

Praying the Lord's Prayer

The disciples saw Jesus at prayer. They asked him to teach them to pray. “Lord, give us a prayer. Give us the words to say as your followers.” And what Jesus gave them was not a long prayer with elaborate words, but a prayer that goes to the heart of what following Christ is about.

This version in Luke is more simple than it is in Matthew. Matthew has more elegant language, and we are used to praying the Matthew version. But the simplicity of Luke is probably closer to the prayer as Jesus taught it.

Father, hallowed be thy name.

Thy kingdom come, thy will be done.

Give us each day our daily bread.

Forgive us our sins,

for we ourselves forgive everyone who sins against us.

And do not bring us to the time of trial.

The closing we use, “for thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory forever” is an ending that was added to prayers – a blessing to God at the close of the prayers, in the same way that we close a prayer with “this we ask in Jesus’ name, Amen.” This blessing to God became connected to the Lord’s Prayer, so it is very old, but it isn’t in the scripture.

This is the bare bones of the Lord’s Prayer. People think that if we say a prayer too often, it is rote and becomes meaningless. Yes, rote and not paying attention, is not meaningful prayer. But when we pray it often with

attention, even when we do it as habit, it is a prayer that roots itself in our daily living, settles into our thought deeper than our consciousness and works within us for our transformation. Praying the Lord's Prayer first thing in the morning is a good way to open the day with God.

Jesus taught us to address God as "Father." Abba. Not a formal term for a distant father, but a close and affectionate family name for Dad or Daddy. This is not a harsh father, but the father who is full of compassion and mercy for his children, a father who runs to embrace the teen who has made a mess of things. The Hebrew word root for compassion, by the way, is *rehem*, which is womb. The Father Jesus is pointing us to is the Father with womblike tenderness toward us.

Jean Venard is known for her teachings on prayer. She says that when there is a broken relationship in her life, she acknowledges that what is unbroken is the relationship she and the other person still have with God. And so she brings the person with whom she must find forgiveness and reconciliation into her prayer. She prays: "Father . . . My Father and the Father of David . . . My Father, and the Father of Sarah My Father, and the Father of my next-door-neighbor . . . "You are Our Father, not only my Father" And so, in her prayer, she brings the people she wants to pray about into the presence of God.

"Hallowed be thy name" This means to sanctify, make holy, set aside from the everyday. The "name of God" means more than the word "God." It means God's nature, God's character, God's being. We keep God's name holy by respecting God in our language, in our thought, in our actions. God

is not a thing we can act upon by bombarding with prayers. God is not an instrument we can use to make our life better. God is not an extension of us, our opinions, our politics, our desires. And so when we pray, “Hallowed be your name” we are praying “May you be honored as sacred and as other than us.”

And the second is an extension of that petition: Thy kingdom come.” “God, establish your sovereignty, your rule, for we long for the day when all humanity will revere you.”

Preaching the kingdom of God was the driving purpose of Jesus’ ministry. When Jesus taught us to pray, he taught us to pray for God’s kingdom to come. This is not a place, of course. The kingdom of God is wherever the rule of God manifests itself. The kingdom comes when there is justice, righteousness, mercy, compassion. The kingdom comes when there is forgiveness and reconciliation, and when hatred or indifference melts into care. We can call it the Kin-dom of God.

So when we pray as Jesus taught us, we ask two things for God: that God be revered, and that God’s rule be extended through all the world. And as we pray, we pray that we ourselves promote that, not hinder it. That I as an individual, and my faith community might in our life together and individually revere God and help to bring forth and reveal the kin-dom of God in our midst and never be a barrier to it by our actions or attitudes.

Then there are three requests for us. That we have sufficient bread for today, that we receive forgiveness, and that we be delivered from a time of trial. These are the things Jesus taught us to ask for.

Bread for today. Will our necessary, basic needs be met today? We pray for that, and not more. But this is not a prayer for individuals. We may pray it individually, but this prayer, whenever we pray it, is a prayer of the church. It is the prayer we are to say as followers of Christ's Way. And that means every time we pray it, we are praying for the community of Christ. And we are praying for the human community of this world.

“Feed all of us the food that we need.” It's not “I” but “we.”

Feed all of us with what we need to live today neither rich nor poor. “Let us not be so rich we would forget you, nor so in want that we would despair and curse you,” says a Jewish prayer. We have complete dependence on God's mercy for our most basic needs.

As much as we need bread, we need forgiveness of our sins. Trespasses and debts are simply other words for sin. We step on God's toes. We trespass into God's space. We overdraw our accounts with God. Trespass and debt. Sin.

We pray for forgiveness. Continual forgiveness. But the necessity of forgiving others is linked with receiving God's forgiveness. Somewhere in scripture it says, “Forgive your neighbor the wrong he has done and then your sins will be pardoned when you pray.”

One who will not forgive cannot receive forgiveness. It's not that we can't be forgiven until we do our share of forgiving and get forgiveness as a reward. Mercy flows through the same channel, whether it is given or received. The ability to forgive and to be forgiven is part of the same gift.

“Do not bring us to a time of trial.” We usually pray this as “Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.” What is the temptation? Chocolate? Sex? Cheating? And how would God lead us into temptation? Why would God put us in temptations way? Wrong meaning. It is the temptation to lose faith. Save us from the time of trial. Loving Father, Dad, please protect us all from anything which will threaten our faith in you. Protect us from physical and spiritual harm. Protect us from any circumstances that might threaten our relationship to you.”

Father, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Give us bread for today. Forgive us our sins, for we forgive those who have sinned against us. Lead us not into a time of trial. Amen.

Gracious God, may what has been spoken and what has been heard be lodged in our hearts and in our living. Amen.

Luke 11:1-4 Full reading for Christ's teaching on prayer and assurances that God hears and answers us is Luke 11:1-13.

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