

Prayers

To God

Bless the Lord for His creation; both what He has already created (the world and everything in it) and what He is creating even now (babies being born, and life being sustained).

For myself

Weekly theme: discipleship

Great and mighty Lord, Your miracles of grace are awesome, and I ask You to show me Your great power and love this day. Bless me as I go about my daily life, that in doing my daily work I may prove to be a faithful disciple. And use my life to bless others so that they may see more of the glories of Your grace and salvation. May I do Your will on earth I pray: **AMEN**

For others

Pray for those who struggle against ill health, and pray for those you know who are ill. Do not pray lightly, for your prayers will be a source of life for those for whom you pray; and pray believing that God is compassionate and longs for the healing of all who suffer.

Meditation

There are many who need your love and care, Lord Jesus,
For You can give help to the wounded of body, mind, and spirit.

You can focus the mind of one who cannot face debt;
You can help someone handle tough working conditions;
You can bring hope to the troubled soul that sees no future;
You can liberate men and women from insecure marriages;
You can give help to those who feel they cannot cope;
You can bring refuge to people who are trapped by insecurity;
You can heal children rejected by parents, and parents by children;
You can remove the anxiety of those ensnared by chronic illness;
You can heal the hearts of those who have been sexually abused;
You can see each human problem from every different angle.

So when, in love, we do our best to care for those in need,
Give us Your wisdom so that Your Spirit may work through us.

Bible Passage

Luke 11:1-4

¹ One day, Jesus was praying at a certain place, and after He had finished praying, one of his disciples said to Him,

“Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples.”

² He said to them,

“When you pray, say:

**Father, may Your name be made holy;
may Your kingdom come.**

³ **Give us sufficient bread for each day.**

⁴ **And forgive us our sins,
for we forgive all who are indebted to us.
And do not lead us into times of testing.”**

Review

There is no doubt that this is a powerful and awesome prayer, reported directly from the lips of Jesus to us by Luke. What a great privilege we have in these words! How glad we are that the disciples asked Jesus about His prayer life, and wanted His advice about their own prayer, for this is the result.

However, the first thing we notice here in Luke is that his report is not the same as the longer version of the ‘Lord’s Prayer’, reported in Matthew (Matthew 6:9-13). Luke has missed out about three sentence of the prayer! Does this matter? Whatever the reasons for the different versions of the Lord’s Prayer in Scripture (see ‘Going Deeper’), they present us with a broad understanding of Jesus’ advice about prayer. So instead of relying solely on the one version of the prayer we know well, we should be excited by the possibilities of learning more from Jesus about prayer, from a different report of His advice.

The disciples asked Jesus to teach them to pray, knowing that John had done the same for his disciples (11:1). They were used to prayers in a list, with one said after another. Jewish synagogues of the first century had such lists, and one example has eighteen lines. In this passage, Jesus gives five memorable lines of prayer (Matthew has seven – 6:9-13). The first two address God and seek His Kingdom, and the next three are about human need for food, for love and forgiveness, and for freedom from ‘testing’. Each powerful phrase is a masterpiece of understatement, drawing us closer to God, who is the source of our provision. In addition, this is a collective prayer. Though we can say it individually, its requests are for more than one; it speaks of ‘us’ and ‘our’, and of ‘we’ who must forgive, not ‘me’, ‘mine’ or ‘I’. Its primary use is a prayer spoken by disciples for themselves and others, and for all people.

The first word in the prayer is addressed to God as ‘Father’, and the language is personal. Jews of the day would begin their prayers with the term ‘Our Father’ (Matthew starts the Lord’s prayer in this way – 6:9). But to speak directly to God using the word ‘father’ is more personal. This is the Aramaic word ‘abba’, in Greek ‘pater’, which is closer to an intimate and ‘family’ form of address. Though the prayer is spoken by a group of people, God is still a ‘Father’ to each one individually, through Jesus.

Next, the prayer sweeps us between earth and heaven. In heaven, God’s holiness is awesome and evident, but on earth it is not, and His name is known throughout heaven but

not throughout the earth. So Jesus' prayer asks that both God's holiness and His name be honoured on earth (*'may Your name be made holy'* – 11:2); it is a way of praying for God to be known on earth. Now there are many 'names' of God found in Scripture, so which one is referred to here? I suggest that the logic of this prayer means that the name of God we must make known is 'Father'. This indeed, is Jesus' revelation, for He has come to show us the 'Father'! There is much more in John's Gospel about this (John 5:20f.).

The next three phrases are important prayers (11:3,4). Firstly, we to pray for daily provision, and this reminds us of God's provision of 'manna' for Israel during their 'wanderings' (Exodus 16,17). In those days, God required that Israel had to trust God for the provision of the day, without looking ahead to tomorrow. It may be hard for us to live like this now, because our lifestyle means that we plan ahead with 'budgets', and store food in freezers! But this prayer is about more than food. It challenges us to trust God for much more than food. To put our future in His hands is a test of everything about us, our hearts, minds, strength and emotions!

Then, the prayer about the forgiveness of our sins here in Luke is worded a little different to what we might expect. The Lord's Prayer from Matthew's Gospel says, *'forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us.'* (Matt 6:8), which makes a vital connection between seeking God's forgiveness and forgiving others. But here, Luke's words are slightly different; they say, *'forgive us our sins, for we forgive all who are indebted to us'* (11:4). Look closely and you will see that here, the one who prays asks God's forgiveness because of forgiveness already shown to others. You may think this odd, but it is not; Jesus taught His disciples to make sure they forgave others (as in the parable of the unforgiving servant – Matthew 18:23-35). This prayer is not about the primary forgiveness of God by which a sinner is saved. It is the request of honest disciples, who seek to forgive others, and who need the Lord's forgiveness for their own faults and failings in everyday life.

Lastly, the prayer says, *'do not lead us into times of testing.'* This is a natural prayer, but it is not as general as we might think, as a combination of careful thought and examination of the text will show. Scripture frequently reveals that God leads His people into various trials through which they learn; stories of this abound, for example, Elisha and Elijah (2 King 2), or Gideon (Judges 6,7). No one should fear trials from which they can learn and grow as God's people. However, the prayer asks that we are not led into 'testing', and the word for this suggests the questioning of God, and of faith. The prayer therefore expresses the heart of one who does not want to question God or struggle with Him. For those who are close to their Lord can cope with almost anything.

As we use this form of the Lord's prayer, it may sit uncomfortably to us for a while. However, it can help us in a number of different ways. We will use it well if we do so from a place of understanding of what Jesus first said as reported by Luke, rather than an emotive reaction to words read out of context. Once we get to know this great prayer, the doors will open to our exploration of it at greater spiritual depths.

Going Deeper

Notes on the text and translation

V2 *'may Your name be made holy'*

Other translations:

'hallowed be Your name' (NIV)

'uphold the holiness of Your name' (NRSV)

This is a very difficult phrase to translate, and for this reason, most translators fall back on the traditional *'hallowed be Your name'*. The Greek may be translated literally as this: *'Your name be made holy'*. Grammatically, this is a command, but we can hardly think it right to tell God to do something in a prayer, so we take the only other possibility, which is that this command represents a desire, hence my translation, *'May Your name be made holy'*.

Something very similar can be said of the next phrase, *'May Your Kingdom come.'*

VX *'give us sufficient bread for each day'*

Other translations:

'give us each day our daily bread' (NIV)

'give us the bread we need for today' (NRSV)

There is considerable scholarly argument over the Greek word I have translated *'sufficient'*, and which most translations give as *'daily'*. I take the view that this rare word is included here because it is used in the *'Septuagint'* (the famous Greek version of the Old Testament used in Jesus' day) for God's provision of *'manna'* in the desert. You will remember that each day, the Israelites gathered sufficient of God's provision for their daily needs (Exodus 16:31f.)

V4 *'for we forgive all who are indebted to us'*

Other translations:

'for we also forgive everyone who sins against us' (NIV)

'for we ourselves forgive everyone that is indebted to us' (ESV)

This is an interesting phrase, because it does not tally with the Lord's prayer as we know it (see study). The traditional prayer (as found in Matthew 6:9f.) expresses the hope that the one praying will forgive others because of the forgiveness already received from Jesus; the saved sinner can forgive in the power of Jesus' name.

However, in Luke, after Jesus has said *'forgive us our sins'* (to God), this next phrase contains a conjunction indicating *'cause'*, and translates *'for we forgive everyone who is indebted to us'*. This is different; the one praying asks God to forgive sins on the basis of his or her willingness to forgive others. This may sound not quite right, but the study looks at this carefully and explains from Scripture why this is so.

V4 *'and do not lead us into times of testing'*

Other translations:

'and lead us not into temptation' (NIV)

'and do not lead us to the time of trial' (NRSV)

There has been much argument in Christian circles over the wording of the Lord's prayer, and it is reasonable to retain the traditional word *'temptation'* in this phrase. However, the Greek word usually translated *'temptation'* means primarily, *'a time of testing'* in which the believer questions God in some way. The prime example of this is Jesus' famous *'temptations'* (Luke 4:1f.). But lest we think of temptations as only a matter of pursuit by the devil, it is wise to reflect on the broader meaning of the word.

Further Comments

Jesus' advice on prayer in Matthew and how it differs from Luke

The version in Luke is repeated here:

*Father, may Your name be made holy;
may Your kingdom come.
³ Give us sufficient bread for each day.
⁴ And forgive us our sins,
for we forgive all who are indebted to us.
And do not lead us into times of testing."*

The Gospel of Matthew records these words, and I have placed in bold the words that are similar to those in Luke.

⁹ **Our Father in heaven; may Your Name be kept holy;**
¹⁰ **Your kingdom come;**
and Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.
¹¹ **Give us this day our daily bread;**
¹² **Forgive us our sins,**
as we forgive those who sin against us;
¹³ **And do not lead us into temptation,**
but save us from the evil one.

You can see from this that what is missing in Luke is the following:

- Matthew says 'our Father **IN HEAVEN**' but Luke misses out 'heaven'
- Luke omits '**Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven**' (Matt 6:10)
- Luke omits '**But save us from the evil one**' (Matt 6:13).

Jesus' advice on prayer in Mark, and the reasons for differences between the Gospels

The advice of Jesus on prayer recorded in Mark's Gospel is as follows:

²⁴ *Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.* ²⁵ *And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins."*

These words add to our collection of Jesus' advice about prayer. Jesus speaks about prayer in other places, but these three texts stand together and are strongly related to each other. Mark adds Jesus' urging to believe when praying, and highlights again the importance of forgiveness. As we have seen in Luke's version of the Lord's Prayer, the emphasis here is not on the primary grace of God to forgive our sins and save us; it is on the stern obligation of disciples to forgive, so that our prayers asking God to forgive us our mistakes will be granted. All these texts about forgiveness read like additions to the parable of the unforgiving servant (Matt 18:23-35).

You may ask; why are there all these differences? Perhaps Jesus spoke more than once to the disciples about prayer; it would seem odd to suggest that Jesus only spoke to the disciples once about this most important subject! Moreover, those who first heard Jesus reveal these things may have used His outline of prayer on many occasions, eventually remembering slightly different versions of it. It does not take much imagination to see how differences could have arisen in the reports of Jesus' teaching on prayer handed down after He died and rose again. Our treasure is to receive all this in the Gospels and see how it fits together and can enlighten our prayer life.

Discipleship

Application

Honouring God's name

In this prayer, Jesus presents us with a strong challenge of faith. The part we are most familiar with is His call for us to establish His rule on earth, His 'Kingdom'. In our fellowship, in our churches and in our homes, we are called to let Him be our 'rule', so much so that those around us spot something different about us. But this prayer also says that we are to make the name of our God holy in the world, and that is a real test of our faith. People refer to God in a general and common manner, for all kinds of people believe in various gods. We can say 'God bless you' to a Hindu person or a Muslim without offense, because what they regard as 'god' is different from our faith. The name is neither known as 'holy' or respected for what we mean by it.

In this respect, the prayer here in Luke is helpful, for it emphasises the Christian faith in God as a loving 'Father'. Certainly, when we call God our 'Father', people of other faiths may well be offended! That is not their view. But this is what we are called to give witness to, and we cannot witness to it if we do not know it!

The power of forgiveness

The power of forgiveness is a repeating theme of Scripture, from the stories of Joseph to the redemptive acts of Christ on the Cross, to the glorious work of God at the second coming of Christ. Forgiveness is God's practical love, and it no surprise that Jesus teaches us to exercise it just as the Father does. In truth, we need constant forgiveness ourselves, and this is where the Lord's Prayer, whether in its long or short form, can help us. Instead of praying to God by giving Him a list of our constant requirements and concerns, this prayer diverts us to what we really need, which is both a reminder to live by the rule of forgiveness, and God's own forgiveness for our on-going sins.

Times of testing

The prayer here is a basic one. Many Christians fall by the wayside when something difficult happens in life, bereavement or chronic sickness, for example, or some other tragedy. Whilst we ask the Lord in this prayer for help in the various trials of life, our experience in this is vital when it comes to life's toughest trials. If we become used to the Lord's guidance in the general run of life and all its many experiences, we will perhaps be ready for the heavier blows when they come, for they will indeed come.

Ideas for what to do

- Write out both versions of the Lord's Prayer, from Matthew and from Luke, and use each of them for a period of time as a template for your prayers. After this time evaluate whether the version in Luke has any benefit over Matthew's version.
- Look up the version of the Lord's prayer that is used in your church, and ask yourself whether it conveys what you have learned about this great teaching of Jesus. If it does not, think about what you can do about this. Jesus surely did not teach just for us to get hooked on liturgical versions of them – or did He?

Questions (for use in groups)

1. Which version of the Lord's prayer is most memorable to you, Matthew's version or Luke's version? Which is best for use in church? Which is best for teaching young people, and why?
2. What does it mean to you to call for the coming of God's Kingdom?
3. How easy do you find it to forgive others, and can anyone in all honesty ask God for forgiveness if it is held back from others?

Final Prayer

Thank You, dear Jesus for the prayers You have given us in the Bible, and thank You especially for the 'Lord's Prayer'. May I not be such a creature of habit that I only use one version of it when You have given us at least two, and may I use Your advice to say these prayers to my daily benefit. **AMEN**
