

The Lord's Prayer

Prayer was very important in the life of Jesus, and the disciples noticed how highly Jesus valued the experience. So, they asked him, “*Lord, teach us to pray ...*” (*Luke 11:1*). In reply Jesus gave the widely known and well-loved prayer known to this day as ‘The Lord’s Prayer’.

The prayer can be used as a model on which to base our own prayers, or it can be simply repeated, and we can think about each clause. In either case, the experience can be very uplifting.

The prayer (opposite), has a clear and simple structure. Notice that the prayer has three sections and that each section has three clauses.

The first section concerns God Himself – His name, His kingdom, and His will. The second section presents our own petitions – for our daily food, for forgiveness and for God’s care. Finally, the prayer returns to God, acknowledging that everything belongs to Him.

God First

The prayer opens by addressing God as “*Our Father*”. The first occasion in the Bible in which God is presented as a ‘Father’ refers to Him as a Father to the emerging nation of Israel and is found where Moses is commanded to approach Pharaoh and say:

Thus says the LORD: Israel is My son, My firstborn (Exodus 4:22).

The concept of God as a ‘Father’ therefore is associated with the ideas of belonging and of freedom. God set

**Our Father in heaven,
Hallowed be Your name.
Your kingdom come.
Your 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 do not lead us into
temptation, but deliver
us from the evil one.**

**For Yours is the
kingdom and the power
and the glory forever.**

Amen.

Matthew 6:9–13

the Israelites free from cruel slavery in Egypt; God offers to set us free from the cruel slavery to temptation, sin and death.

Let us consider the first section:

Hallowed be Your name. If we love God, we will respect His name because God cannot be separated from His

name. God's name must, therefore be hallowed, treated as holy or sanctified.

Your kingdom come. Every follower of Jesus longs for the coming again of Jesus and for the Kingdom of God. The prophet Isaiah urges us to:

"... give Him no rest till He establishes and till He makes Jerusalem a praise in the earth (Isaiah 62:7).

Your will be done. In Gethsemane, shortly before his death, Jesus prayed three times that his Father's will, not his own, be done. He went to the cross because that is what God asked of him. It is important that we do not repeat these words carelessly. We have to really want God's will to be carried out in our lives.

Us Afterwards

In the second section we present our requests:

Give us this day our daily bread. Jesus suggests that we should pray for each day as it comes – 'this day'. Elsewhere, Jesus teaches, *"Do not worry about tomorrow ... Sufficient for the day is its own trouble"* (Matthew 6:34).

Forgive us as we forgive. In Matthew chapter 18, Jesus told a parable about someone who had been excused an enormous debt but who could not find it in his heart to excuse a colleague a very small debt; he was condemned. Equally, if we cannot forgive others who wrong us in any way, God will not forgive us our faults. Jesus gave the stern warning:

So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does

not forgive his brother his trespasses (Matthew 18:35).

Do not lead us into temptation. It will be easier to understand these words if we consider an example. Peter was a strong, brave man but he was also self-confident. He said to Jesus:

Lord, I am ready to go with you, both to prison and to death (Luke 22:33).

Later, when they came to the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus urged his disciples, *"Pray that you may not enter into temptation"* (v40). But the disciples did not see any special danger and they did not pray.

After the arrest of Jesus, Peter followed him into the place of his trial and there were servants in the courtyard. It was a cold night and a fire had been lit. Peter approached the fire but that brought him among company. He was noticed:



Now Peter sat outside in the courtyard. And a servant girl came to him, saying, "You also were with Jesus of Galilee" (Matthew 26:69).

All eyes turned on Peter and he blurted out, *"I do not know what you are saying"* (v70) and then *"I do not know the man"* (v72). In fact, three

times, Peter denied any knowledge of Jesus. His courage, his bravery and above all his sword were completely useless now. If a soldier had challenged him he would have responded bravely, but a servant girl had mocked him and he fell.

If it had been a warm night Peter would have stayed away from the fire and he would not have been noticed. But it was a cold night and so Peter's weakness was exposed – and he learned not to trust in himself. If we are aware of our own weaknesses we will remember the words of the prayer, “Do not lead us into temptation”.

Closing Praise

The final section of the prayer is not found in many modern translations of the Bible and nor is it thought to have been in the original text. It was maybe added during the very early years of Christianity for use in the churches.

Nevertheless it is good that we remember that the kingdom, the power and the glory all belong to God. It is also worth knowing that the words do have a Bible basis from a prayer of David in the Old Testament.

Yours, O LORD, is the greatness, the power and the glory, the victory and the majesty; for all that is in heaven and in earth is Yours; Yours is the kingdom, O LORD, and You are exalted as head over all (1 Chronicles 29:11).

Following a Pattern

Notice how short the prayer is. If we try to say long prayers our minds are likely to wander. A short prayer will be more enlightening and uplifting.

In the Old Testament there is an example of a man who prayed passion-



ately, and his prayer followed the same pattern as ‘The Lord’s Prayer’. Good King Hezekiah had received and ultimatum from the proud Assyrian king. Hezekiah took the ultimatum into the Temple, and there he unrolled it and prayed to God.

O LORD God of Israel, the One who dwells between the cherubim, You are God, You alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth. You have made heaven and earth. Incline Your ear, O LORD, and hear; open Your eyes, O LORD, and see; and hear the words of Sennacherib, which he has sent to reproach the living God. Truly, LORD, the kings of Assyria have laid waste the nations and their lands, and have cast their gods into the fire; for they were not gods, but the work of men’s hands—wood and stone. Therefore they destroyed them. Now therefore, O LORD our God, I pray, save us from his hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that You are the LORD God, You alone (2 Kings 19:15–19).

He began his prayer by acknowledging God’s greatness. Then he asked God to deal with the problem and then

he ended his prayer by asking that God's sovereign will should be fulfilled.

Hezekiah's prayer was heard, and Jerusalem was miraculously saved. The lesson for us is to note how concise Hezekiah's prayer was and that he prayed about just one problem.

The wise man of Ecclesiastes advises us to remember,

God is in heaven and you are on earth, therefore let your words be few (Ecclesiastes 5:2).

Keep Praying

Jesus taught more about prayer:

Then he spoke a parable to them, that men always ought to pray and not lose heart (Luke 18:1).

The parable that followed concerned a widow who repeatedly asked a judge to help her. At first, he was reluctant but finally he gave the help that the widow needed. The lesson? We should pray tirelessly and ceaselessly. If we neglect prayer we will become spiritually tired and our faith will become weak.

In the same chapter is the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector. The Pharisee prayed telling God what a good man he was, but the tax gatherer prayed humbly, saying, "God, be merciful to me a sinner!" (v13). The Pharisee had prayed to himself, not to God. But the tax gatherer's prayer was heard, and he went away with his sin forgiven.

May God bless our efforts to pray.

David Budden

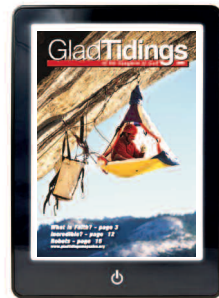
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