

WEEK THREE | PETITION TWO

Your kingdom come... on earth, as it is in heaven.

If we're going to pray "***Your kingdom come,***" we need to understand what Jesus means by kingdom.

HOW JESUS DESCRIBES HIS GOSPEL

Jesus' public ministry began with his proclamation, "*Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near*" (Matthew 4:17).

Jesus is using prophetic language unmistakable to the Jewish ear, signalling that he is the fulfillment of long-awaited promises. But if the kingdom "*has come near*" in Matthew 4, why does Jesus teach us to pray for it to come in Matthew 6?

Let's look at four key words in Matthew 4:17—repent, kingdom, heaven, and near.

Repent

Some of us grew up in the era of fire and brimstone pulpits. The command to "repent" can cause a shudder. But the Greek word is *metanoeo*, which is more invitation than a threat. It means "to change your mind," or "to reconsider." Reconsider what? According to Jesus, everything you thought you knew about reality. Why? Because the kingdom of heaven is near.

Kingdom

A kingdom is a region where a ruler has domain—the place where whatever he or she wants done, gets done. God's kingdom, then, is "the range of his effective will"—the place where what God wants done comes to pass.

God's kingdom is the not visible but very real realm where God reigns. A rule characterized by love, truth, justice, goodness, and wholeness. It's a wonderful place to be. The apostle Paul testifies that "*the kingdom of God is... righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit*" (Romans 14:17).

Heaven

While Jesus often speaks of the "*kingdom of God,*" in Matthew's Gospel we find him emphasizing that this kingdom is also the "*kingdom of heaven.*"

Most of us think of heaven as somewhere "out there," the place where God watches from a distance and we will one day join him.

But for the biblical writers, heaven is close. The "first heavens" is a term used to describe the earth's atmosphere. So when Jesus describe the invisible realm that God inhabits, he lets us know it's not only "out there," but also as near as the atmosphere surrounding our bodies. God's kingdom is so close that "*in him we live and move and have our being*" (Acts 17:28).

Near

When Jesus says that the kingdom has come near, he is announcing the incredible news that God's kingdom is now accessible in a new way. In Jesus' first recorded words in Mark's Gospel, he prefaces this announcement with the dramatic phrase "*The time has come*" (1:15). The implication is that with Jesus's arrival, history has reached a crisis point. Everything has changed. God's kingdom has begun to break into earthly existence like never before. Jesus is now announcing the availability of another kind of life.

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But here's the thing: as real and available as God's kingdom is, there are still, for now, competing kingdoms. In fact, part of what makes us human is the fact that each one of us has a personal kingdom—"a realm," Dallas Willard says, "that is uniquely our own, where our choice determines what happens."¹ We always have the option to align our little kingdoms either with God's kingdom or with the kingdoms of this world.

That's why, with this second petition of the Lord's Prayer, Jesus teaches us to pray for his kingdom to come more fully into our lives, our neighborhoods, our churches, our governments, every corner of our world—until God's reign is as complete in us as it is in heaven. We're asking him to supplant the competing kingdoms that operate in our individual hearts and in our collective systems. And once again, we're asking God to do what only he can do.

There is, of course, a disconnect we sometimes feel between the peace and wholeness of God's kingdom and the discord and death of this world. We live in this Present Evil Age even as we begin to participate in the Age to Come.

So what do we do when we experience this dissonance—when we find ourselves "*groan[ing] inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies*" (Romans 8:23)? According to Jesus, we should pray for the kingdom to come, trusting that God is incorporating our prayers and lives in his ongoing mission to restore and redeem all things.

LIVING INSIDE THE SECOND PETITION

Make a list of the kingdoms you encounter every day.

Some of the kingdoms under your control may include:	Some of the kingdoms out of your control may include:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ your inner thought life;▪ your financial choices;▪ what you eat and drink;▪ your social media use;▪ the running of your household.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ your extended family;▪ the operation of your local, regional, and national governments, systems of education, and justice;▪ the various competing value systems in the wider culture.

As you consider all the kingdoms that overlap with your life (both those under your control and out of your control), do you notice an area for which you are currently carrying a burden? If so, spend some time simply lifting up that area into God's light and love, asking for his kingdom to come.

You may or may not emerge with a clearer sense of how you might participate in God's mission in that area. In any case, time spent asking for the kingdom to come is never wasted.

¹ Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering Our Hidden Life in God* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1998), 21.