

RENEWING YOUR SPIRITUAL LIFE

Lessons of the Lord's Prayer



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 also have forgiven our debtors;
And lead us not into temptation,
But deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever.* Amen.
*(*Final sentence has origins in ancient tradition.)*

Matthew 6:9-13
(compare Luke 11:2-4)

Scripture:

Matthew 6

And When You Pray...

2. "So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full.
3. But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing,
4. so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.
5. "And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full.
6. But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

Matthew 24: 3-14

He Who Stands Firm Will Be Saved

3. "As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately. "Tell us," they said, "when will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?"
4. "Jesus answered: "Watch out that no one deceives you.
5. For many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am the Christ,' and will deceive many.
6. ... Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom
7. ... you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me.
8. At that time many will turn away from faith and will betray and hate each other,
9. and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people.
10. Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold,
11. but he who stands firm to the end will be saved.
12. And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come."

CONSTANTINE PREPARES FOR BATTLE

In the year 312 AD, before entering the battle at Milvian Bridge, just north of Rome, the Roman emperor Flavius Valerius Constantinus had a vision of the Chi-Rho cross. The vision called him to renounce the Roman religion, and adopt Christianity as his religion and the religion of his people, if he were to be successful in battle. He told his soldiers to inscribe the Chi-Rho on his standard and on the shields of his soldiers. Constantine won the battle, which proved to be the decisive victory over his dangerous rival, Maxentius.

**A year later, Constantine issued
an edict granting freedom of religion
within his empire.
In 324, he became the first Roman sovereign
to formally adopt Christianity,
the nearly three hundred-year-old faith.**

THREE MONUMENTS

Together with his mother, Queen Helena, Constantine built three glorious monuments to Jesus in the Holy Land.

- One was the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, at the site where Jesus was crucified.
- The second sanctuary was the Nativity Church in Bethlehem over the cave where Jesus was born.
- And above the Mount of Olives grotto in which Jesus prophesied the destruction of Jerusalem and the end of the world, Constantine ordered construction of the third magnificent basilica. Called either the Church of the Disciples or the Church of Eleona (Mount of Olives, in Greek), it was destroyed by the Persians in 614. Then, hundreds of years later, the crusaders erected a chapel on the site of Eleona and called it Pater Noster which means “the Lord's Prayer.”

COMMEMORATING AN EVENT, NOT A PLACE

This site commemorated the place, but more likely the event, in which Jesus taught the Lord's Prayer to the disciples.

The Gospels' account provides almost no information on the location of Jesus' teaching of the Lord's Prayer. (The third-century Acts of John chapter 97 – a canonical New Testament source - mentions the existence of a cave on the Mount of Olives associated with the teaching of Jesus, but not specifically the Lord's Prayer.)

When the site for the veneration of Christ's ascension was moved up the hill, a cave which had marked the traditional place of Christ's ascension on the Mount of Olives became associated exclusively with Jesus' teachings on the conflict between good and evil. (Matthew 24:1-26:2)

Like many buildings in Jerusalem, the Constantinian Church suffered destruction by the Persians in 614. The memory of Jesus' teaching remained associated with this site, but the content of that teaching shifted from good and evil to the “Our Father” prayer. This new identification was based on a clever harmonization of Luke 10:38-11:4 with Mark 11:12-25 (the withered fig tree).

When the Crusaders arrived, the site was associated specifically with the Lord's Prayer. They constructed a small oratory amidst the ruins in 1106, and a church was rebuilt in 1152, thanks to the funds of the Bishop of Denmark, who was buried in it with his butler. Twelfth-century pilgrims mention seeing marble plaques with the Lord's Prayer inscribed in Hebrew and Greek at the church. Excavations have uncovered an inscribed Latin version. There are now one hundred forty versions of the Lord's Prayer on the walls that line the porticos of the Pater Nostra.

OUR HOLIEST PRAYER

This is the prayer Jesus taught the disciples. To many believers, it contains the essence of all possible prayer. Since the very birth of the Christian religion, millions of people, Protestants and Catholics alike, have prayed the “Our Father.” By now you'd think people would understand this prayer very well.

Maybe yes, maybe no.

Jesus used this prayer as a teaching model. The most important thing about this prayer is not the words themselves, but what it teaches about the attitude with which we approach God.

THE LORD'S PRAYER TEACHES US THREE THINGS

- First, prayer is to be **brief and real**. The effectiveness of our prayers has nothing to do with their length or their so-called "spirituality." We find very little in this prayer Jesus gives us that could be considered "spiritual." This simple prayer deals with the very basics of your life and mine, with reality and sincerity.
- Second, Jesus emphasized **persistence**. When this prayer is given in the Gospel of Luke, it is accompanied by the story of the man who was awakened by his friend's knock. At first, the man is reluctant to respond. We need to remember here that a parable teaches only one lesson. The lesson of this parable is to be persistent in prayer. Jesus is telling us to approach God boldly as we would a neighbor who asks repeatedly without giving up. God will reward our perseverance.
- Third, Jesus told us to pray **expectantly**. We are to expect answers and miracles because of the nature of the One to whom we pray.

**No one can pray the Lord's Prayer
and use the little word "I,"
which is often prominent in the prayers that
people offer to God.
The Lord's Prayer is about "us" –
our community, and our world,
and how we can get along together in it.**

A MODEL NOT A RECIPE

Jesus would never have taught the disciples this prayer if they hadn't asked him to. It was never Jesus' intention to teach a rote prayer. He was not indicating that they should use these exact words whenever they prayed. He was suggesting a pattern. The Lord's Prayer is an idea, not a blueprint.

Make your own prayers just as real, just as perseverant and just as expectant.

THE LORD'S PRAYER CONSISTS OF THREE SECTIONS. THESE SECTIONS INCLUDE SEVEN PETITIONS.

- The first section of the prayer ponders **the Kingdom of God**. In our kingdoms, people make mistakes. People have needs for nourishment. They hurt each other. In the Kingdom of God, people are forgiven, they are nourished, and they do not hurt each other.
- The second portion deals with **human needs**. The need is not only for bread, for all the physical elements that sustain life. Most of us want to do far more than sustain life. We want to sustain all the amenities, luxuries, and status we can acquire. Jesus' prayer deals just with the need, and not the wants.
- The third section acknowledges that of all our needs, the need for **forgiveness** is greatest. The formula is simple. We are forgiven by the same measure that we forgive others. It's the Golden Rule in the form of a prayer.

So, we have three sections:

- **a section about the kingdom,**
- **a section about human needs,**
- **a section about forgiveness.**

THE LORD'S PRAYER IN CHRISTIAN LITURATURE

The Lord's prayer has formed a favorite topic of meditation and commentary for the great theologians and lay people of history. I found some references to the Lord's Prayer in some of the great writers of Christian history. Here are some highlights.

Our Father who art in heaven. "First my mind must become detached from anything subject to flux and change, and tranquilly rest in motionless spiritual repose, so as to be rendered akin to Him who is perfectly unchangeable, and then it may address Him by this most familiar name and say: Father. What spirit a person must have to say this word - what confidence, what purity of conscience ... to call this Being his Father!"

**Gregory of Nyssa, (c. 335-c. 395)
"The Lord's Prayer"**

"When we say: **Hallowed be thy name**, we ask that it should be made holy in us, who are in Him, and at the same time in all others, on whom the grace of God is still waiting, that we may obey this precept also, by praying for all, even for our enemies." **Tertullian (c. 160-c. 220)**

Concerning Prayer

Thy kingdom come. "There is energy, drive, purpose in those words; an intensity of desire for the coming of perfection into life. Not the limp resignation that lies devoutly in the road and waits for the steam roller; but a total concentration on the total interests of God, which must be expressed in action. It is useless to utter fervent petitions for that Kingdom to be established and that Will be done, unless we are willing to do something about it ourselves."

**Evelyn Underhill
*The Spiritual Life***

Thy will be done. "It is to the will of God that we surrender our wills... The only true and perfect will is the one that has been merged with the will of God, so that the person has no will of his own.

"Indeed, one step taken in surrender to God is better than a journey across the *ocean* without it"

Meister Eckhart (c. 1260-c. 1327)

The Talks of Instruction

On earth as it is in heaven. "He commands the prayer because He wishes that everything on earth, that is, the baser things and those allied with earthly things, should be made like the nobler things and those that have their commonwealth in heaven..."

"... with the result that there will no longer be any earth, but all will become heaven."

Origen (c. 185-c. 254)

On Prayer

Give us this day our daily bread. "There is a transcendent energy whose source is in heaven, and this flows into us as soon as we wish for it. It is *a real* energy; it performs actions through the agency of our souls and of our bodies. We should ask for this food."

Simone Weil

"Concerning the Our Father"

And forgive us our debts. “We must pray for daily pardon, as duly as we pray for daily bread. Our sins are our debts; there is a debt of duty, which, as creatures, we owe to our Creator. We run in debt continually. We receive our being and all we possess from God.”

Matthew Henry and Thomas Scott
Commentary on the Holy Bible

As we also have forgiven our debtors. “Notice that Jesus does *not* say, 'As we SHALL forgive our debtors.' Consequently, we are to understand that whoever requests so great a favor, and who has previously surrendered his will entirely into the hands of God, must first have forgiven his debtors. That is why our Savior says, 'As we also have forgiven our debtors.' Whoever has said sincerely, 'Thy will be done' must, first, have actually forgiven his debtors, or at least have firmly resolved to do so And *after* all, what really have we to forgive? Not actual wrongs, but only mere trifles that amount to nothing!”

Teresa of Avila (1515-1582)
The Pater Noster of Saint Teresa

And lead us not into temptation, But deliver us from evil. “In this life there is temptation, in this life the sailing is dangerous, in this life something is always seeping through the chinks of our frailties, which has to be bailed out. Here on earth, then, is the place to pray for daily bread, to pray for forgiveness of our trespasses, to pray that we may not be led into temptation, for in the life to come temptation gains no entrance.”

Augustine of Hippo (354-430)
"The Lord's Prayer Explained
to the Candidates for Baptism"

For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory, forever. Amen. "The phrase was almost certainly not in the original prayer ... But we may be glad for the addition; it is a final note of the trumpets The word *amen* is trust, assurance and affirmation that God can bring great things to pass: 'So let it be!' By proper instinct the church added a doxology and an *amen* to the Lord's Prayer."

George A. Buttrick
The Interpreter's Bible

GOD'S INVITATION TO PRAYER:

**“I want you to forget a lot of things.
Forget what was making you crazy.
Forget the worry and the fretting because
you know I'm in control.
But there's one thing I pray you never forget.
Please, don't forget to talk to Me - OFTEN!
I love YOU!**

**I want to hear your voice.
I want you to include Me in on
the things going on in your life.
I want to hear you talk about
your friends and family.
Prayer is simply you having
a conversation with Me.
I want to be your dearest friend.”**



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