

Prayer

How do we pray? And what is prayer anyway? I don't know how many books have been written about prayer. I looked in my book cases and I have accumulated about 55 books on prayer specifically over time. Some containing prayers to be used in public or private worship, some about prayer and how to pray.

But I do not have books about how to be a child with my parents. Somehow I knew what to ask and how to ask for it. "Mum, I am hungry, when's dinner?" "Dad, can you help me with my homework, please?" "Mum, can I go to this party, please?" "Dad, I am meeting with friends to go the cinema, can I use your car please?" "Mum, I would like to have a .. [name a desire: bike, computer, xbox] ... for my birthday please!

And cunningly enough we often knew if the answer was yes or no before we asked the question! From: "Yes, of course" to "Money does not grow on trees you know!".

And sometimes we did not know what to ask for, or even that we needed help. If we had a problem at school or with a friend that was bothering us. Sometimes we could just ask by

sitting with them and because something was bothering us, they would ask us: “What’s the matter?” At least I hope and pray that your relationship with Mum or Dad was that way.

But whatever my relationship with my Dad or Mum was, I did not get to read books to tell me how I should ask for help from them. I just did it, because they were my Mum and my Dad. I had a relationship with him.

And it is in this simple but profound form of relationship with God the Father that the Lord’s Prayer is given to us.

Placement of The Lord’s Prayer

The disciples wanted to know how to pray. John the Baptist apparently had taught his disciples how to pray, and they wanted to have the same teaching. And as they see Jesus praying they wanted to know the same thing. So they asked him and he gave them this simple prayer to pray. And this prayer has sustained countless Christians over the ages in their lives!

The Lord’s prayer

Let’s look at each of the parts of the Lord’s prayer, but for each element I am adding a bit of silence so that we can all pray that phrase of the prayer:

<p>(Our) Father (in heaven)</p>	<p>You remember the relationship? Who is God for you? Is he your Father? When you pray, come into his presence and approach him. Open your heart for the relationship that you have with him. <i>“Father” <silence and prayer></i></p>
<p>Hallowed be your name</p>	<p>Even though he is our Father he is also our God. We recognise who he is: That unlike us he is holy. We recognise his greatness, his majesty, his glory and his power. As we approach him we also bow down in front of him, and acknowledge to him who he is. <i>“Hallowed be your name” <silence and prayer></i></p>
<p>Your kingdom come (May your will be done on earth as it is in heaven)</p>	<p>Our first actual question! But not one for just ourselves, but for the whole of creation. We recognise that God is King, but also that world has yet to accept him as King. And we pray that he will change the world so that everyone will acknowledge and accept Jesus as King. Our own petitions are framed in the overarching goal of Jesus: To make disciples of all nations. We acknowledge that this is the request that has the priority – everything else that we ask has to be in agreement with that. This allows us re-prioritise our</p>

	<p>questions: do we really need to have this Lord? Is this helping your Kingdom to come? <i>Your kingdom come, may your will be done on earth as it is in heaven <silence and prayer></i></p>
<p>Give us each day our daily bread</p>	<p>This is the first question really for ourselves. But we only ask for what we need to live: ‘Our daily bread’. This is food that is enough for the day. Not less but also not more. In this space we want to ask for so much more, there are so many things we could ask for. But there are many people on this world that have less then their daily bread, and we are among the people on the world that have more than what we need. So, as we ask for ourselves, we also think of those who have nothing and we thank God that he has actually given us more than what we need. Is he asking us to share more? <i>Give us each day our daily bread <silence and prayer></i></p>
<p>Forgive us our sins</p>	<p>Why do we need to ask for forgiveness? Jesus knows that we cannot be in the close relationship with him if there are things on our conscience. As God is holy, he makes us holy through the forgiveness of sins. Jesus</p>

	<p>washes us clean as we recognise that we have done wrong, and that we are indebted to him and to other people, and do not have the means to pay back.</p> <p><i>So we ask him to forgive us our sins <silence and prayer></i></p>
<p>For we also forgive everyone who sins against us (or is indebted to us)</p>	<p>We recognise that other people sin too, and that as they do they hurt us they are indebted to us. But Jesus wants us to forgive instead.</p> <p>This is a strange clause in a way. It is set in the present. It not in the past: “We also forgave everyone who sinned against us”, neither is it in the future as a promise: “We will also forgive everyone who sin against us”. But is is now: it is what we are doing now. It is at the same time a condition: “we know you won’t forgive us if we do not forgive everyone”, as well as a promise: “we will forgive everyone”, as well as our current state of affairs: “we are forgiving everyone who sins against us”. We are working on this. It is a decision of our will. We choose to forgive. We may not have fully done so, but we are working on it. This is us: we are forgiving people. We identify ourselves with Jesus as</p>

	<p>people who forgive. It is what we do. So lets do that now: <i>For we also forgive everyone who sins against us (or is indebted to us)</i> <i><silence and prayer></i></p>
<p>And lead us not into temptation (but deliver is from the evil one)</p>	<p>Jesus knows that there are temptations, and that the evil one is the great deceiver and tempter. Temptations are the first step in the process that leads to sin. If we are not tempted, it is easier for us not to sin. So Jesus tells us to ask God to take these temptations away, and at the same time reminding ourselves that we should resist these temptations if they are still there. What temptations do you have in our life? Food, drink or drugs, status, recognition, procrastination... whatever the desire is that is in your heart can take you out of a relationship with God through sin. And it is different desire or temptation for each one of us. You know what your weakness is: <i>So ask God to not lead you into that temptation and deliver you from the evil one</i> <i><Silence and prayer></i></p>

Amen.

Rounding up

Have you wondered if there is something missing? What do we pray for most often in our prayers of petition and intercession? For health and well-being of ourselves or for others. We pray for governments and nations, we pray for our church or for our city. We pray against injustice and unrighteousness. What we often do is to pray for things other than ourselves.

But what Jesus tells us to pray for is for not others or ourselves, but for our relationship with God the Father. Because that is the only thing in our lives that is eternal. All the other things will pass away: health, well-being, governments, nations, church and city, injustices and unrighteousness. It will all pass away. But Jesus gives us eternal life through our relationship with God the Father. So the Lord's prayer asks for those things that keeps our relationship with God the Father good.

That's why Jesus died on the cross for us. So that all the barriers of evil, sin, guilt, shame and death will be removed from our hearts for Jesus to come and live in us and through us.

That therefore is the most important thing we pray for and we do this by the Lord's prayer. Everything else in our Christian lives flows from knowing Jesus and through him knowing God the Father through the power of the Holy Spirit.

So, if you not already do so: pray the Lord's prayer. Every day. As often as you think of it. But pray the meaning not the words. Begin your prayer time with it and end with it. Because it is our relationship with God the Father that gives us life.

Amen.