

Living God's Grace Forgiving as He Forgives Us

The Lord's Prayer is the most underestimated and neglected source of immediate power, strength and blessing that is on offer and available to the Christian today. Its purpose is that a Christian may have close fellowship with God.

I want to lay down some principles and observations about the Lord's Prayer that I hope will grip you and make you want to understand it and personally pray it every day. If you have not been doing this, but start doing it, I am sure you will thank me one day in the future, if we meet, or in heaven. The fact that some pray the "our Father" several times a daily and almost certainly do not concentrate as they utter the words is not a good reason for you not to do it—at least once a day. Once you are convicted to do it and pray it from the heart rather than from your head, you will sense the smile of God as you pray it.

Praying the Lord's Prayer is simply an act of obedience. Jesus clearly and explicitly said that when we pray, this is what we are to say. This does not mean that this is what we pray each and every time we pray; it is both a pattern prayer and a prayer to be prayed—publicly and privately.

The more I pray the Lord's Prayer, the more astounded I am at its contents. It is utterly extraordinary and amazing. It's the perfect prayer. In fact, implicitly it covers every need we could possibly have. Some object to embracing it because it does not include the words, "In Jesus' name, Amen". I reply: The moment we say, "Our Father," we pray in Jesus' name—then and there. For we could not call God "our Father" if Jesus had not given access to the Father. Saying "our Father" and "in Jesus' name" are virtually synonymous.

Consider this irony of ironies (at least in my case): I learned the Lord's Prayer in public school but not my church or home. I was brought up in a spiritual church. I was brought up in a godly home. But I learned the Lord's Prayer in my school in Ashland, Kentucky. To add to the irony: Praying the Lord's Prayer is not allowed in school today.

I cannot recall a single time we prayed the Lord's Prayer in my old church. Perhaps it was because we were not a liturgical church. Perhaps it was because we were biased against it because the more formal churches prayed it in every service. I cannot explain it. But I have to say it was manifestly wrong that we did not pray it in our church or our home. We prayed the Lord's Prayer every Sunday at Westminster Chapel for 25 years. I'm glad our children were very familiar with it.

These things said, I would urge all who read these lines to look carefully at the Lord's Prayer as well as at my book, *The Lord's Prayer*, where I am able to go into greater detail. But I also urge you to pray the Lord's Prayer regularly. Daily. Seven days a week. Louise and I have prayed the Lord's prayer daily for years and years and years. It is not only good for our marriage; it is good for our walk with the Lord.

Jesus' Prayer

Never forget that Jesus Himself is the architect of this prayer, composing every word and every line. The title "the Lord's Prayer" means it is Jesus' suggested prayer for you and me. It is mentioned twice in the New Testament, once when Jesus' disciples said, "Lord, teach us to pray" (Luke 11:1-14).

The other is when Jesus made it part of his Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 6:9-13). The context for the Lord's Prayer in the Sermon on the Mount is Jesus' caution not to perform our righteousness before men—regarding giving, praying and fasting. Noting that we are not heard for our much speaking,

He gives us the prayer that refers to quality of our words, not quantity.

According to 1 John 5:14, we are heard in heaven when we pray in the will of God. The implication is that if we do not pray in God's will, we are not heard.

There are three times when we can be sure we are praying in the will of God: First, when we pray in the Spirit, because when we pray in the Spirit, we pray in God's will (Rom. 8:26-27). Second, when we ask for wisdom. God delights to grant wisdom and tells us to ask Him when we don't know the next step forward (James 1:2-5). Third, when we pray the Lord's Prayer, the one Jesus Himself told us to pray.

Pattern Prayer

For someone who wants to know how to pray, Jesus gives us an appropriate *order*. For example, the first hint about talking to the true God is that we show proper respect for Him; we don't rush in with requests but recognize to whom we are speaking. We are talking to our Creator. Our Redeemer. To Almighty God, than whom no greater can be conceived. And we are told to call Him Father.

This does not mean we cannot address Him as God, Lord, Jesus or Holy Spirit. But Jesus Himself called Him Father, and speaking generally, so should we.

There are six petitions (seven if we want to be technical). The first three are God's prayer requests; the second three are His suggestions about how we should pray for ourselves.

"Hallowed be Your name." The first thing God tells us to do is worship. We must not rush into the presence of God Almighty with a feeling of entitlement. We pause to recognize that He is holy. It is also an implicit request that all the world will affirm God as holy. We actually pray that He will be famous. The Beatles once said they were more famous than

Jesus. It should be every Christian's deepest desire to make God—the true God—popular and famous, that His name be honored.

“Your kingdom come.” God's second prayer request is that we pray for the coming of His kingdom. This immediately invites the Holy Spirit to come afresh into our hearts. We learn from the Sermon on the Mount that the kingdom of God is the rule of the ungrieved Spirit. It is a request that He become the true Lord of our lives, that we will experience being changed from glory to glory. But there is more; it is also a request for the Second Coming to happen now!

“Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.” God's third prayer request is that His will be done in our hearts as it is in heaven; that is, what is in God's mind or heart may be carried out perfectly in our lives. We pray to be obedient. This reminds us of the important truth that God has a will of His own. We must remember this word: There is no rebellion in heaven. The angels don't rebel. The sainted dead don't rebel.

Likewise, we pray in the Lord's Prayer that we will carry out God's will in our lives with utter acquiescence and obedience. Beware of the view that says since there is no sickness in heaven, we should pray there would be no sickness on earth. That notion is a diversion from the purpose of the Lord's Prayer; it is heretical teaching. After all, there is no death in heaven either. The purpose of this petition is for our sanctification, not healing.

“Give us today our daily bread.” This petition puts physical needs before spiritual needs. This is surprising for some. Indeed, some say this refers to our spiritual daily bread. One difference between the church fathers and the reformers was on this topic. Augustine said it referred to spiritual food; Luther and Calvin said it refers to physical food and needs.

Jesus knows that we must eat in order to live. We should pray for our physical needs—the essentials: good health, good

sleep, balanced emotions, even financial needs. It is hard to deal with our spiritual situation when we are hurting physically, emotionally and financially. William Booth, the co-founder of the Salvation Army, taught that it is hard to witness to a person with an empty stomach.

“Forgive us our debts [or sins or trespasses] as we also have forgiven our debtors.” This fifth petition deals with our spiritual state. The Lord’s Prayer is not a prayer for salvation. Only a Christian can rightfully pray this prayer. The one who can pray to God as the Father is the one who recognizes His Son. God the Creator becomes our Savior the moment we accept His Son as the Father’s one and only Son. This petition is also essential to our fellowship with God. We pray for forgiveness day by day because we want to have continual fellowship with the Father.

This petition also shows that the Lord knows we will sin. I was brought up with a theological background that said I must never, ever sin or I would forfeit my salvation. I used to wonder why, if we must never sin, this petition is in the Lord’s Prayer at all. John said if we say we have no sin—or have not sinned—we are deceived (1 John 1:8-9).

This is also why the petition continues: “as we forgive our debtors [those who have sinned or trespassed against us.” But do we? This petition has made more people liars than any document in history! But don’t blame God; we must blame ourselves. In a word: This petition is what allows us to have a close relationship with Him.

“Lead us not into temptation.” This sixth petition, which goes with the seventh, is difficult to understand. It might imply that God otherwise actually leads people into temptation. No! God never—ever—tempts us to sin (James 1:13-14). But He does govern our lives, and the request that we should put to God daily is that He will not lead us into a situation wherein we are tempted. The stress is on into temptation, that God will

rule and govern our lives in a manner that we are not thrown in at the deep end, namely, being tested or tried.

God “tested” Abraham (Gen. 22:1). I pray every day that God will not put me to the test. I prefer to be spared of a difficult ordeal. That said, if we “fall” into testing, we should count it “joy” (James 1:2). Why? God knows we are up to it and that it will result in blessing. We don’t go looking for testing but accept it with joy should it come.

If God allows you to fall into testing, consider it a compliment from Him. As one saintly old woman put it, “I have served the Lord for so long that I can hardly tell the difference between a blessing and a trial.”

“But deliver us from the evil one.” This could either be regarded as the seventh petition or as part of the sixth. We should pray for daily grace to escape the snare of the evil one, Satan. The Greek words *tou ponero* are translated “the evil one” in many modern versions (NIV, CSB and as a footnote in the ESV). This is put in the Lord’s Prayer that we may know there is such a thing as evil generally and the architect of evil is the devil. He is our enemy—our perpetual enemy—and Jesus does not want us to be unaware of this. Paul said we wrestle not against flesh and blood but against supernatural evil (Eph. 6:12 and following).

“For Yours is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever, amen.” Because some early manuscripts do not include this final doxology, there is a question about whether it is part of Jesus’ original words. My answer: It certainly does no harm to pray it!

Jesus’ Postscript

I have one more thing to say—because Jesus had one more thing to say immediately after He introduced this prayer in the Sermon on the Mount. Indeed, He implies that the main reason for the prayer is to focus on an essential teaching of the

Sermon on the Mount: forgiving your enemy.

You will recall that we say in the prayer that we pray for forgiveness of our sins while also claiming to having forgiven those who trespassed against us. It is a major claim. A huge claim, which is why Jesus returns to this part of the prayer. Immediately after He concludes the Lord's Prayer, He goes back to a particular teaching: "For if you forgive others their offenses, your heavenly Father will forgive you as well. But if you don't forgive others, your Father will not forgive your offenses" (Matt.6:14-15, CSB).

Remember, this is not a prayer for salvation. Or proof of being saved. Or referring to losing your salvation. It is talking about losing intimacy with the Holy Spirit.

The purpose of the Lord's Prayer is to experience the ungrieved Spirit with unbroken continuity. Otherwise, who would ever be saved? It is a prayer regarding the hardest of all issues—namely, that we will indeed *totally forgive* those who have hurt us, maligned us, lied about us, rejected us, abused us, betrayed us or spoke against us.

The truth is, we all have a story to tell. We all have had people do us wrong. No exceptions. Our task is to forgive them rather than point the finger at them, expose them or try to get even with them. We must *pray for them—and mean it!* The guaranteed result: a deep sense of God.

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