

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name

Followers of Jesus talk to God in all kinds of different ways. They use different tools and different formats.

Some pray with loud, passionate voices, pleading with God through tears.

Some pray silently, using few words, and silent trust.

Some pray the words of the Psalms, others the words of poets or theologians and claim their words as their own.

Some pray casually- talking to God as they would their best friend.

Others pray through music or artwork..

No matter how we pray, the invitation to communicate with our Maker and our Lord is one of the sweetest gifts we have been given.

Jesus taught his disciples a specific prayer when he taught them how to pray. This prayer is powerful and useful when it's exact words are repeated, and especially when it is prayed in unison with our brothers and sisters across history and across the world. However, more important than the exact words of this prayer is the framework it gives us from how and what we ought to talk to God about.

In the next few weeks, we are going to explore this prayer in deeper detail, and I would invite you to pray this prayer in your time with God this week. Dwelling slowly on each phrase and its meaning as we dive deeper into these words that Jesus gave us.

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Today we begin with the opening address of the prayer:

"Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name."

From the outset, this prayer is communal. Jesus prays "Our Father" not "My Father." It's as if he wants to remind us that we cannot disconnect our relationships with others from our relationship with God. Throughout the entire rest of the prayer, Jesus uses corporate language as he prays.

It may feel strange to you to incorporate communal language into your daily prayers like this, but I'd invite you to give it a try for a week or so. You may be surprised by how it shifts **what** you pray for and **how** you pray.

Jesus also teaches us to address our prayers to God in the fullness of who he is- one who is **both** holy, set apart, and high above his creation- **and** one who is near and intimately connected like a Father. The word translated into English, "Father" is actually a tender Aramaic word that is closer to our word "dad" or "daddy."

Jesus, in how he teaches us to address God reminds us that God always is **both** holy and powerful **and** tender and compassionate. He is **both** differentiated from us **and** intimately connected to us.

As you pray the Lord's prayer this week, I invite you to:

- Pray on behalf of your community (family, friends, church, neighborhood, nation, or whole world) **more** than on your own behalf.
- Spend time meditating on the nearness and the tenderness of God as a good parent as you pray.
- Spend time meditating on the holiness and bigness of God as you pray.

Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

The Kingdom of God is one of my favorite things to think about.

I think I'm in good company, because it is the topic that Jesus taught about the most.

The Kingdom of God is the supreme end of all creation.
It is the best scenario for humanity,
and it is the reality that most honors and glorifies God.
It is a reality saturated with right-relationships. It is marked by justice.
It is enveloped in perfect love. It is beaming with beauty.
It is overflowing with flourishing.
Because in the Kingdom of God, everything functions the way God intended.

When we think about the Kingdom of God, the closest picture we get to help us imagine it in scripture is the garden of Eden before the fall.

So when we pray for God's Kingdom to come, and God's will to be done on earth as it is in heaven. We are really praying that our world would look more like Eden.

We are praying that humanity would move more towards right relationships with God, with others, and with creation. We are praying that where there is sickness, decay, and death, that there would be flourishing, resurrection, and new life. We are praying that the will of God would be done instead of the will of the evil one- whose will brings division and destruction and hate and harm.

As we pray, we are asking God to bring this about in powerful and miraculous ways, but we are also praying that God would equip us to be a part of His Kingdom coming in our midst- by praying for healing where there is hurt, by caring for the people in front of us, and by working for systemic changes that bring justice and wholeness and life to everyone around us.

As you pray this week, I invite you to:

- Spend time imagining what it would be like to live fully in the Kingdom of God- to experience the peace and joy that would bring.
- Pray for the reality of the Kingdom of God to come to your home, to our church, to our city, and to the world.
- Ask God if there is any particular way he is inviting you to participate in the coming of his Kingdom this week.

Give us this day our daily bread.

There's a story in Exodus where God's people are wandering in the desert, and they start getting hangry (I can relate). They become anxious and fearful that they are not going to have enough food to survive or be satisfied. They start complaining to Moses, and God hears their complaints and promises to give them enough food for each day - and instructs them not to hoard or store up more than what they need for each day.

The story implies that part of what God wants to do for the Israelites is teach them about their dependence. They are being taught to trust that God will show up the next day again to give them more food.

In the Lord's prayer, this line "give us this day our daily bread" is an echo of that story. It's a call to remember God's faithful provision for his people in the past *while* we acknowledge our dependence in the present.

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I am very aware as I sit to write this devotion that I have 4 meals worth of leftovers in my refrigerator. I have a significant amount of money in my savings account. I have a cushion, and dependence feels more theoretical than literal.

I know, of course, that I am dependent on God for my very next breath. I know and often feel my dependence on God for patience, kindness, and love for the people around me. Yet, I do not feel dependent on God for my lunch today.

So as we pray this line of the prayer, I think we are called to a dual invitation.

We are indeed called to be reminded of our own very real dependence on God in every physical, emotional, mental, spiritual and relational facet of our lives.

We are also, as we talked about before, called to remember that we are praying this prayer in and on behalf of a community. We pray "give **us** today **our** daily bread," not "give **me** today **my** daily bread." So every time we pray this prayer, we are invited to call to mind the over 676,000,000 people in the world who are currently living on less than \$1.90 per day. We are called to remember the people in our city who are food insecure, and who feel their dependence on God in ways that we could learn from.

And perhaps, we are also invited to consider sharing the overflow we have stored up for the sake of our global family.

As you pray this week, I invite you to:

- Pay attention to your breath, and remember that you are dependent on God to keep giving you breath in this moment.
- Acknowledge other places in your life that you feel dependent and are in need of God's provision.
- Spend some time researching global poverty and pray for those who are daily in need of physical provision.
- Ask God if there is some specific way he is inviting you to share from your overflow with others.

Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.

Forgiveness is a hard, but necessary part of our Christian faith.

If you were to dig into the Greek words used in part of the Lord's Prayer, you would find that the concepts of forgiveness and debts in this passage are weightier than our words in the English really give us.

In fact, this verse could probably be more accurately translated this way:

*Let go of Your right to receive what You are justly entitled
as I let go of my right to receive what I am justly entitled.*

What is both beautiful and excruciating about that translation is that it acknowledges the injustice of the action that has taken place.

Forgiveness does not say, "Get over it. It wasn't that big of a deal."

It says, it *was* a big deal. And I'm going to choose to release it anyway, *because* God has chosen to release me from paying the debts of my unjust actions towards Him and towards others.

One of my favorite theologians, Miroslav Volf, says this about forgiveness,

"Forgiveness flounders because I exclude the enemy from the community of humans and myself from the community of sinners."

Practicing forgiveness requires a humble awareness of my own need for forgiveness, and it requires me to apply the same mercy I want extended to me, even to my enemies.

As you pray this week, I invite you to:

- Pray the sinner's prayer: "Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me, a sinner."
- Confess the places in your own life that you need God's forgiveness.
- Bring to mind specific people that you need to forgive and hold them before God.
- Bring to mind perhaps vague groups of people that you need to forgive and hold them before God (i.e. groups of people who voted for laws you disagree with, groups of people that forced you into a season of change/transition, groups of people that excluded your child, etc.)

Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

Perhaps you can imagine the feeling of being tempted.

You know it would be better for you not to choose into your vice:

Over-eating,
binge-watching tv,
fueling hateful thoughts,
watching pornography,
buying all the things in your amazon cart,
speaking poorly about or towards your spouse,
gossiping.

Some part of you wants to say no,
but it feels like there is almost a magnetic force drawing you towards the thing that you know will ultimately provide only temporary and partial happiness.

We are pretty weak beings when it comes down to it.
We don't resist temptations well on our own.

So this prayer helps us to humbly acknowledge our weakness and ask God for help and strength to choose away from the harm we can control.

In this prayer, we also ask God to deliver us from the harmful things that we cannot control by asking for protection from evil: a word that means things that bring destruction and harm.

This whole prayer is actually a great reminder that we are not in control. We are not all powerful. We are not capable of protecting ourselves.

As we pray these petitions, we are reminded that a God who is bigger, kinder, and more powerful than we are is our source of strength, protection, and provision.

As you pray this week, I invite you to:

- Ask God to show you where you are being tempted recently.
- Ask God to show you *why* this thing is tempting you: what are you avoiding? what are you trying to get?

- Ask God if there are any tangible steps he is asking you to take to avoid this temptation.
- Ask God for the strength and self-control you need to choose something different.
- Pray for protection (deliverance from evil) for your family, your neighborhood, and your enemies.

For Thine is the Kingdom, and the Power, and the Glory forever. Amen.

When I was little, I used to love having my dad carry me upstairs to put me to bed. So shortly before bedtime, I would curl up on the couch and pretend to fall asleep so that I could get carried to bed.

It was nice to have the last moment of the day be one where I didn't exert effort. I was held. I was carried by someone so much bigger and stronger than myself.

As we reach the doxology of the Lord's Prayer, I imagine this part of the prayer doing something similar.

We have been praying for our daily needs, the restoration of the world, the ability to forgive, the ability to resist evil. All things that seem big and heavy and somewhat daunting.

But as we pray the words of this doxology, we remember again that our God is bigger and stronger and more responsible for the world than we are, and we proclaim that as we let him carry us out.

We pray "Yours is the Kingdom"

The Kingdom is not mine.
Its coming is not dependent on my feeble actions.
I cannot break it.
I cannot bring it to its fullness by my weak efforts.
I surrender it back to You.
I trust You to bring it to fulfillment.

We pray "Yours is the Power"

You, Lord, are so much bigger and stronger than any other force
You are stronger than death.
You are stronger than hatred.
You are stronger than every division.
You use your power to bring wholeness.
So I can acknowledge that I am weak.
I can trust your strength and your power

To be strong enough
For the whole world, and for me.

We pray "Yours is the glory forever."

Your goodness, beauty, holiness, and worthiness
Are eternal.

There is nothing I can do to add to or diminish your glory.

So I affirm it now.

I testify to it now.

I live my life in awe and trust.

And I rest in the steadiness of who you are.

As a child rests in the arms of their father.

Let it be so.