

5 Elements of The Lord's Prayer

Matthew 6:5-14

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. Truly I tell you, 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. 7 And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. 8 Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

9 "This, then, is how you should pray:

"Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
10 your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.

11 Give us today our daily bread.

12 And forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.

13 And lead us not into temptation,[a]
but deliver us from the evil one.[b]'

14 For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. It is not always easy to find the right words to pray.

Introduction

Ask someone to pray during a church gathering and I often get this response, "O please, find someone else to pray. My prayers don't flow nicely. And I'm not always sure what I am supposed to be praying about".

Jesus's own disciples may have felt the same way. So they approached The Teacher and said to him, 'Lord, teach us to pray'

Jesus then taught them what we now call, The Lord's Prayer, also known as the "Our Father" prayer.

At the outset of this message I want you to know that this is a prayer for all times and seasons, for all situations, and for all people. The Lord's Prayer takes a mere 15-20 seconds to say. Recently, I figured that praying the Lord's Prayer, silently, takes (me at least) 20 seconds. So, hand washing time can also be prayer time! But you need to hear this; though it is a short prayer, it is filled with incredible content. If ever there is a prayer that summarizes the Christian faith and what is expressed in the Gospels, this prayer does it. Reflecting on The Lord's prayer, St. Cyprian of Carthage, a third century bishop wrote, "My dear friends, the Lord's Prayer contains many great mysteries of our faith. In these few words there is great spiritual strength...for this summary of divine teaching contains all of our prayers and petitions."

The Lord's prayer is familiar to many of us. In fact, many of us have it memorized and can recite it without much difficulty. But because it is so familiar to us, The Lord's Prayer can easily fall into just being something we verbalize without actually praying it. The discipline of prayer is to train our minds and our hearts to be focused on God and not just to be reciting "empty" words.

Allow me to share 5 key elements of this model prayer.

1. First, Jesus wants us to know about the **people** of this prayer –

Even as a brand-new Christian, the way the Lord's Prayer starts out fascinated me. It does not say, "My Father". Instead it is "Our Father". Scripture scholar John Meier explains that in God's kingdom, we don't live as isolated individuals but "we experience God's fatherhood as members of the church, the family of Jesus, the Son."

A year ago when one stated, let's Get ready to go to church, it meant actually going to church. But due to COVID getting ready for church can mean something very different today. For some it now means Livestreaming the service to be viewed at home. This has allowed there to be a lot of flexibility regarding when worship services can be watched. But, after months of worship having the option of taking place at home via Zoom or YouTube, the rhythm of going to church that used to be automatic for many, is no longer a given. Almost 500 years ago, the Heidelberg Catechism described the Christian experience in a way that seems to have anticipated our modern dilemma. It begins with the question:

"What is your only comfort in life and death?"

In response are these words; "I am not my own, but belong body and soul, both in life and in death, to my faithful Savior Jesus Christ".

Did you hear it? My body belongs to Jesus. By extension, I also belong to his means of grace in the world, the church. Of course there is much more to being the church (and following Jesus) than attending a weekly service, but gathering to worship is one significant aspect of being part of the church. When a person chooses not to attend, something goes missing. My absence diminishes what Christ can accomplish in and through the church, while my presence is a tangible means of participation in the Kingdom of God.

Ultimately, it's not about "what I get out of it."

The church cannot fully accomplish her purposes in the world when I withhold my presence. Physical participation in worshipping with others matters.

- Worshipping with my brothers and sisters in Christ orients my loves.

Each week, when I gather with other believers, my heart can be re-calibrated in tiny ways that keep me facing Jesus rather than drifting in another direction.

- Worshipping with my brothers and sisters in Christ reminds me that following Jesus includes being part of a family.

Becoming a Christian means becoming part of God's family and changing how I live here and now. Spending week after week with other believers, sharing the worship experience,

eventually adds up to a network of caring relationships. As we do life together, we lend support to each other on our faith journeys.

Though I understand the present need for watching services via one's computer due to COVID I hope that when things finally open up we will make the effort to gather physically together.

Simply watching a worship service from home positions a person to be a solitary consumer rather than an active participant. While virtual worship has been a gift to keep us connected during the "COVID season", it is not a sustainable way to cultivate the community of faith.

- Worshipping with my brothers and sisters in Christ enables me to participate in God's work of grace in others.

Our effort to show up and worship together has a way of encouraging. Let me speak candidly to you. Preaching to a camera is not the same as preaching when there are congregants who are present and expectant to hear God speak to them. Your presence lends energy and solidarity to what is being preached and taught. Your presence also affirms the value of corporate worship for those who are in attendance. Your smile and even your wave from six feet away and your voice lifted in praise manifest the Spirit's presence to others who have come. This is what it means to be the image of God. Our identity as God's image is expressed physically—it is an embodied reminder of the presence and rule of God. We represent the unseen God to one another. We are not our own. We are members of something bigger than ourselves—Christ's body on earth.

- Worshipping together is also a means of declaring allegiance to the kingdom of God.

On the outside, the church may not seem like much. It may seem weak. But the church is a visible witness to the unseen reality of God's kingdom. Being present each week testifies to this. It acknowledges that God's invisible kingdom is more substantial and more lasting than the other concrete institutions in our community. It will outlast the postal service, local businesses, schools, and politicians and their offices. It will outlast the pandemic and the hurricanes and the wildfires and the ugly inequalities in our world. It will outlast political parties. Our participation in gathered worship testifies to that greater and lasting Kingdom.

The "our" in the Lord's Prayer is a reminder that I am not meant to walk the road of spirituality alone... I am to do it in community... with others. This is why Jesus starts His prayer with the word, "Our".

2. Second, as Jesus wants us to know about the people of prayer, He wants us to also know about the **Person** of prayer- The Father

When John F. Kennedy was President of the United States, Life magazine published photos of his children, John Jr. and Caroline, playing with their toys on the floor of the Oval Office. Those images captured the hearts of the American people in a deep way. Why?

I think it was because it bridged a gap between two thoughts: Kennedy was the President of the United States, but he was also a father. He held political power in the Free World, but playing at his feet were two little kids who called him Daddy. The use of the title Father shows us that God is not only majestic

and holy but also personal and loving. I find that there is something comforting, addressing our prayers to “The Father”. It fills my heart with a sense of secure warmth. While God is transcendent over the entire universe, He is also immanent in that He is near to us—He is both transcendent- ‘high and lifted up” and immanent – God who is with us. In other words, He is not some remote Being who lives afar off and has no concern for what we go through. Instead He is personal God.

I am comforted in knowing that I serve a vast and powerful God who is in control of things. And I am also comforted knowing my God is only a prayer away, who is close to us.

We are instructed to pray, “Our” Father because He is not just the father of someone else ...He is OURS as well. He is our Heavenly father.

3. Third, As Jesus wants us to know about the people and the Person of prayer, He also wants us to know about the **purpose** of prayer.

This purpose is found in the words, “Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done”.

Albert Barnes, a commentary writer, wrote. “The petition is the expression of a wish that God may reign everywhere; that his laws may be obeyed; and especially that the gospel of Christ may be advanced everywhere, till the world shall be filled with his glory”.

There are those in the church who are wanting to write off the world as a hopeless cause. They seem to want Jesus to come and take them out of it... right now! But God is not finished here yet. Even though we live in a world that is not perfect, God has not written it off. And if God has not written it off, neither should we!

On one of my runs I was reflecting on the phrase, “Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done”. As I did so, 5 words came to mind:

- I. The first word was Creation – When God created the world He declared that it was good.
- II. The second word was Crisis – crisis in that sinful, rebellious disobedience destroyed that goodness God intended humankind to live in.
- III. The third word was Cross – On Sunday January 3, one of my church members wrote a message on our church FB site, asking the question, “What happened to the cross? It always reminds me of what Jesus did for me. I missed it yesterday..” (We had taken the cross down to put up some Christmas decorations and had not yet gotten it back up) I’m so glad she asked; it is a question we should be asking. When teachings take place in this church, the theology of the cross needs to be an important part of what is taught. If it is not you should be asking the question, “Where is the cross?” When preaching takes place in the church, the reality of the cross needs to be part of the message. If it is not, you should be asking the question, “Where is the cross?”

John Stott wrote, in his book, The Cross of Christ, “The fact that a cross became the Christian symbol, and that Christians stubbornly refused, in spite of the ridicule, to discard it in favor of something less offensive, can have only one explanation. It means that the centrality of the cross originated in the mind of Jesus himself. It was out of loyalty to him that his followers clung so doggedly to this sign.”

Dear Ones, we must cling to the cross! To restore God's original goodness someone had to pay the penalty of sin. God allowed His Son Jesus to do so...by death upon a cross.

IV. The fourth word that came to mind was Conversion –

Connected with the theology of the cross is conversion. A reality of my faith is this; I could never myself believe in God, if it were not for the cross. Let it be known that The only God I believe in is the One Friedrich Nietzsche once ridiculed as "God on the cross". In our world of pain, how can one worship a God who is immune to it? Yes, Christ took the penalty we deserved on a cross; but God will never force anyone to accept that goodness of His gift of salvation.

A decision of acceptance- of conversion must take place.

V. The fifth word that came to my mind was Commission.

We should notice that God's goodness is connected to the Great Commission. Again, listen to the words of John Stott, when he writes, "If the cross is to mark our Christian life in the home and the church, this should be even more so in the world. The church tends to become very preoccupied with its own affairs, obsessed with petty, parochial trivia, while the needy world outside is waiting. So the Son sends us out into the world, as the Father had sent him into the world."

Dear ones, "The cross calls us to a ... radical and costly kind of evangelism"

We have got to understand this. Prayer is not just to transform us and to make us feel good and tingly, but through prayer we can become so on fire for God that our words and lives become agents of world transformation.

4. As the Lord's prayer speaks to us about the people, the Person and the purpose of prayer, it also speaks to us about the **petitions** of prayer.

- VI. We are invited to pray for our daily food.... Our daily needs.... Praying to God the Father –the Giver of provisions
- VII. We are invited to pray for the forgiveness of our sins... praying to God the Son, Jesus Christ, who is The Forgiver and the Giver of Peace
- VIII. And we are invited to pray for power to resist the temptations that come our way...praying to God the Holy Spirit – The Giver of purifying power

As I have spent time thinking about the petitions of the Lord's Prayer I observed the following. The sequencing of the petitions reflect the spiritual journey of many... of how a physical, earthly need initiated them to approach God, which then led to them realize how impoverished they were spiritually, causing them to seek after Jesus for spiritual salvation...which then led them seek after, what some term, the second blessing of being filled with the Holy Spirit, allowing them to live and serve in the power and purity of the Divine.

We have thus far looked at 4 elements of the Lord's prayer

The people of prayer

The Person of prayer

The purpose of prayer

And the petitions of prayer.

5. There is one more element we need to consider- the **process** of prayer– which is the forgiveness of others

If we say, "I will never forgive so-and-so for what he or she has done to me,"...if we say, "I will never forget what so-and-so did to me," and then go and pray the Lord's Prayer, did you realize that we are deliberately asking God not to forgive us? It has been stated that "Forgiveness, like peace, is one and indivisible."

William Barclay contends that human forgiveness and divine forgiveness are inextricably inter-combined. Our forgiveness of others and God's forgiveness of us cannot be separated; for they are interlinked and interdependent. If we sincerely pray the Lord's prayer and truly desire to forgive others who have hurt us, God will help us in three areas:

- I. He will help us in our ability to understand.

There is always a reason why a person does something. If he is rude and impolite and cross tempered, maybe he is worried or in pain. If he treats us with suspicion and dislike, maybe he has misunderstood, or has been misinformed about something we have said or done. Perhaps the individual is the victim of his or her own environment or his or her own heredity. Maybe his or her temperament is such that life is difficult and human relations a problem for them.

William Barclay writes, "Forgiveness would be very much easier for us, if we tried to understand before we allowed ourselves to condemn".

- II. Through prayer God can help us not to allow memories to emotionally keep hurting and damaging us.

Some people wrongly believe that forgiveness is synonymous with forgetting. We say, "Forgive and forget." And we think, "If I forgive somebody, then I have to forget what they have done to me."

When we tell people that in order to forgive someone they have to forget the offense, we are asking them to do something that is impossible. Forgiveness is a spiritual action, but forgetting is a biological action. We do people a disservice when we say, "Unless you forget, you truly haven't forgiven."

Forgiveness and forgetting are not the same thing. In fact, trying to forget what people have done to you can short-circuit the forgiveness process. Hope College, Associate Professor, Dr. Charlotte Van Oyen Witvliet says, "Forgiveness does not involve a literal forgetting. Forgiveness involves remembering graciously. The forgiver remembers the true though painful parts, but without the embellishment of angry adjectives and adverbs that stir up contempt."

III. And through prayer God helps us to love.

It is having that unconquerable benevolence, that undefeatable good-will, which will never seek anything but the highest good of others, no matter what someone does to us, and no matter how they treat us. It is having a holy love that should characterize our response to those who have hurt us; a holy love that causes us to respond totally opposite from how those without Christ would respond. It is a love that can come to us when Christ, who is that love, comes to dwell within our hearts---and he comes when we invite him through prayer.