

All the Prayers of God's People

Welcome to Week 3 of our Prayer teachings! Jesus teaches the disciples in the gospels of Matthew (6) and Luke (11) how to pray by utilizing a written prayer called the Lord's prayer. It begins by saying, "Pray then in this way" as our basic instructions, which means that we are invited into prayer specifically and repetitively. That's good news for a few reasons.

Sometimes when we know we need to pray, we find ourselves instead distracted by things in our world, our minds, our business, or our lives and we do not know how to slow down. The Lord's Prayer helps us to stop in a methodical and ritualistic way to talk with God. This is good as we need this time to build our relationship, regularly (even when we don't have time, energy or desire). It's an "easy" way to pray to God and lift up our hearts for reformation.

It's also good news because the Lord's prayer incorporates all the aspects of prayer that our five fingered prayers have covered so far and then some! The Lord's prayer incorporates all of our personal, spiritual and emotional needs in other words. This means that when we pray this prayer, we are called to reflection and will find that God hears and meets our needs.

Many of you have learned this prayer and likely heard many a sermon given on the Lord's prayer. This article will strive to cover just the basics to begin with. Let's break it down.

The prayer begins with the familiar words: Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. This line represents our praise to God, humbly coming before God who sees our very depth and needs. We praise God in all things good and bad and in doing so, the focus is on God and not ourselves.

The second line is: Thy kingdom come; thy will be done. This line represents giving up our controllability for things that are uncontrollable to our human hands. We greet God in this line by acknowledging that while we are not in control, there is great comfort in resting in the **Omnipotence** (**God** is all-powerful), the **Omniscience** (**God** is all-knowing), and the **Omnipresence** (**God** is everywhere at the same time) of God in our lives. Especially during a pandemic, this seems very important to our prayer lives!

The third phrase is: On earth as it is in heaven. This line represents a hope for the future and trust that the life, death and resurrection of Christ for us is real as followers. While we are not Christians *because* we will receive this life everlasting, part of the great joy of faith is that God is in the midst of life here on earth AND life beyond the grave. This is the ultimate grace that we experience and rejoice in each resurrection Sunday (which is every Sunday)!

The next phrase is: Give us this day our daily bread. This simple phrase reminds us to be thankful for the gifts of life. Often in moments of despair (or pandemic), we forget to recognize the many ways God is present or providing. This phrase reminds us of all Christ has and is doing.

The next phrase may be the most challenging and again takes us to our finger prayers: forgive us our trespasses/debts/sins, as we forgive those who trespass against us/debtors/sin against

us. Why the different words? The word debt comes from a translation of Matthew, the word sins comes from Luke, and trespasses is the Catholic interpretation of the overall perspective of what it means to be a sinner (patheos.com). The Greek word most commonly used means sins or debts which is why Presbyterians prefer to say debts. The Greek ties into the Old testament concept of clearing financial debts which were forgiven during the year of Jubilee. The Greek word also means forgiving our “fatal flaws” or ways we sin against God. For us, no matter which word we choose, this is a moment and opportunity of sincere recognition that all of us fall short of the glory of God. Not only are we called to ask God to forgive our mistakes, but we also are called to forgive ourselves and forgive those who hurt us. In this line, we are working to restore relationships in whatever way possible as Christ does in the ultimate reconciliation on the cross.

Next is the phrase: And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil. This is a line that is not specifically covered in the five finger prayers but in truth may be one of the most important lines we express. Each day there are choices before us as followers of Christ. Many times we choose one path only to discover that perhaps it is not where we should have strayed. This line acknowledges that God is in the midst of all of our journeys (wayward and straight and narrow). Here we pray for the Lord to guide us (and our decisions) so that they would be pleasing and connecting instead of giving way to things that will tear us, the church, and our personal relationships away from God. This does also cover our prayers for others, our leaders, our government as well as they seek wisdom in the ways they should go!

And finally, the Doxology or closing states: For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, for ever and ever. While there is debate if the doxology is original to the Biblical text, these last words summarize and turn us back to God. While we are invited to pray for personal needs, guidance, wisdom, etc. earlier in this prayer, in this phrase we re-acknowledge that God’s kingdom is greater than our will. In this expression, we honor God and return to God in our lives, a perfect summary of our cries during prayer.

The very final statement of this prayer is the word: Amen. This by definition means, ‘truly’ or ‘it is so’. Amen is our testament that God will hear and answer these words.

So next time we sit down and pray “The Lord’s Prayer”, we are invited to consider each line as we go, slowly. Even write it down or look at it in the Scriptures so that you can take your time reflecting on what comes to mind in each situation. What are you thankful for, how do you need to forgive, what ways do you see God’s wisdom is needed, etc.? We may just find during this pandemic especially, that these familiar words (which we often say quickly and in passing) touch on some deep places of joy, gratitude, pain and heartfelt needs in our lives. Let us pray.

Our Father, who art in heaven, Hallowed be thy Name.

Thy Kingdom come. Thy will be done on 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, The power, and the glory, For ever and ever. Amen.