



Theology and Practice of Prayer A Lutheran View

Study and Discussion Guide

(Commission on Theology and Church Relations)¹

Outline

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¹ These materials may be used alone or as a companion to the CTCR report, *Theology and Practice of Prayer: A Lutheran View* (2011; abbreviated as TPP). The headings for the six sections of this study provide the page numbers from TPP which may be read in tandem with the study. The materials are presented in six parts, with each part divided into two sections to allow for the study to take place in 6 or 12 sessions, as desired. Moreover, the consecutive arrangement allows individuals or groups to break each section into additional parts if desired.

1. From Universal Practice to Christian Teaching

(TPP, pages 5-14)

A.

Opening: Pray Psalm 61:1-5

What is prayer?

Dictionaries remind us that the English word “prayer” indicates a request from a lesser person to one greater—imploping or begging. Although less common today, it is a word that was frequently used in every-day relationships in court pleadings or requests from servants or beggars. Note the tone of the humble request in **Psalm 61:1-5**. What are some of the words used to describe prayer in this psalm?

Prayer is often a cry—a faint call—which is an important fact. We pray because of weakness and need.

The universality of prayer

Prayer is found in every culture and among every class of humans, so it is a universal practice. But it varies widely in terms of how people pray and the one to whom they pray. For example, some religious prayer practices include petitions to different gods for different goals, use of carved wooden blocks to seek guidance for a specific course of action, utter silence with the goal of entering into a trance-like state, and other techniques. Consider what you know about the prayer practices of non-Christian religions and why that is important. Why is prayer such a universal human practice?

All the world prays, because. . . of human powerlessness and need

We pray because “Man is a beggar before God,” said St. Augustine. Luther scrawled, “We are beggars, it is true,” on a piece of paper found in his pocket when he died. No one wants to beg, but when the need is most extreme, what other recourse do we have? Begging happens because of need. But for those who beg on streets and by-ways around the world, it is coupled with uncertainty (“Will anyone help?”) and also a sort of alienation and even resentment (“They don’t understand or care, if they did, they would help.”)

Read the familiar story of Elijah and the prophets of Baal (see **1 Kgs 18:23-24, 27-29, 36-38**). Everyone is praying, but what is the difference in the prayers to Baal and Elijah’s prayer? What do the differences involve and reveal?

All the world prays, because. . . of something innate to humanity

Read **Acts 17:22-28**. Paul points out the inherent religiosity of people in verse 22. People have a natural inclination to “seek God” and “feel their way” to him (v. 27). How effective is feeling our way to God?

Read **Romans 1:21-23**. How does the commonality of prayer correspond with the biblical teaching of some level of natural knowledge of God? Is the instinctive or natural human knowledge of God adequate? How does Romans 1 help explain the different approaches to prayer found in other religions? These passages show that something of the invisible God is seen in creation; but the image is easily suppressed and detours into falsehood.

There is “a ‘driveness’ in our creaturehood that gives humanity no surcease from praying. As praying Christians, seeking to fulfill our mission and destiny as God’s church in the world, we need to understand this phenomenon.” (Kenneth E. Korby, quoted in TPP, 10.)

B.

(Pray Psalm 8 if this is a separate session)

Why the world prays? (Luther's explanation)

Read and summarize the message of **Romans 2:14-16**. That God's Law is on our hearts might seem evident only in that people tend to have a sense of right and wrong about such things as murder or adultery. But part of the Law is also the recognition of a god (higher power, force, principles, etc.) to which we are indebted and from whom we seek help.

The *Large Catechism* speaks of this "natural law." Martin Luther also explains that humanity has arranged "forms of divine service" (prayer, etc.) in a desire to find God and be helped and blessed by him, but he also warns that seeking God by reason alone only makes us fools (*Luther's Works*, 40:96). It makes sense, then, that prayer is a universal experience, yet, one colored by sin. Indeed, even an atheist chaplain (talk about a contradiction in terms!), Greg Epstein, has suggested a form of prayer for atheists (*Good Without God*, 179ff.). So, although it is universal, prayer certainly is not understood in a universal fashion.

Where do we begin in order to gain a solid foundation for prayer?

As Christians, we begin with Scripture and with Jesus' teaching, especially the Lord's Prayer. As *Lutheran* Christians our understanding of prayer is connected to the central teaching of justification by faith. We also realize that there is much to learn from the writings of past generations that are faithful to Scripture—from church fathers, Creeds and confessions.

Identify some Biblical synonyms for prayer in these passages

- **Psalm 41:4; Acts 10:14**
- **Psalm 61:1; Acts 7:60**
- **Psalm 5:2; Luke 11:2**
- **Psalm 2:8; Mark 11:24**
- **Jer. 27:18; 1 Tim 2:1**
- **Psalm 86:9; Acts 26:7**

Biblical synonyms for prayer—such as "say," "ask," "cry," "beg," "intercede," "entreat," and "worship"—all remind us that prayer in Scripture means some form of talking with God.

Prayer portraits

Each of the following pictures of prayer tells us something. Note the settings and the purposes for prayer in these instances:

- **Numbers 12:13**
- **Psalm 69:30**
- **Psalm 35:13-14**
- **Daniel 6:10**
- **Acts 3:1**
- **Matthew 26:41**
- **Ephesians 6:18-20**
- **1 Timothy 2:8**

God's people pray in times of need and rescue, in sickness and loss, alone and with others, at set times and places and on all kinds of occasions and in any place.

"The Scriptures identify prayer as an act that could be set in particular moments and places and routinized in definite ways. But it was not confined to such settings. Formality and fixity interchange with openness and freedom in the time and place of prayer. (Patrick Miller, quoted in TPP, 14.)

2. Prayer and the Gospel

(*TPP*, pages 14-22)

A.

Opening: Pray Psalm 130

The variety of biblical terms for prayer points to a simple definition of prayer as talking with God. In the Bible, prayer is focused less on the talking than on *the One to whom we pray*.

To whom do we pray? We know God in Christ

Read **John 17:3** and consider Harold Senkbeil's comment: "If we want to learn to pray we must become like children. For that's who we really are, children of God through faith in Jesus Christ. Thus the first step in prayer is to step into the presence of God our loving Father as His beloved children. And there's only one way to do that: in the name of Jesus."

God of the Gospel

Read **Psalm 130:1-8**. David's prayer is spoken in great distress—"out of the depths I cry"—but it is also a prayer of great confidence. What gives David confidence? As he "waits" for the Lord, what is it that he awaits? Why is this mournful prayer so full of hope?

Read **Psalm 32:1-7**. Consider this prayer of David—a prayer spoken with full knowledge of his "transgression," "sin," and "iniquity." It acknowledges that God's judgment is heavy and that guilt can disable us completely. But notice also how David describes a "godly" person (verse 6).

The book of Hebrews is also a great source of teaching about prayer because it reminds us of the One who intercedes for us. Look at **Hebrews 4:14-16**. Who is our "great high priest"? What does his intercessory work mean for us and our prayers? **Hebrews 10:19-25** reminds us that we can "draw near" to God "by the blood of Jesus" our Priest, who in Baptism ("sprinkled," "washed") gives the "assurance of faith" and the "confession of our hope."

More than we ask or think

Read and discuss **Ephesians 3:14-21**. In these verses, the Holy Spirit reveals the gift of prayer at work in St. Paul. To whom does Paul pray? From whom does strength come? What does Paul ask for his readers? What does he say that enables being "filled with all the fullness of God" according to Paul? Note that Paul both encourages prayer and also reminds us that God is not limited by our requests.

The Gospel changes everything

Previously, we looked at the uncertainty of the human search for God, and the way that affects prayer. Luther identifies the problem: "It is impossible for a conscience to expect anything from God unless it first gains the conviction that God is gracious for Christ's sake."

But Christians pray as those who are "completely certain that we are heard on account of Christ and that by his merits we have a gracious Father." (Apology of the Augsburg Confession XI, 20)

B.

(Pray Psalm 66 if this is a separate session)

Atheists and others just don't get prayer

Many people mock prayer, seeing it as cute in little children and immature adults, but ultimately futile. It doesn't help when Christians portray prayer unbiblically or inadequately.

What prayer is not

Notice what Jesus says in **Matthew 6:5-7**. Prayer is not some form of magical incantation based on fine or fancy words. God isn't impressed even though some folks may stand in awe.

- **Daniel 9:18-19** is a reminder that prayer is not a conversation between equals. We “present our *pleas*” to God, recognizing we have nothing but sin to offer him in exchange. All prayer is a plea—prayer always depends on God's mercy alone.
- **1 Timothy 4:4-5**, especially verse 5, puts prayer together with the Word of God and reminds us that prayer is not a substitute for the Word of God, but is to be coupled with his Word.
- Above all else, prayer is not a neutral spiritual tool for any use we choose. **Isaiah 44:14-17** points out the foolishness of prayer to a false God. The story of the prayers of the tax collector and Pharisee in **Luke 18:10-14** is a reminder that proud prayers are not God-pleasing. These are “cautions” of a sort that may help prevent false views of prayer.

Discuss the problem of false views of prayer, and consider other inadequate views about prayer.

Other misunderstandings

- **Psalm 50:15** shows that while some may think God is unapproachable, the true God invites and urges us to pray.
- Read **1 Thessalonians 5:16-18**. Some also think that there is no need for prayer since God is all-knowing—but the all-knowing God says something different.
- Still others think of prayer as a “blank check” (for the right person) and may use Jesus' words to support their claim: “Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do” (**John 14:13**). But how does **John 15:7** fit with such a perspective? There Jesus applies his promise to those who “remain in me and my words remain in you.”

Christian prayer is a response to the Gospel

“After the preaching of the Gospel whereby God speaks to us, this is the greatest and foremost work, that by prayer we in turn speak to God.” —Martin Luther

3. The Paradox of Prayer

(*TPP*, pages 23-35)

A.

Opening: Pray Psalm 103

Remember that we have seen how the Gospel clarifies things. Luther: “It is impossible for a conscience to expect anything from God unless it first gains the conviction that God is gracious for Christ’s sake.” This means that Christians pray as those who are “completely certain that we are heard on account of Christ and that by his merits we have a gracious Father” (Apology of the Augsburg Confession XI, 20).

True worship—and prayer—in spirit and in truth

Read **John 4:1-26**, especially 19-24. What Jesus says about true worship as done in spirit and truth goes for prayer as well, for prayer is an aspect of worship. Notice verse 23—“the Father is seeking such people to worship.” The Father seeks our prayers! In case we have any doubt about that, consider and discuss some of the exhortations to pray that are found in God’s Word:

- **Luke 18:1**
- **Luke 21:34-36**
- **Romans 12:12**
- **Colossians 4:2**
- **1 Timothy 2:1-3**
- **James 1:5-8**

Such verses remind us that Scripture has to urge us to pray. Luther points this out also, urging pastors “to exhort and encourage the people to pray” (*Large Catechism*).

So why should we pray?

Because God tells us to pray—it’s a duty. We have not only all the preceding verses, but the Ten Commandments as well: “You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God” (**Ex 20:7**). We dare not forget that when God prohibits one thing he commands its opposite. As God forbids false gods, he does so to have us know him, the true God (**Ex 20:3**). So also, when he forbids the misuse of his name, he is also commanding its right use.

Yet, we fail to keep the commandments. Commandments cannot save us, for they constantly indict us instead. That is why it is so important to recall the earlier emphasis of this study, that *Christians* pray because we know God in Jesus Christ. We know the Gospel—our sins (including failures to pray as we ought) have been forgiven for Jesus’ sake.

Only after Luther discusses the Ten Commandments and the Apostles’ Creed in the catechisms, does he explain the Lord’s Prayer, saying: “We have heard what we are to do and to believe.... Now follows the third part, how we are to pray.” (Quoted in TPP, 24.)

B.

(Pray Psalm 50:7-15 if this is a separate session)

Because of the forgiveness of sins, God's command to pray is rightly understood. It not only points out how to live, it also mirrors our failures. In Christ, we can also see it as gift.

A delightful command

When we are troubled, what a relief for a friend to say, "Hey, talk to me." Note—this is an *imperative* (a command). What a blessing that God lovingly *commands* us to talk to Him. It is no less than a word of welcome! Skim through **Psalm 119**, stopping at verses 24, 47, 77, 92, 143, 174 to read more closely. What common theme do you notice in these verses? Think about it and discuss it together. Read **Ephesians 6:18-20**. Who is stirring us to pray? What are we to ask?

A certain promise

Luther identifies another motivation for prayer: God promises to listen. Look at **Matthew 7:7-11** and **John 16:22-24**. Note the promises and the assurance that our heavenly Father is better than any earthly father. Consider the promise that as we ask in his name, our "joy will be full." Read **James 5:13-18**. The apostle James echoes his Lord urging prayer in His name (v. 14). He uses the example of Elijah to encourage us. Why does he link prayer together with confession of sins? Consider this in light of James' words about "the prayer of the righteous" (v. 16).

As noted previously these promises are sometimes misunderstood. Consider again the words "in Jesus' name" (in keeping with his purposes and will). Consider how God "raises" and "heals."

God-given words

The Bible is full of prayers that are recorded for us. Luther sees this is as more prayer encouragement from God. God Himself gives the Bible's prayers in the Psalms and elsewhere.

Consider that, like all of Scripture, the Bible's prayers are *inspired* words of God for us and for our learning. Skim through **Psalm 40**, which reminds us that God puts words in our mouths (v. 3). With this, God provides what might be counted a fourth reason to pray. By giving us the "words and approach we are to use" (*Large Catechism*) God shows us our greatest needs. All the world prays out of need, but Christians know both exactly where to turn—the true God—and also the deepest human needs, which God has shown us.

The prayer paradox

But, "Pastor, if God knows everything and He knows what is best and will do His will in the end, then do we *really* need to pray?" It is true that God never changes or wavers in doing what He says. He knows all before it happens and needs no information from us. Nevertheless, God urges us to pray throughout Scripture, for our greatest human need is to know Him and to relate to Him personally, hearing His Word, receiving His sacramental gifts, and responding in prayer.

"I will change the speech of the peoples to a pure speech, that all of them may call upon the name of the Lord and serve him with one accord" (Zeph. 3:9).

4: “This is how you should pray...”

(TPP, pages 36-42)

A.

Opening: Pray Psalm 51:7-15

Prayer is a universal practice, but Christians pray “in Jesus’ name,” that is, because of the Gospel of forgiveness which gives us confidence before God. Christian prayer actually comes as a response to God who commands our prayers, promises to hear them, gives us actual words to speak, and in so doing, helps us to know our deepest needs.

This is how you should pray...

Who teaches us to pray? “Jesus!” would be the children’s answer, and they’re right. But does that mean that the prayers of God’s people before Christ’s coming were inadequate? Not at all, for their faith was in the Christ to come who was promised and who spoke before His incarnation in the Spirit-given prayers of Israel.

- Christians pray the psalms and other Old Testament prayers, just as Jesus did when he joined in temple worship and prayer (**Lk 2:41-51; Jn 7:28; Acts 14:23; Col 3:16**).
- Christians pray personally, just as Jesus did (**Lk 9:18; Acts 10:30; Ph 4:5-6**).
- Christians pray for all—even enemies, just as Jesus did (**Mt 5:44; 1 Tim 2:1-2**).

More than just example

Read **1 Corinthians 12:12-13** and **Romans 12:4-5** and consider the importance of our incorporation *into* Christ. We have the example of Jesus’ prayer practice, but, more importantly, we have been *joined* to Christ as members of His body. Therefore, as Augustine says, “when the Body of the Son prays, it separates not its Head from itself: and it is ... our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who both prays *for* us, and prays *in* us, and *is prayed to by* us” (TPP, 36).

Christ-focused prayer

Read and discuss **Psalm 4:3, Romans 8:15, and Galatians 4:6**. Our faith is focused on Jesus Christ and so also Christian prayer revolves around Him. In and with the Son of God, we know the Father. The Holy Spirit works faith in Jesus Christ and so, by Him, shows us that we are God’s children also and leads us to call Him “Abba, Father.”

The Son of God has become the Son of man, one with the Father and “He prays for us, as our Priest; He prays in us, as our Head; He is prayed to by us, as our God” (Augustine, TPP, 36)

B.

(Pray Psalm 30 if this is a separate session)

Children learn to speak from conversation with their parents. God's children learn to speak *to* God *from* God. That way of learning is *reflected* throughout Scripture, but it *perfected* in Christ. In the revelation of God in Christ and the gift of the Spirit, we come to see that in a fundamental way, our prayers are *to* the Father, *through* the Son, *by* the Spirit.

Lord, teach us to pray

Luke 11:1-13 tells of the disciples' request, "Lord, teach us to pray." Jesus' answer, in the following verses, includes both a prayer and a series of brief glimpses into human behavior that encourage prayer. In a little book called *Psalms: The Prayerbook of the Bible*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer calls it "pure grace" that God teaches us to speak to Him and he reminds us that children of God, just like children of men, learn to speak by listening. Nowhere is that more true than in the Lord's Prayer itself.

The way or manner of Christian prayer

Jesus shows us *how*—the way—to talk to God. He gives us words—"say this"—and he also provides the "manner" in which God's children pray, "for that is what we are" (**1 Jn 3:1**).

Children of God...for that is what we are!

Children talk even before they can articulate words, in cries, babbling, and gestures. They talk without inhibition in the confidence of childhood, especially to mother and father. So also, there is nothing for the believer to hide from God. Consider: **Psalm 5:1; Psalm 13:1; Psalm 38:9; Romans 8:26**. God encourages our prayer, even though what we ask may often be immature or even foolish.

Our status as children of God

See **John 20:17 and Galatians 3:26-27**. Note the basis for our claim to be God's children. It is a revealed truth, not a human deduction, that we are His. In baptism we are adopted, in Christ Jesus, who brings us to His Father and makes Him *our* Father. Nothing is too trivial for our Father.

Encouragement along the way (of prayer)

Sometimes our hearts become cool and we lose our way in prayer through weariness, busy-ness, doubts, inadequacies, and temptations. The Word of the Lord urges and encourages, showing us again and again prayer's simplicity, giving reasons for confidence. Children are persistent—often annoyingly so—but in His only-begotten Son, the heavenly Father encourages all of His adopted children to be persistent and earnest in prayer. Read and discuss **Luke 18:1-8; Luke 10:2**. God knows our frailty (**Ps 38:8-9**), yet welcomes our prayers nonetheless. To us, too weak to bear life's burdens alone, He gives the body of Christ to pray with and for us and calls us to pray for one another (**Lk 9:28; Col 4:2-3; 1 Thess 5:25; Jam 5:16**).

"All the prayers of Holy Scripture are summarized in the Lord's Prayer, and they are contained in its immeasurable breadth. They are not made superfluous by the Lord's Prayer but constitute the inexhaustible richness of the Lord's Prayer as the Lord's Prayer is their summation." (D. Bonhoeffer, quoted in TPP, 37.)

5: Jesus' prayer priorities—I

(*TPP*, pages 42-52)

A.

Opening: Pray Psalm 113

We pray as children speaking to their Father because our elder Brother urges it, showing us both our relationship to our Father and also our relationship with each other as brothers and sisters.

God welcomes all His children's prayers—so does what we say in prayer matter?

Certainly, our life of prayer is not restricted, but set free because our Father wills to hear us. Every sincere, heartfelt prayer is welcomed by our heavenly Father—whether it is the simplest spontaneous prayer of a child or the most eloquent prayer of a great theologian. But the freedom to pray freely in our own words according to our heart's concerns does not mean that we have no need to grow and mature in how and what we pray. The Word of God teaches not only a way of prayer—free and heartfelt—but also words for prayer that show us the heart of God.

Look at the following New Testament references and the Old Testament reference that accompanies it: **Matthew 27:46 (Ps 22); Luke 23:46 (Ps 31); Matthew 21:16 (Ps 8:2); Matthew 22:44 (Ps 110); John 10 (Ps 23, Ps 95)**. These verses show us that our Lord prayed and memorized psalms, the prayers of Israel. Praying with Jesus means praying Scripture and so praying the book of Psalms and, *of course, the Lord's Prayer also (Mt 6:7-13)*.

The First Petition: "Hallowed be thy name" (Mt 6:9)

Why is God's holy name a priority? What is He teaching us? How might **1 Timothy 2:4** fit? Discuss this comment from Luther: "In this petition God becomes everything and man becomes nothing." "God" only means the *real* God when the real God tells us who He is and what He intends and does for the world—as His Word teaches and enriches us (**Col 3:16**).

What's in a name?

Leviticus 20:3 shows us that the right use of God's name is serious business. He sets His face against those who profane it. **Leviticus 19:12** reminds us that either His name is hallowed or it is profaned. Note how He names himself: "I am who I am" or, as it can also be translated, "I will be who I will be" (**Ex 3:14**). We, in contrast, are who God has made us to be.

How is the name hallowed?

Ez 36:23 says literally: "I will hallow my great name." God hallows His name by making Himself known in Word and sacred sign (the sacraments). So Luther explained: "God's name is hallowed when the Word of God is taught in its truth and purity and we, his children, lead holy lives." His name is hallowed as He speaks to us and we speak back in Jesus' name in prayer, for Jesus has "inherited" this holy name (**Hb 1:4**).

"If anyone suffers as a Christian...let him glorify God in that name" (1 Pet 4:16).

B.

(Pray Psalm 122 if this is a separate session)

The Second Petition: “Thy kingdom come” (Matt 6:10)

There is an awful lot of bad stuff in the world. Hmmm. Is God king or not?

God hallows His name by His Word—made flesh and spoken. Now the question is will the Word impact our lives? Or would we rather have some other ruler? (**Is 26:13**) How does this happen?

What is the kingdom all about?

It’s good news! (See **Mt 4:23**.) **Matthew 13** is all about the kingdom and its mysterious nature—see vv. 11, 24, 31, 44. Many miss it; Satan hates it; its power is mysterious; and its future makes it priceless. **Matthew 18:1-4** shows us who fits into the kingdom. So how does it come to us? By the Spirit as He hallows the name for us (**Jn 3:5; Rom 14:17**).

The kingdom comes when...

When the Spirit works faith in God’s Word, God’s kingly rule comes to us. Only by faith do people become joyful citizens of His kingdom (**1 Cor 12:3**). Of course, God is ruling in other ways, too, in such things as nature and government (a kingdom of power, not grace). And, also, we pray for the final, complete coming of His kingdom on the last day (**Rev 11:15**).

The Third Petition: “Thy will be done” (Mt 6:10)

Luke 11:1-4 does not have this petition, which summarizes the first two. A holy name plus kingdom presence equals the accomplishment of God’s will. Because God allows rebellion, his will isn’t done automatically. That’s the difference between heaven and earth and the reason we pray (or struggle; see **Gen 32:28**), since we are seeking God’s promised future.

The will of God

Read **1 Timothy 2:3-4**. God’s will is something far too deep for us in many ways. But one thing is crystal clear: His loving will for people to have His salvation.

God’s will is done when...

“He breaks and hinders every evil plan of the devil, the world, and our sinful nature... and when He strengthens and keeps us firm in His Word and faith until we die” (*Small Catechism*). An unholy trinity of Satan, human rebellion, and individual sin would destroy us, but God’s will is to keep us safe with Him (**Ps 40:8; Ph 2:13; Jam 1:18**).

“We are capable of receiving His [God’s] works and His counsels only when our own counsels have ceased and our works have stopped and we are made purely passive before God, both with regard to our inner as well as our outward activities.” (Luther, quoted in TPP, 51.)

6: Jesus' prayer priorities—II

(TPP, pages 52-63)

A.

Opening: Pray Psalm 104

Christian prayer, flowing from childlike faith, responds to God's command, His promise, and our need. We ask for His will as His name is hallowed and He rules in our lives—but what shall we pray about day-to-day living?

Fourth Petition: “Give us this day our daily bread” (Mt 6:11)

Read and briefly discuss **Exodus 16** as background to this petition. Consider the importance of the phrase “this day” and the words “daily bread.” These words call to mind our most basic human needs and God's daily provision.

The Source of all good for all

Jesus teaches us to pray not only for eternal blessings (the name, kingdom, will of God), but also for daily blessings—and not for us alone, but for all (**Mt 6:26**).

Prayer with thanksgiving

This petition curbs our greed, diminishes anxiety and leads to thanksgiving. These words also connect us to one another and open our hearts to one another's needs as each one of us learns to pray for “our” daily bread and not “mine” alone (**Ph 4:6; 1Tim 6:8**).

Fifth Petition: “Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us” (Mat 6:12)

This petition leads us to acknowledge our guilt and need for forgiveness, in the recognition that our debt is greater than we can ever hope to pay (**Mt 18:23-35**).

Power in the plural

Christ, who became sin for us, leads us in this prayer. He has won forgiveness for all the world—for *all of us*. Forgiveness is not mine to keep for myself (**2 Cor 5:21; Lk 23:34; Eph 4:32**).

But I just can't forgive...

God can, however, and He puts words of forgiveness for all of “us” into this petition. We struggle to forgive when we see the sins of others apart from our own. In this petition Jesus has us praying against such feelings, based on His death for all (**Rom 5:6-8**).

God wishes “to draw us to himself so that we may humble ourselves before him, lament our misery and plight, and pray for grace and help” (Luther, quoted in TPP, 56).

B.

(Pray Psalm 140 if this is a separate session)

Sin is a constant and evil surrounds us. How will we live in this world?

Sixth Petition: “And lead us not into temptation” (Mt 6:13)

As we pray, “Lead us not into temptation,” we are recalling Satan and his work (**1 Pet 5:8**), for he seeks to tempt us to sin (**Mt 18:7**). Jesus, who was tempted for us, is our strength in temptation (see **Lk 22:40** and **Hb 4:15**).

God tempts no one, but...

This petition can be misunderstood, but **James 1:13** reminds us God does not lead us into sin. Rather, it is true that as Satan is tempting, God is testing—to get us to rely on Him.

Our weakness, God’s strength

We are too weak to withstand the attack, but God isn’t. So we rely on Him to keep us from false belief and despair (**2 Pet 2:1, Mt 27:4-5**).

Seventh Petition: “But deliver us from evil” (Mt 6:13)

“Evil” summarizes the human problem, and the reason we need to pray. Our deliverance comes in Christ and will be total in the resurrection (**Ps 140:1-2, 13; Gal 1:3-4**).

Deliverance from every evil

We have no strength in ourselves against evil (**Rom 7:19; Ps 79:9-13**), but the Lord is faithful in preserving us against every evil of every sort (**2 Th 3:3; Eph 5:15-16**).

Overcoming evil

Consider how God’s goodness overcomes evil (**Rom 12:21**) because Christ—in whom there is no evil—is able to overcome it (**Lk 23:22**). He does so in His atoning death and by the work of the Spirit who keeps us in faith to the end (**Gal 1:4; 2 Tim 4:18**).

Amen! Yes, Yes, it shall be!

We conclude the prayer (“For thine is the kingdom...”) with confidence anchored in faith in God. The “Amen” (which is translated “truly”) says that this prayer is pleasing to God, and reflects the assurance we have regarding everything Jesus teaches and accomplishes for us (e.g., **Mt 18:3**).

“Having said, ‘Deliver us from evil,’ there remains nothing beyond for us to ask for... we stand secure and safe, against all things that the Devil and the world work against us” (Cyprian, quoted in TPP, 61).