



The Lord's Prayer is Meant to Be Lived

Jesus's disciples asked a lot of bad questions during their tenure with him: "Lord, do you want us to tell fire to come down from heaven and consume them?" (Luke 9:54). But they occasionally got it right: "Teach us to pray," they asked (Luke 11:1). Our Lord must have beamed with joy at the opportunity to teach his beloved friends how to enjoy fellowship with the Father.

So, with his disciples and an eager crowd gathered on the mountainside one afternoon, Jesus taught them to pray. The words that followed in Luke 11:2–4 are among the most famous ever spoken: "Our Father who art in heaven . . ."

The words are brief and recited easily by a child, but let's not be misled by the prayer's brevity or familiarity. The Lord's Prayer is rightly understood to be the most important prayer for Christians, but it's more than that. J.I. Packer cites Tertullian, who called it a "summary of the gospel," and Thomas Watson, who called it a "body of divinity." Packer himself said the Lord's Prayer is "a key to the whole business of living," adding, "What it means to be a Christian is nowhere clearer than here."

The Lord's Prayer is not just a prayer; it's a vision for life in Christ's inbreaking kingdom. It's an acknowledgment of the injustice, hunger, and evil of this broken world. It's a statement of faith, a call to worship, and a battle cry. It's a bold pleading for divine glory, social renewal, and heaven-on-earth transformation.

And thus, the Lord's Prayer is not just meant to be prayed; it's meant to be *lived*.

If we pray the prayer honestly, we'll be moved to embrace childlike dependence, wholehearted worship, love for one another, and participation in God's mission.

Our Posture: Childlike Dependence

In the Matthew 6 account, Jesus doesn't start with how to pray but how *not* to pray. Jesus contrasts two ways of approaching prayer. One is the posture of *performative spirituality*—doing religious activities to

be noticed by God and others. The second approach is *childlike dependence*—acknowledging our utter reliance on our Heavenly Father.

Yet the Lord's Prayer only makes sense within the context of childlike faith and dependence. We acknowledge it's God's kingdom we live in, not ours. We ask humbly for daily provision, knowing we can't ensure our own survival and flourishing apart from him. We beg for forgiveness, protection, and deliverance just as a young child asks for help and safety as she prepares to fall asleep at night.

There's no way to honestly live the Lord's Prayer without seeing that we're hungry, needy children at the feet of a good and loving Father.

Our Focus: Wholehearted Worship

The Lord's Prayer is Jesus's psalm. It follows the structure and flow of many psalms, including elements of praise, lament, supplication (praying for our own needs), and intercession (praying for others). It invites us out of self-centeredness and into a life of wholehearted worship.

To pray "hallowed be your name" is to approach God not only as Father but also as Lord and King. Jesus invites us to pray and live in a state of wholehearted worship, to walk before God genuinely, continually, and with undivided hearts. Wholehearted worship (Ps. 86:11) is the antidote to idolatry (Ex. 34:11–17), greed (Matt. 6:19–21), and moving on from our first love (Rev. 2:4).

To pray "hallowed be your name" is to center our lives on Jesus and his eternal kingdom. It's to reject living for the praise that comes from others. It's to reject the need to be popular or do grand things to build up our own names. It's to give the entirety of our beings to God and to discover the true joy and peace that comes in total submission to him.

Our Relationships: Love for One Another

It's an overlooked and beautiful dimension of the Lord's Prayer that no singular pronouns are used. There's no "I" or "me." Instead, Jesus invites us to pray with the corporate pronouns "us," "we," and "our."

The Lord's Prayer reorients our individualistic frame and helps us to admit and savor how interconnected we are with the church. By shifting our prayers from singular to corporate, Jesus reminds us of the second great commandment, to love your neighbor as yourself (Matt. 22:39), and his so-called new commandment, to love one another (John 13:34–35).

Praying the Lord's Prayer moves us toward our brothers and sisters' practical needs. To pray for our daily bread is to identify with fellow believers who lack resources, peace, and hope. To pray for forgiveness is to admit we often mistreat one another and must return to each other, again and again, to forgive and pull up the ugly weeds of bitterness.

To pray the Lord's Prayer honestly is to be moved to love one another quickly and comprehensively.

Our Mission: Participation in God's Work

Ultimately, we cannot pray the Lord's Prayer without stepping into our broken world as Jesus's disciples. The Lord's Prayer empowers us to participate in Jesus's work and fulfill God's world mission. We aren't just praying for God's name to be hallowed or his kingdom to come only in the church but "on earth as it is in heaven." Just as these words lead us to love one another in the church, they also call us to share Christ's love with those outside the church.

To pray "give us today our daily bread" is to identify with the hunger (physical and spiritual) of those around the world, moving us to feed the hungry and fight against global poverty. To pray for forgiveness ("forgive us our debts") and *from* forgiveness ("as we also have forgiven our debtors") means we'll often have to seek the forgiveness of our neighbors and coworkers. To pray "deliver us from evil" moves us to work for the deliverance of others from the Evil One's cruel and unjust schemes.

To pray and live the Lord's Prayer is to fulfill the mission Christ prayed over us at the Last Supper: "As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world" (John 17:18).

As Frederick Buechner put it,

"We do well not to pray the Lord's Prayer lightly. It takes guts to pray it at all. To speak those words is to invite the tiger out of the cage, to

unleash a power that makes atomic power look like a warm breeze."

Buechner reminds us that the Lord's Prayer is a song of promise that will one day be fulfilled. One day, it *will be* on earth as it is in heaven. All shall be well. Until then, we pray.