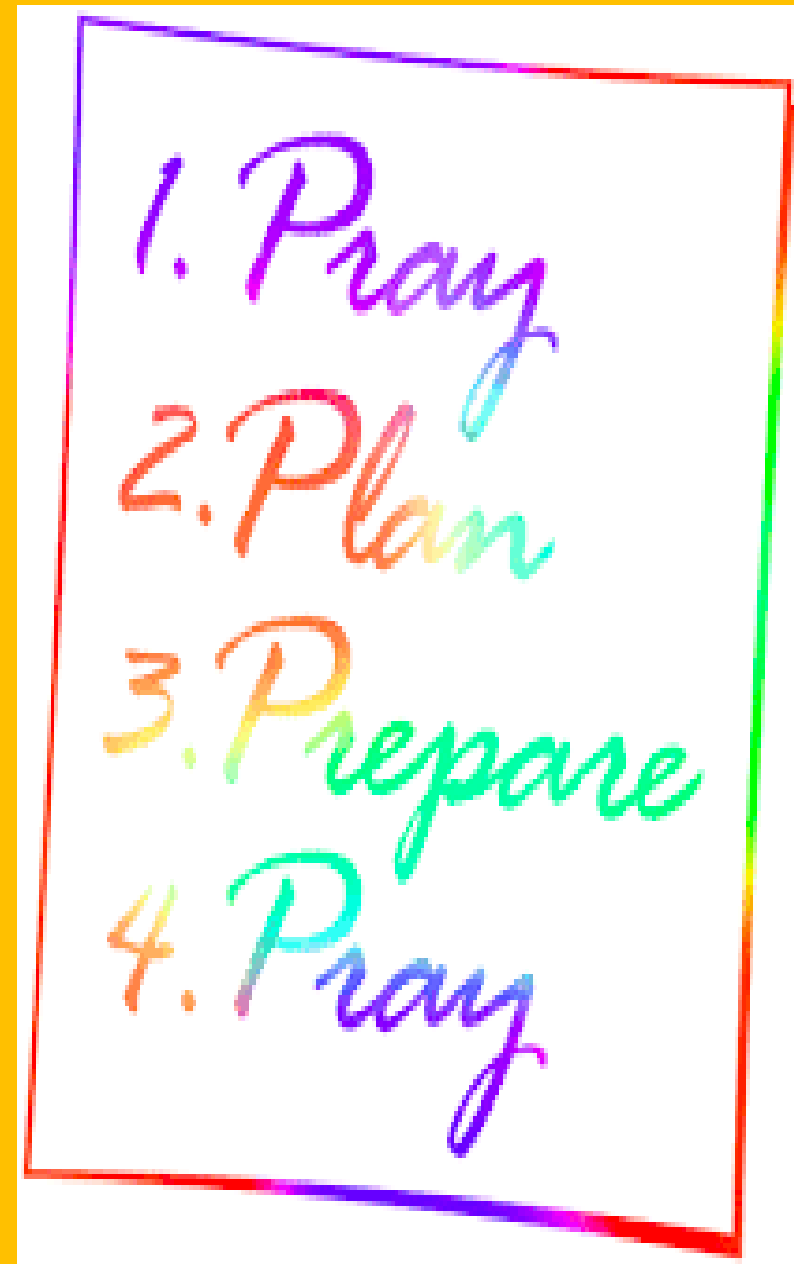
### **Meditate on scripture before praying**

Because prayer is a lifting of the heart to God (Lam. 3:41), it is wrong that believers should be “cool and joyless in prayer.”

Luther advises “*recitation to yourself*” of some part of the Scripture

--- not Bible study

--- letting thoughts and feelings via the Word converge on God



## *four-stranded garland*

*“I divide each [biblical] command into four parts, thereby fashioning a garland of four strands. That is I think of each commandment as first, **instruction**, which is really what is intended to be, and consider what the Lord demands of me so earnestly. Second, I turn it into a **thanksgiving**; third, a **confession**; and fourth, a **prayer**.” This turns every biblical text into “a school text, a song book, a penitential book, and prayer book.”*



## Third Principle:

### “Riff” on the Lord’s Prayer

After meditating on the Scripture, pray through each petition of the Lord’s Prayer, personalizing each one

#### Benefits

- *addresses “distracting thoughts”*
- *forces us to use the full language and basic forms of prayer*
- *is actual prayer*

<b>Our Father</b>	<b>Who art in Heaven</b>
<b>Hallowed be thy name</b>	<b>Thy kingdom come</b>
<b>Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven</b>	<b>Give us this day our daily bread</b>
<b>And forgive us our trespasses</b>	<b>As we forgive those who trespass against us</b>
<b>Lead us not into temptation</b>	<b>But deliver us from evil</b>
<b>For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever</b>	<b>Amen</b>

## Fourth Principle:

### **Preaching of the Holy Spirit**

This is not another “step” or practice to go along with the others but rather something to be kept in mind while going through all prayer and meditation. He calls praying believers to essentially keep a lookout for the Holy Spirit.

*“The Holy Spirit himself preaches here, and one word of his sermon is better than a thousand of our prayers. Many times I have learned more from one prayer than I might have learned from much reading and speculation.”*



## 2. The Prayer of Prayers

### *The Lord's Prayer*

*Our Father which art in heaven,  
Hallowed be thy name.*

*Thy kingdom come.*

*Thy will be done*

*in earth, as it is in heaven.*

*Give us this day our daily bread.*

*And forgive us our debts,  
as we forgive our debtors.*

*And lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from evil:*

*For thine is the kingdom,  
and the power,*

*and the glory, for ever.*

*Amen.*

*Matthew 6:9-13 KJV*

# *The Danger of Familiarity*

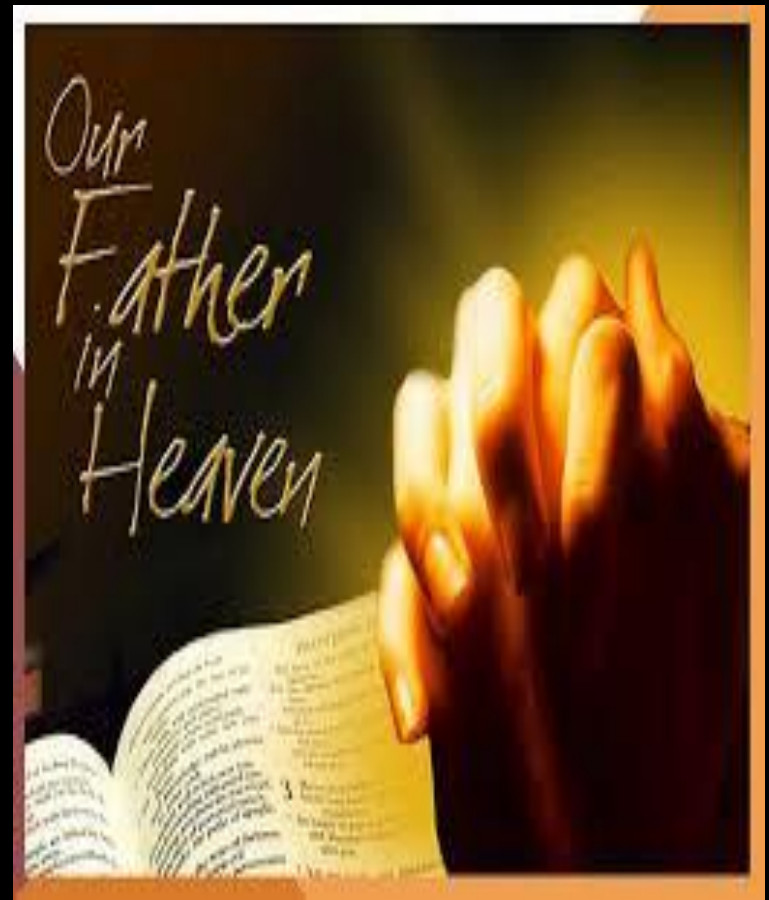


## *the address*

Calvin explains that to call God “Father” is to pray in Jesus’ name.

*“Who would break forth into such rashness as to claim for himself the honor of a son of God unless we had been adopted as children of grace in Christ?”*

Luther believed the address was a call to not plunge straight into talking to God but to first recollect our situation and standing in Christ



## *the first petition*

- 1) *“hallowed” – seldom used*
- 2) *idea of holiness is alien in our secularized society*
- 3) *seeming problem of logic, expressed by Luther:*

*“What are we praying for when we ask that His name be holy? Is it not holy already?”*

*“Of course it is holy, but in our use of it his name is not kept holy.”*





*So what are we praying?*

*In baptism we have God's name put upon us. So, **God, keep us from dishonoring the name by which we are called.** (Luther)*

*Ingratitude and an indifferent attitude toward God fails to honor his name. To "hallow" it is **to have a heart of grateful joy toward God.** (Calvin)*

***that more and more people would honor God and call on his name.**  
(Augustine, Luther)*



## *the second petition*

*“As light is absent to those refusing to open their eyes, so it is possible to refuse God’s rule.”*  
(Augustine)

the “*Lordship*” petition

(now)

- emotions
- desires
- thoughts
- commitments

(consummation)

end of suffering, injustice, poverty, death



## *the third petition*

*“Unless we are profoundly certain God is our Father, we will never be able to say ‘thy will be done.’” (Timothy Keller)*

## *Gethsemane*

*“For my heart’s desire  
Unto Thine is bent:  
I aspire  
To a full consent.”  
-George Herbert*

*“on earth as it is in heaven”*



## *the fourth petition*

*“daily bread” = necessities, not luxuries*  
(Augustine)

*Following upon the first three petitions, we do not come arrogantly and anxiously telling God what has to happen. Many things we would have otherwise agonized over, we can now ask for without desperation.*

(Calvin)

### *social dimension*

*to pray “give us – all the people of our land – daily bread” is to pray against “wanton exploitation” in business, trade, and labor, which “crushes the poor and deprives them of their daily bread.”*

(Luther)



## *the fifth petition*

*Jesus tightly links our relationship with God to our relationship with others.*

*--bitterness*

*--grudges*

*“If anyone insists on his own goodness and despises others . . . let him look into himself when this petition confronts him. He will find he is no better than others and that in the presence of God everyone must duck his head and come into the joy of forgiveness only through the low door of humility.” (Luther)*

*The petition is not only a challenge to our pride but a test of spiritual reality. If we find confession and repentance intolerably traumatic or demeaning, it means “the heart is not right with God and cannot draw . . . confidence from his Gospel.” (Luther)*

*“And forgive us our debts,  
as we forgive our debtors” Matthew 6:12*



## *the sixth petition*

### *Important distinction:*

*“The prayer is not that we should not be tempted, but that we should not be brought [or led] into temptation.” (Augustine)*

*Temptation’s positive value  
(in the sense of trial/ testing)*

to *“enter into* temptation,” (Matt. 26:41) = ??

### *Puzzlement:*

*Why would we petition God thus?*

*Temptations from the “right” and from the “left”*

*‘right’ = riches, power, and honors*

*(tempt us into thinking we do not need God)*

*‘left’ = poverty, disgrace, contempt, afflictions*

*(temp us to despair, lose all hope, become angrily estranged from God.)*

*(Calvin)*



## *the seventh petition*

*Calvin combined this phrase with “lead us not into temptation” and called it the sixth and last petition. Augustine and Luther, however, viewed “deliver us from evil” as a separate, seventh petition. It can also be translated “**deliver us from the Evil One,**” that is, the devil.*

*Luther writes that this petition is “directed against specific evils that emanate from the devil’s kingdom . . . poverty, dishonor, death, in short . . . Everything that threatens our bodily welfare.”*

*Augustine indicates that while the sixth petition is for deliverance from the remaining evil inside us, this seventh petition is for protection from evil outside us, from malignant forces in the world, especially our enemies who wish to do us harm.”*

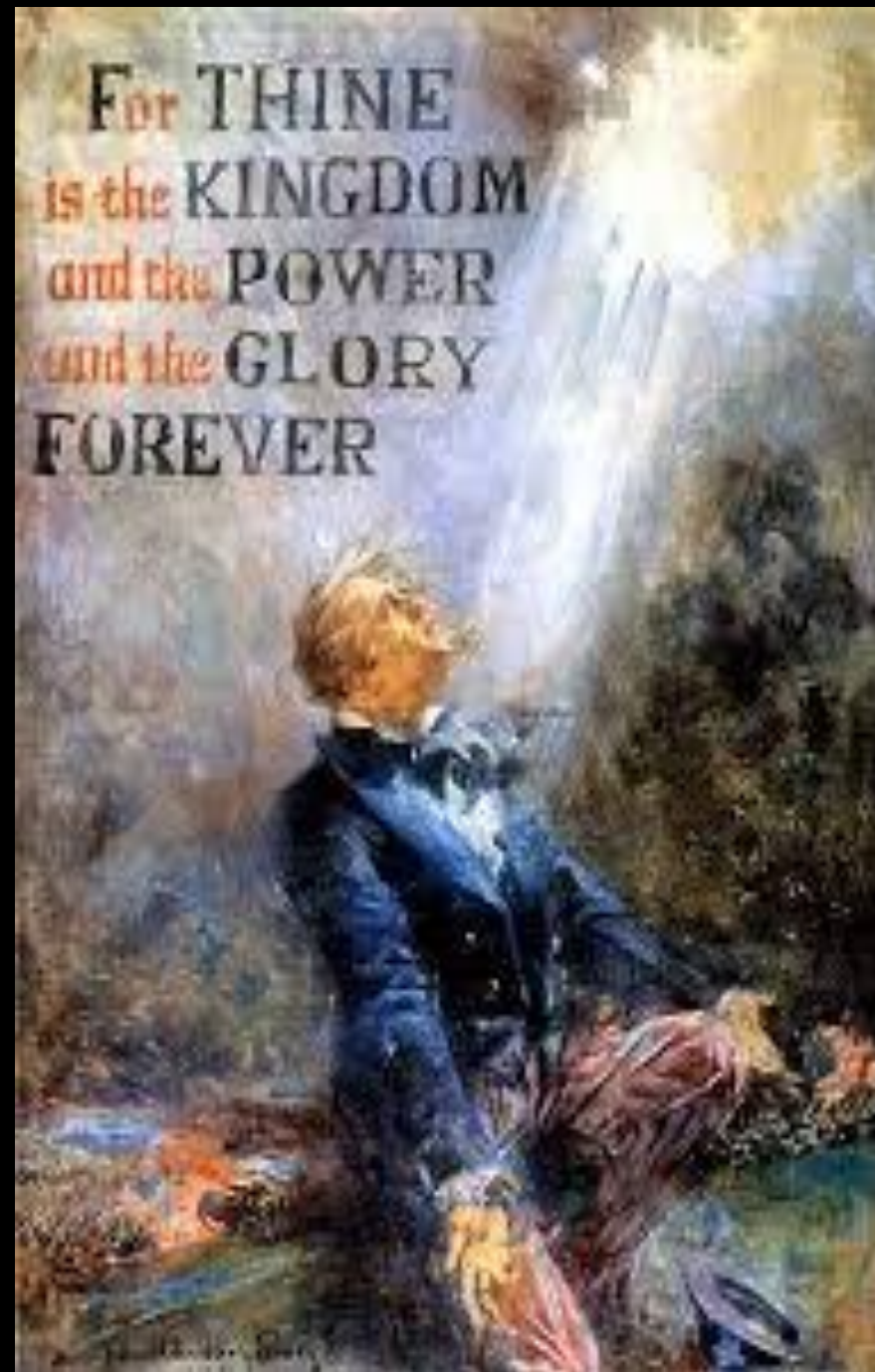


## *the ascription*

- not in the gospel texts
- not in the Latin versions

“It is so appropriate that it ought not to be omitted.” (Calvin)

*After descending into our needs, troubles, and limitations, we return to the truth of God’s complete sufficiency. Here our hearts can end with “tranquil repose.”*





*“Give, Forgive, and Deliver --- Us”*

OUR FATHER

who art in Heaven  
hallowed be thy name.  
Thy Kingdom come.  
Thy will be done  
on earth <sup>as in</sup> HEAVEN.

Give us this day our dally bread  
and forgive us **Our trespasses**  
as we forgive those who trespass against us  
and lead us not into temptation

but deliver us  
from evil.

For thine

Kingdom

and the Power

and the Glory

for ever and ever.

**AMEN.**

### 3. *The Touchstones of Prayer*



# What is Prayer?

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# What Does Prayer Require?

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# What Does Prayer Give Us?

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# Where Does Prayer Take Us?

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## *What Prayer Is*

Work	Prayer is a duty and a discipline
Word	Prayer is conversing with God
Balance	Prayer is adoration, confession, thanks, supplication

## *What Prayer Requires*

Grace	Prayer is “in Jesus’ name,” based on the gospel.
Fear	Prayer is the heart engaged in loving awe.
Helplessness	Prayer is accepting one’s weakness and dependence.

## *What Prayer Gives*

Perspective	Prayer reorients your view toward God.
Strength	Prayer is spiritual union with God.
Spiritual Reality	Prayer seeks a heart sense of the presence of God.

## *Where Prayer Takes Us*

Self-Knowledge	Prayer requires and creates honesty and self-knowledge.
Trust	Prayer requires and creates both restful trust and confident hope.
Surrender	Prayer requires and creates surrender of the whole life in love to God.