

Jesus Discipling: The LORD's Prayer

"Pray then like this," Jesus tells his disciples in the famous Sermon on the Mount. In His classic teaching on prayer, Jesus disciplines his followers in the values, priorities and identity of the kingdom of God. There is no better way to grow as a disciple of Jesus than to pay careful attention to Jesus' prayer and let it shape your values, priorities and identity.

First, Jesus teaches you that that your life is prayer is to be secret, not for show (Matthew 6:5-6). The religious leaders of Jesus' day, the Pharisees, used their praying in public to establish their moral status and authority as godly people. Jesus says that they have already received their reward in full, i.e. they have won the respect and praise of other people. In contrast, Jesus' disciples are to be marked by a life of secret prayer motivated by their deep confidence that God their Heavenly Father will not only see them but meet them in their secret place of prayer.

Second, Jesus teaches you that prayer is not to a "religious formula" to put God in your debt. The different religions of the Gentiles stressed "many words." They believed the sheer amount of words they prayed, coupled with their earnestness and zeal in prayer worked like a lever to oblige God to act on their behalf. This is a "religious" approach to God because it assumes that by something we do – in this case our lengthy prayers – puts God in our debt. In contrast, Jesus says that your prayer life should be marked by the deep confidence that God is your Heavenly Father and that he knows what you need before you ask him.

Then Jesus shares what Christians call the "Lord's prayer." It is a remarkable prayer in that in very short phrases, Jesus sets forth the values and priorities and identity of the Kingdom of God. Let's consider each phrase in turn.

"Our Father in heaven." The Protestant Martin Luther once asked who can ever get beyond or grasp the depth of these words, "Our Father." In them Jesus' says that we are to come to God in the intimacy of a

son/daughter to their Father. As we do so, we must remember that we are part of a spiritual family ("*Our Father*") and that God is holy and exalted (*in heaven*). Rather than using the generic title "God," Christians should pray to God as "Our Father."

"Hallowed be your name." The first petition is that God's Name would be glorified and hallowed in our lives and world. God's glory is the top priority, the highest value, in the Kingdom of God. Jesus wants it to be our highest priority too!

"Your Kingdom come." The second petition is that God's kingdom – literally His reign – would come in every square inch of our world, starting with us. In this prayer, we are asking for God's reign to advance in our thought life, in the life of our mind, in our sexual life, in our relationships, in our workplace, in our families. We are also praying that our friends and family and colleagues would swear allegiance to Jesus. Like God's glory, the advance of God's kingdom is to take priority over every other thing in our life.

"Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." Of all the petitions, this is the one that expresses the most intimacy and vulnerability. In it the disciple says that he or she will trust God's will, even when they can't understand it or it hurts. This attitude of trust in God's will and submission to God's will was shown by Jesus when he prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane and said, "not my will but yours be done."

"Give us this day our daily bread." In this prayer, Jesus teaches his disciples not to trust in their money or America or their ability to control and secure their life, but to trust in God for their "daily bread." This looking to God to provide their basic needs is very countercultural on the east side where we feel so in control of our lives, where money can buy what we need and want. But in reality, ultimately even our daily bread is from the hand of God who gives us life itself. Jesus presses us to acknowledge this fact in our prayers.

“And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.” Jesus teaches that your sins put you in debt to God. The cost of God forgiving you of our debt of sin was the cross of Jesus Christ. It took the cross of Jesus to cancel your debt to sin and justly deserved punishment. As the people of the Cross, Jesus shapes us as a people of “hair trigger” forgiveness. We come to God asking for forgiveness, and we forgive those who have incurred a debt to us by their sin. By putting the petition in the order Jesus does, by placing our request of God’s forgiveness on our own practice of forgiving our debtors, He emphasizes the absolute need for forgiveness of our debtors to be a regular practice in our life; doing so gives us confidence that when we come to God and ask for forgiveness, God will say YES!

“And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.” The sons and daughters of God live in a dark world, where the Prince of darkness reign. In this last petition, Jesus teaches you to recognize this fact and ask God for His deliverance. Again, like the prayer for “daily bread” this petition goes very much against our modern, secular, technological society where we are skeptical of the existence of spiritual evil and are confident that we can solve our problems through technological advance. Jesus confronts this, and shapes us as a people who cry out to God for deliverance from evil daily.

It would be a mistake to make a “law” out of the LORD’s Prayer, to pray it in some kind of “rote way” as if it had some kind of magical power in itself. For at the very heart of the Lord’s prayer is not a “religious formula” but a Father to Son/Daughter relationship. The most radical thing that Jesus taught was that we could come to the Holy, Exalted, Majestic, Awesome God and call him our “Abba” Father. Not only did Jesus teach us to pray to God as our Father, but Jesus’ cross made it possible for us to come to God as our loving Father. One of the chief ways that we honor Jesus’ obedient life and sacrificial death on our behalf, is to let him usher us into the intimacy, vulnerability, dependence of being a son or daughter of God and praying to God as

our Father. Luther was right! Who can ever plumb the depths of meaning in the words: “Our Father.”

Individual Prayer Guide

Take time this week to pray the LORD’s prayer every day. Find a quiet place. Your bed before you get up for the day. A couch in your living room or your closet. Then use the Lord’s prayer to guide you in your prayer time. Take time to read/pray each word and phrase/petition. You can add your own words to them, but let them guide the priorities and values and intimacy of your prayers. Most importantly, embrace and rest in being a beloved son or daughter of God. Pray to God as “our Father” and as “my Father.” If it is hard to say the words “Father” of God because of a bad experience you had with your earthly father, then be sure to add “Our Father *in heaven.*” Remember that He is the holy God, exalted and pure. He is very different than your earthly Father.

Community Group Discussion and Prayer

1. What are the six petitions of the LORD’s prayer? What values, priorities and identity do they form in Christ’s disciples?
2. How have you used the LORD’s prayer in your prayer life?

Practicing Prayer in your Community Group

Take 20 (or so) minutes to pray. Pray through each phrase of the LORD’s prayer. Let its words guide you in your praying. Be sure to emphasize and rejoice in being a daughter of son of God.

3. What was hard/what was good about this time of “praying the LORD’s Prayer”?