

How to pray? The Lord's Prayer

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He asked me how to pray. He was struggling with addiction to alcohol and perhaps drugs as well.

The Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6:9-13) is probably one of the best known and most frequently used Christian prayers. It was Jesus' response to his disciples' request to teach them how to pray. It is the manner of praying as well as the ideas themselves which uplift, inspire, heal and save us.

This prayer begins with the affirmation of our direct relationship to God, "Our Father which art in heaven." God is our Father, not a remote power or being. By beginning prayer with an acknowledgement of God as our creator or Father, we are establishing that we are His children, no merely the children of men.

"Hallowed be Thy name." Then Jesus adds praise of God. Praising God helps break the human tendency to focus on the problem instead of God, the solution. Honoring God, expressing genuine gratitude for His goodness uplifts our thought. Like taking an airplane ride, praise lifts our thought above the clouds and enables us to see the clear skies and sunshine of spiritual inspiration.

"Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven." I love this nowness of this prayer. God's government and rule is not some future time and place but right here and now. God's kingdom is come. His will is done in earth right now, today, just as it governs heaven.

This was Jesus' primary message. He began his healing and saving ministry with the worlds, "Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." (Matthew 4:17) Or as the J.B. Phillips translation puts it, "You must change your hearts for the kingdom of heaven has arrived." No procrastinating obedience to God's government until later. God governs now.

The implications of using the word kingdom with God's government was better understood two thousand years ago. A king had absolute,

unquestionable power. When he commanded, his orders were obeyed. His word was law. So Jesus was instructing his disciples that God's word is law right now on earth. What a revolutionary statement when they appeared to be governed by a foreign power and dominated by a pantheistic religion given to emperor worship. Despite human appearances to the contrary, Jesus was telling them to pray to understand that they live under God's kingdom and that His Word rules. How helpful this is in praying about current governmental situations at home and abroad.

“Give us this day our daily bread.” Mrs. Eddy gives a spiritual interpretation of this verse in Science and Health as “Give us grace for today; feed the famished affections.” Such gentleness is conveyed by considering grace as what meets the human need. We do not need some other substance or material thing to sustain us. It is grace and a feeling of God's loving presence while fills the emptiness and feeds the hungry soul.

“And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.” This concept is so important that Jesus repeated it. (Matthew 6:14,15) It is the first verse which indicates that man has a role to play and a responsibility. It is our responsibility to not hold mistakes against someone forever. As we pray to be forgiven our mistakes, so we should be willing to love others enough to forgive them. Love is the essence of forgiveness. It warms the cold heart, softens anger, soothes hurt feelings. It is so important to our own salvation that we not harbor a cold heart, anger, or resentment. Such emotions harm us more than others. As we love and forgive others, we will not be so hard on ourselves. This opens our heart to God. His forgiveness brings reformation of character.

The final verse of Jesus' original prayer concludes, “And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil” which is better translated “the evil one”. While we affirm God's power and authority, His provision for us, His loving-kindness to uplift us beyond transgressions, yet Jesus tells us to specifically be alert to whatever would distract us from doing and being good. It is not God who tempts us. “Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man: But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed.” (James 1:13,14) This daily prayer would help us to reject self-justification and selfishness as temptations. Sincerely praying this verse would help us avoid many an unpleasant detour in our life.

“For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.”
While this line was apparently added by a later copyist, it certainly ends the prayer with praise of God as Supreme and omnipotent.

This most fundamental of prayers which we teach our children as well as rely on ourselves can meet every human need. As you deeply consider each line of this prayer, fresh insights and applications to your life are sure to unfold. It is as if Jesus is speaking directly to us, teaching us how to pray effectively to the one infinite, all-powerful God.

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