

The Lord's Prayer

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[0 : 0 0] I'll pray for us. Father, please help us as we seek to understand your word today, be at work in us, that I might both speak it and that we might hear it, and Father, that we might respond rightly to you.

We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, friends, I want to start off today by urging you to face reality with me.

And the specific reality that I want you to acknowledge is that our world is a world that is out of plumb. That is, our world is a world where good does not always triumph. You don't have to look very far. In fact, most days you don't have to look beyond the first page of the paper.

It is a world where people suffer. It is a world where God is often mocked. It is a place where relationships are frequently fractured. It is a place where I yearn to be other than I am.

Where often I yearn to be for things to be other than they are with me and with others. That is the reality of life, isn't it, friends? The world is not as we think it ought to be, and even as under God we think it should be.

[1 : 1 4] That is the reality of life. And if you're like me, then you wonder how should we follow Jesus in such a world as that? How should we be God's children in a fallen world?

And more than that, how and what should we pray in such a world as this? So as we face our world, and as we face our place in it, as we face relationships, we ask how should we come before God, and what should we say to him in a world that looks like this?

And that is how the disciples felt. And today we're going to look at how Jesus taught them to pray. And at the centre of what Jesus says is verses 12 and 13. That section that we've come to know is the Lord's Prayer, and we here as Anglicans, we tend to pray it each week.

But in order to understand the Lord's Prayer, you need to understand it in its context. So we're going to start doing that work together. So please open your Bibles with me. No matter how well you know the Lord's Prayer, open your Bibles and have a look at chapter 6, verses 5 to 6.

Look at what Jesus says. He says these words. If I was to just summarise what I think Jesus is saying here, it is this.

[2 : 4 6] That when you pray, you are not to have your eyes on others, but on God himself. That is the sort of prayer that gives God his proper place.

When our concentration is on him, not on how we are viewed, nor even on who we are. The sort of prayer that pleases God is one that looks toward him.

That is one that he looks at with favour. Now look at verses 7 and 8. And when you pray, Jesus says, do not keep on babbling like the pagans, for they think they'll be heard because of their many words.

Don't be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. Now within the Bible, we have a great example of pagan prayer. Let me tell you where it's from.

It's from 1 Kings chapter 18. It's the time of Elijah the prophet. And he's engaged in conflict with the prophets of the false god, Baal, who was a storm god.

[3 : 43] So a god of lightning and rain and so on. And anyway, what Elijah does is he sets up a contest to show who is the real god. He says, look, what we'll do is we'll each set up an altar.

We'll put a sacrificial animal on it. And then the prophets of Baal, well, you'll pray and you'll ask God to send down fire to ignite the sacrifice. And then I, Elijah, will do the same.

I'll put up a sacrificial animal on an altar. Anyway, the contest is agreed to. And the prophets of Baal start calling upon their god. And they go at it all day long.

And there's no response from their god. Then they start dancing before their god. And Elijah takes advantage of them. He starts mocking them. And so they start shouting louder and louder and louder.

And they begin to go into a prophetic frenzy. They begin cutting themselves with swords. You know, not unlike you see in some parts of the world today. With swords and spears cutting themselves, piercing their body.

[4 : 42] They enter into this frenzy. And nothing happens. And eventually it's Elijah's turn. And he makes his altar. And he digs a ditch around it. And then three times they pour water on the altar.

And it flows down into the ditch. And then Elijah prays a short, simple prayer. Asking God to act. And immediately the fire from God falls on and burns up the sacrifice.

The wood, the stones, the soil. Even licks up the water in the ditch. Friends, that's the difference between a real god and a false god. And Jesus is talking about that real god here.

You see, the real god is not the god of pagans. Pagans have no assurance that God is a God who knows them and loves them. So they need to persuade God.

They need to pressure him into listening. Even when I was young as a Christian, I used to try and do this. You know, you sort of grit your teeth, clench your fists, and you believe as hard as you can, thinking that that's going to make God answer.

[5 : 46] No. You don't need to dance. You don't need to babble. You don't need to repeat things endlessly. You don't need to perform religious exercises, say mantras, grit your teeth, clench your fists, so that something has to happen with this god.

Now, our god is a living god, friends. He cares. He listens. He doesn't need persuasion. You just have to ask him.

Jesus is clear. You don't need all of that other stuff. As he will go on to say in Matthew 7, 7 to 17, our god is a father who delights to give good gifts to his children.

He doesn't need to be cajoled or persuaded to give good gifts to his children. And that brings us to the next point. Have a look at the first part of the Lord's Prayer. As you do, I want you to consider what your view of God is.

Do you view God, perhaps, as a distant, heavenly God who's somehow out to make life as hard as possible for you? In other words, do you view God as a tyrant, perhaps?

[6 : 53] I know you'd never say that. But in the back of your brain, perhaps you might. Or is God like the one who's presented here? That is, he is in heaven, but he's not distant.

Nor is he tyrannical. He is a father, a loving father. So we come to the first three points of the Lord's Prayer. And as we do, we should have in the background of our minds the things we've learned so far.

Pray with your eye on God and not on yourself or others. Pray with confidence, knowing God's keen to listen. Three, be aware God's a loving father who seeks only good for his children.

You can see what's going on as you begin to come to the Lord's Prayer, can't you? Jesus is painting a picture that's relationally full. We have a God we can approach as children dependent upon him.

We have an intimate relationship with him like that of a child and a father. And that's how you enter the Lord's Prayer. So, now let's have a look at, if that's the how we come, then what's the content of our prayers?

[7 : 55] What should we pray? Well, in the Lord's Prayer, Jesus gives a model of prayer, and I want you to notice a few things about it. First, notice some things about the structure.

Just have a quick squiz, you know, run through the Lord's Prayer. It has an introduction and is divided into two sections. The first half are your prayers. That is, for God and his kingdom.

And those prayers have a conclusion, on earth as it is in heaven. The next set of prayers, the second half, are our prayers. That is, for us and for our needs.

Now, let's look at what those prayers mean. Let's look at the first three, because I think as I explain them to you, I think I'd like to just push them a little bit, perhaps, beyond what we normally consider.

The way to read these prayers is to read them in the light of their conclusion, on earth as it is in heaven. And the point is, you see, when you think about heaven, what is heaven like?

[8 : 55] Heaven is a place where God's name is hallowed, his dominion is exercised, and his will is done. It is a place where everything is as God would have it be. But that is not how we presently see the world, is it?

Heaven, in many ways, still looks a bit like being there somewhere else, a place of God and a place where God is king and recognised as king. But the earth we see now is not a place that currently recognises God or his son as king.

It's a place of humans, isn't it? It's a place where, I mean, that's what we read about in our newspapers, a place where humans rule, where humanity is king or queen, where humans recognise no one but themselves, and they go about their own wicked way.

Can you see, therefore, the thrust of these first three prayers? They represent a yearning for the realities of God that exist in heaven to be here on earth.

They are a cry for God to act in his world, to restore things to be the way that God has ordained them to be. Now let's have a look at the detail of these three prayers.

[9 : 59] First, God, act to make your name holy. Your name be holy. Hallowed be your name. Let me give you some background to this, which comes out of the Ezekiel passage that we read.

In the Old Testament, God's name is tantamount to his purpose and to his person. In the Old Testament, the Old Testament says that through sin, God's name is profaned or rejected or not hallowed.

When people sin, you see, they are not recognising that God is the king and he is to be recognised and served as the holy one. The Old Testament prophets, therefore, look forward to a time when Israel will stop profaning the name of God and live under his holy rule, as they were designed to.

They realise there would be a day in the future when God would act, when he'd save his people, when he'd act to punish those who have profaned his name.

He will at the same time punish those who have profaned his name and that's what this prayer is about. You see, in the end it is saying, God, do it now. Act now to make your name holy.

[11 : 15] Act to do away with those who are profaning it. Act to bring glory to yourself now so that the world will recognise you are rightly God.

Sin will finish. Your name will no longer be profaned. In the end, when you pray this prayer, what are you praying for? You're praying for all of heaven to be enacted here on earth.

In one sense, you're praying for the end of the world as it currently is and for God's full kingdom to be displayed here on earth.

It is praying for God to act and to act so that earth will reflect heaven. It is to sow, you're saying, sow all to the world that your name is no longer profaned but hallowed.

When will that happen, friends? It'll happen at the end of time, won't it? Now let's have a look at the second request. This second says, God, act to bring in your kingdom.

[12 : 12] Your kingdom come. Background? Jews yearned for the kingdom. They, of course, expected it to be a political kingdom. They expected that its coming would herald the end of the world and the coming of a new age.

Jesus took a slightly different view. He saw it as something like this. He is saying that we should pray for the coming of this kingdom and that we should pray not for man's kingdom but human's kingdom or not humans, sorry, for his kingdom.

Ultimately, though that means that we're praying for God to invade human beings and set up his kingdom within their lives, in the end, we're also praying for the end of the world when we pray your kingdom come.

It is to pray for God to act so that earth will reflect heaven, that God's kingdom, not human kingdoms, will be dominant in the world. In the end, for that to happen, humanity's got to be totally transformed and Christ has to come as king and ruler, not only in our individual lives but in the life of the world as a whole.

So the third prayer is we should pray, God, let your will be done. God, act to bring about your will. The background, God's will for history, is that human beings live under his rule, that all things are summed up under Christ, Ephesians 1.

[13 : 35] It is that humans live in right relationship with God, that they live in right relationship with each other. And the gospel has declared that this is beginning now. With Jesus it is possible, but the full accomplishment will only come with the doing away of sin and of Satan.

So in the end, if you can hear what I'm saying, to pray this prayer is in the end to pray for the end, for God to act, to act so that earth will reflect heaven, to so order the world that his will be recognized and done.

So let me make it clear, I think in the end to pray these first three prayers is to ultimately pray for a new world, for a new heaven and earth, where righteousness dwells, where God is seen to be king, and he rules, and he set his son as king over the world.

You see, it is to pray for an end to a world where humanity rules, where evil is dominant, where injustice is prevalent, where sorrow is endemic, where tears are a necessary part of life, and where suffering is par for the course.

You see, if you pray for these things that Jesus says in these first three prayers, you are, in other words, praying for God to throw out Satan, to judge sinners, to vindicate his children, to save his people, and to abolish sin.

[15 : 04] Can you see what's going on in the first half of this prayer? This model prayer. It is thoroughly Christian. It is for Christians who wait for God's son to come from heaven, who wait for Jesus to come and rescue us from the wrath to come.

To be Christian is to say, Maranatha, come Lord Jesus. To be Christian is to wait for the forthcoming of these three prayers in their fullness.

that is for the blessed hope, the glorious appearing of our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ. To be Christian is to cry out, How long, O Lord, before these things are set right and these things come into place?

It is to echo the final words of the New Testament. Amen, come Lord Jesus. Let's move, though, on to the next section. In the next section, we concentrate on praying for ourselves and our needs.

And in one sense, this section is far more straightforward. These prayers are easier to understand. However, the first thing I want you to notice is there's a profound difference in focus of them. The first three requests had their focus in the end on the future.

[16 : 18] The second three have their focus on the present. This is very important to notice. You see, what's being said is only when your focus is as in the first three prayers, that is on God and His kingdom, can you rightly approach the present.

So we could make our next point this. If we get our focus on God right and His purpose right, then we'll see our own needs in proper perspective.

And you'll see what I mean by this as I go on. I think that's exactly what's happening in the second half of the Lord's Prayer. Jesus goes on to tell us what sorts of things we'll pray for if our focus is on God and His kingdom.

What will you pray for? Well, you'll pray for bread for today. I think this is a request that God would supply what you need to keep alive. It is a prayer for the necessities of life.

You see, I wonder if you can see the point. If you have the kingdom of God in mind, if you see that the end of the world is right around the corner, then you won't be praying so much for wealth and luxury and a great job and a terrific career and more money, will you?

[17 : 24] No, instead you'll be praying for what you need to live. So it is with Paul later in the New Testament. He says, if we have food and clothing with these, we shall be content.

That's the prayer of the kingdom person. God, give me enough to survive. Give me the necessities of life. Second, there's a prayer for forgiveness. Jesus urged us to pray that God will forgive us.

You see, Jesus knows that our real need in this present world is to be right with God so that we might meet his coming kingdom rightly.

Our prayer ought to be, please make this a reality. Can you see the point? If you've got the kingdom in mind, if you see that the end of the world is just right around the corner, then you won't focus your prayers so much on sickness or coughs and colds, all those things are right.

It's just right for me to pray that God would give me back my voice. Entirely appropriate. But if the kingdom was to come today, it would be somewhat of an irrelevancy, wouldn't it?

[18 : 31] Because my throat and so on would be healed instantaneously. It would be gone. And not only that, but every other problem that I have would be as well.

You see, you pray about the thing you really need. Forgiveness. That's the prayer of the kingdom person. God, please forgive me. Help me to forgive others even as you have forgiven me.

Third, lead us not into temptation. What's that a prayer for? It's a prayer for deliverance and protection. A prayer that God would deliver and protect us from the things that would keep us away from Him.

It's a prayer that God would deliver and protect us from the things that would drag us away from our relationship with Him. Can you see the point? If you have the kingdom in mind, if you see that the end of the world is right around the corner, then you won't be praying so much for deliverance from poverty.

It's a good thing to pray for. You won't be primarily praying for that though. You won't be primarily praying for protection from the difficulties of life.

[19 : 35] No, because they will pass away when the Lord comes. Instead, you'll pray for your need to stay in relationship with Him. You'll be praying for protection from the evil one who would seek to drag you away.

That's the prayer of the kingdom person. God, deliver me from the one who's constantly trying to separate me from you. Keep me from the evil one and from temptation.

So that's our next point. We should pray for our own needs but not lose focus that our most desperate need is for a good relationship with God.

So there's a quick summary of the Lord's Prayer. The question is what are we going to do about it? What's the right reaction to the teaching of Jesus? How does Jesus' teaching change our prayer, our attitudes?

How should we modify our actions in the light of His words? Well, the first thing to do is to put yourself personally under the spotlight of this prayer. You see, the first thing I want you to notice is that it's not, the Lord's Prayer is not the sort of prayer you'd want to pray if you're out of relationship with God or other people.

[20 : 45] Is it? I wonder if you've watched those older movies. They don't do it so much these days but you remember those movies where someone's died and you've buried them and you don't quite know what to do and there is one of two things you do in the older movies.

One is to recite the 23rd Psalm, isn't it? The Lord's my shepherd. What's the other one? It's to say the Lord's Prayer. But actually if you're out of relationship with God, it's the very last prayer you should be praying.

Why? It's a prayer for people who are Christian, not Christian, not non-Christian. It is a prayer for people who have God as their loving Father. And when they pray it, it's a prayer that God would continue to be at work in history, to bring in His kingdom in the present and in the future, that God would make things on earth as they are in heaven, that He'll bring about the end of the earth with all its suffering and decay.

It's a prayer that He'll replace the corrupt and evil world with a new heaven and a new earth in which God is King, where God is King and where tears and suffering are banished forever. But a world like that has no place for people who don't believe in Jesus, if you know what I mean, for people who are rejecting Him and rebelling against Him.

It's not a prayer you want to be praying, if you're not willing to do that. Because to pray for God's kingdom to come, for His name to be honoured, is a prayer for people like you.

[22 : 13] to be put out of His presence. It's sad, isn't it? But that's what it is in the end. You see, it's a prayer for us. It's a prayer for us as the children of God and we pray it with gusto.

It is for Christians as they wait for God to set things right as they know He will. It is a prayer that He'll supply their needs while they wait. It is a prayer that He'd forgive them, that He'd help them forgive others because were He to come, He would judge us for our lack of forgiveness of others, that He would keep us from the hour of testing, that He would keep us from the forces of evil that would drag us away from our Father.

Please understand what I'm saying. It's not a prayer for you if you're not Christian. If God is not your Father, you won't want to be praying this prayer unless you're willing to become His Son.

If you're not a child of God, it's not a prayer for you. In your case, it would be a prayer to call down judgment upon yourself. So where are you?

If you're not a Christian here today, think about this. Are you a person who can pray this prayer without fear? prayer? If you're not, don't pray it yet.

[23 : 35] Come to the Lord Jesus, bow before Him, seek His forgiveness, and then pray it with all its fullness. Are you a person who longs for God's King to be fulfilled in your life and in the world?

As a Christian, you are, so pray it with strength. Second thing I want to do is to think about how this principle should filter down into our prayer lives. And I'm going to repeat some things I've said before, but that's okay.

How should the teaching of Jesus change our pattern of prayer? How should it be a model for our prayers? How can we work out how to let this Word of God do what God intends it to do, that is change the way we think and the way that we act and the way that we pray?

Well, let me suggest the way in which it's changed the way I pray, and this may help you. In my mind, I have two or three categories of prayers. Sometimes when I think about prayer, I think about it in terms of three columns.

First column is God's glory. These are the prayers that are the prayers of the first half of the Lord's prayer, all about God, his kingdom, his glory. These prayers, I think, are the bread and butter of our prayer life.

[24 : 52] Second column should be headed, my eternal needs. prayers. These prayers are prayers for the things that I need and that my friends and family need in order to be able to stand before God on the last day.

These are the sorts of things that Jesus prays for in the second half of the Lord's prayer. And the third column would be my desires. That is, the things that I would like to have, the things that have to do with my daily life, the things that are to do with life and health and safety, these things may not be essential for me in the end.

Nevertheless, they are things that God wants me to bring to him and they are things that he is interested in. We don't know whether he wants them or not for us, but we do know that he wants us to talk about these things.

Now, the last point I want to make today is that my order of priority in those prayers is from one to three, from God's glory to my desires. column three indicates the things I should pray for if I run out of time.

My own view is that column three is the focus of most of our prayers. Is that not true? That is, most of our prayers are focused on column three. I want us to urge us to switch things around a little bit.

[26 : 15] Nothing wrong with praying for column three and sometimes, like the psalmist, it will be the focus of your prayers because you are in desperate straits. Nothing wrong with that.

But the bread and butter, the general direction, is to focus on God's glory first. The things we need in order to be able to face him on the last day, and those other things as well.

Pray for everything, but try and put some order in it, and God's glory and the purposes of his son ought to be at the forefront of that. Let's pray.

Father, we thank you for this prayer that your son has taught us. Father, we pray that we might have your glory and honour at the forefront of our prayer lives, that we pray for those things that we need in order to be able to face you on the last day and be sustained in life in the present.

We pray, Father, that you would help us bring all things before you. And, Father, we pray that you'd help us to structure our prayer lives so that they reflect the prayer that the Lord himself taught us.

[27 : 31] And we pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. bless you.