

# The Lord's Prayer as a School for Prayer

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, let's bow our heads in our school for prayer this morning and pray together before we begin.

Lord, teach us to pray. Amen. I don't know if this ever happens to you, but I caught myself in church a few weeks ago thinking about how very odd a thing it actually is for a huge room full of 21st century adults to be standing there and addressing and singing to an invisible deity.

In a world that ignores God, which encourages our own sinful and compulsive tendency to live without reference to God, prayer becomes a pretty central and defining characteristic of what it means to be a Christian.

It's one of the first things I noticed when on August 28, 1980, one of the first things I noticed when I came to faith as a teenager that suddenly I wanted to pray.

I wanted to do this. I wanted to worship. It was a miracle. The primary language of the church at its very heart is this rather strange language of prayer and worship.

[ 1 : 28 ] God's gift to us in Christ so that we can enjoy the fellowship with him that we were made for. But it's hard to pray. It's especially hard to maintain a discipline of private prayer.

It's even harder to be a prayerful person, to live on this horizontal and vertical dimension all the time, even though, as we said earlier, that's what we were made for. The scriptures testify to this all over the place.

The Desert Fathers were pretty keenly aware of this struggle we have to be prayerful people in the fourth century. And some of the brothers once asked Abba Agathon, they asked him, amongst all good works, which is the virtue which requires the greatest effort?

And he answered, forgive me, but I think there's no labor greater than that of prayer to God. For every time a man wants to pray, his enemies, the demons, want to prevent him.

For they know that it is only by turning him from prayer that they can hinder. His journey. Whatever good work a man undertakes, if he perseveres in it, he will attain rest.

[ 2 : 32 ] But prayer is warfare to the last breath. As we begin the Lenten season, it's appropriate for all of us to acknowledge the real state of affairs in our hearts when it comes to prayer.

Many of us feel a crippling burden of guilt, or at least a bit of unease, when it comes to our prayer lives. We have all kinds of excuses for this. You know, it's the B word. We're busy. We have full lives, sometimes frantic lives.

The pressures, the stresses of living in a fast-paced culture like ours means that prayer can so easily become one more thing on the to-do list that we can never seem to make time for, one more place where we feel as though we're not measuring up.

Some of us might be fooling ourselves about our prayerlessness because we like to talk about prayer. We like to read about prayer. We like to assure others of our prayers for them, and so we think we're actually praying more than we do.

And still others of us are filled with an intense longing for prayer and intimacy with God, and yet somehow the numbing realities of so many demands on our time and our emotional energy, so many responsibilities to carry, so many hats to wear, make us inconsistent and only half serious about the practice of prayer, resentful about the encumbrances of everyday life.

[ 3 : 50 ] And sometimes our own deep loneliness or alienation from others can make us feel cut off from God too. And in a group this size, there could be a few of us here who feel like they're caving in inside and their prayers are stuck in their throat.

Well, whatever the case, probably if an infrared prayer camera could be directed on most of our Christian communities, very little actual prayer would show up.

And of course, it will always be this way if we're construing prayer as an extra to add on to a busy life, or just sort of a little too high up on Maslow's hierarchy of needs for those of us who are just trying to survive till next week.

Despite widespread support for prayer, most of us don't learn to pray until we learn that we need to pray, until we can say with the psalm, my soul clings to the Lord.

So there are many questions to ask. Why don't we pray? How do we pray? And finally, if you say any familiar word, enough times you can lose a grip on just what it means.

[ 4 : 58 ] What is prayer anyway? In spite of the secular sea that is all around us, it's very trendy to be spiritual these days in a generic kind of way. So we need to ask, what is distinctive about Christian prayer?

The discussion of prayer is so great that it requires the Father to reveal it, his firstborn word to teach it, and the Spirit to enable us to think and speak rightly of so great a subject.

I didn't say that. Origen, in the 3rd century, very widely said that. The discussion of prayer is so great that it requires the Father to reveal it, his firstborn word to teach it, and the Spirit to enable us to think and speak rightly of so great a subject.

So there can be no better place to begin than to come alongside the disciple in Luke's Gospel, who after he watched Jesus at prayer one day, said, Lord, teach us to pray.

Jesus answered by teaching his disciples a prayer, which will be very familiar to any good Anglican, and even to a lot of bad ones, the Lord's Prayer. As Anglicans, we say this prayer when we worship together, and in so doing, we're in continuity with the vast majority of Christians through church history and around the world who make use of the very words of Jesus to pray together when they gather.

[ 6 : 20 ] The early Christians took this Lord's Prayer very seriously. Candidates for baptism were taught this prayer, and it was regarded with great pride and awe.

It was a badge of discipleship and belonging to the Christian community. And we know definitely that by the 4th century, the Lord's Prayer had also found a place in regular use in the celebration of Holy Communion.

So the Lord's Prayer has been central in Christian liturgy and devotion down through the centuries to the present day here at St. John's. Even a Protestant reformer like Martin Luther, for instance, who might have been inclined to pounce on things like vain repetition in prayer, understood the Lord's Prayer to be effective as a prayer, as a liturgical text.

Well, alongside its function, then, as a set prayer in worship and devotion, this prayer given to us by Jesus has also had an equally long history as a text of Scripture used as a guide to prayer or a biblical pattern of prayer.

It's this second use of the Lord's Prayer that I want to focus on this morning. And I'd like to share with you just some of the things I've learned as I've come to the Lord's Prayer as a school for prayer.

[ 7 : 31 ] I've had the feeling as I've prepared this of just being delighted again and yet overwhelmed with all there is to be gained from studying this prayer and all its facets, its many levels.

And I'm very aware that I've hardly begun. This is a school for prayer that can function like a kindergarten for new believers who need basic instruction in prayer, but also like a graduate school for those who are ready to plumb the doubt.

Studying the Lord's Prayer is a lot like the experience I had last summer when I took our children blueberry picking in Abbotsford. Has anyone ever picked blueberries in Abbotsford? Yes. Okay, you'll know what I'm talking about then.

Rows and rows and rows of blueberry bushes stretching into the distance, loaded, heavy, with ripe blueberries just ready to fall off their stems into your hands.

And there we were with our few little buckets in just an hour or so to see what we could do. Our time together here will be a bit like that kind of blueberry picking too. Hopefully, we can come away with a little bit of ripe fruit from this very abundant field in our time together as we pause and we allow ourselves to get past the wonderful cadences and familiarity of this prayer to be confronted and encouraged, not just by the Lord's Prayer for us, but by God's Word to us.

[ 8 : 49 ] So as we go along, you'll notice that I've raided the shelves of my church historian husband in order to gather around me a great cloud of witness to the power and dynamism of the Lord's Prayer.

I wanted to bring the voices of some of the great doctors of the church to our session this morning. Voices like Tertullian, who called this prayer the epitome or the summary of the whole gospel. Or Augustine, who called it the spirit. The source of all other prayers. And Martin Luther, who once said, I'm convinced that when a Christian rightly prays the Lord's Prayer at any time, his praying is more than adequate.

So these great teachers and others will accompany us as we enter the door of our school for prayer this morning and begin by looking, first of all, at the context of the Lord's Prayer in Scripture.

The Lord's Prayer turns up in two places in the New Testament. In Matthew's Gospel in Chapter 6, this is from the NIV. And in Matthew's Gospel, it turns up in the center, like a jewel in the center of Matthew's Sermon on the Mount, Jesus' Sermon on the Mount in Matthew.

[10:02] And in Chapter 11 of Luke's Gospel, just right after the story about Mary and Martha and the one thing needful. So here are the two versions of the prayer, side by side.

So in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew, Jesus has just been giving instructions to his disciples about not doing acts of righteousness in order to be seen by others. Whether that's giving to the needy.

In Chapter 6, verse 2, he says, when you give to the needy, do not announce with trumpets. Or whether that's praying. In 6, verse 5, do not be like the hypocrites who love to pray standing in the synagogues.

Or whether that's like fasting. When you fast, do not look somber. The hypocrites do. They disfigure their faces to show men they're fasting. So it's in the context of this instruction about not doing acts of righteousness to be seen by others that the Lord's Prayer turns up.

And the repeated refrain is that these hypocrites have received their reward already in full. So we see the Lord's Prayer coming in the midst of instruction about the true motives, the true posture of believing prayer.

[11:10] Pray in secret, says Jesus. Don't babble on as if you're going to impress God because it's not as if God doesn't already know what you need. And pray like this. And here's the Lord's Prayer.

Pray in this way. In verse 9 of Chapter 6, he says, this then is how you should pray. Luke's version of the prayer, on the other hand, is Jesus' response to the request of one of his disciples, Lord, teach us to pray.

The disciple has just seen Jesus at prayer, and then he asks Jesus for instruction on prayer like John's disciples were given. Give us a prayer like that. And Jesus says in Chapter 11, verse 2, when you pray, say this.

Jesus is going to go on after this shorter version of the Lord's Prayer that we have in Luke. He's going to go on to give further instruction to his disciples to be persistent, to be persevering, to be deeply trusting in prayer.

This is where we have the verse, ask, and it will be given to you. Seek and you will find. So there's a different emphasis in each of these contexts. Can you see any other differences?

[12:19] Do you notice any other differences in the two prayers? Leaves a bit out. What in specific do you notice that is left out?

Deliver us from the evil one. That's right. The last line. The in heaven bit is left out. Anything else? Your will be done is left out.

Anything else? Since instead of this. Oh, you're good. Yeah. Give us today our... Give us each day. Give us today. Very similar. Mm-hmm. Yeah. Deliver us from the evil one is on the other side.

Father is... The Father's address is our Father in Matthew.

Now, these differences are very characteristic of differences between Matthew and Luke. In other cases, you notice similar differences between Matthew's version of the Beatitudes and Luke's more stripped-down, bare-bones version.

[13:20] Um... Which prayer is closer to the one we tend to say in church together? The one with God. Yeah. The Matthew's version.

That's right. Matthew's version was adopted, in fact, pretty much right away in the early church as the one that the church would use in its prayer together. And, um...

But I just think it's so wonderful that we have both of these versions of this model prayer in Scripture with just slightly different emphases and context. It suggests there are reasons why a biblical case can be made for both the use of this text as a set prayer for believers as well as a guide or a pattern for prayer.

It seems quite likely that Jesus taught this central prayer more than one time. So let's turn to Matthew's prayer, then. It's the prayer that most of us have memorized in one way or another. And just to keep us on our toes, I'm going to use a contemporary version this morning rather than the one we're familiar with in church. So let's keep this context in mind, remembering that the posture of prayer recommended by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount is one of deep humility and dependence and trust, the opposite of spiritual pride or spiritual achievement.

[14:34] we pray as children to our Heavenly Father, as subjects to a majestic King. And as we examine each of these petitions, this is going to surface over and over again as a key to understanding the prayer as a whole.

So we'll take each petition one by one and what we'll do is I'll just say or I guess pray really each line and then we'll pause for a minute. I want us to take the time to just sit in silence and let the words sink in.

let's go at this slowly. So here's the first petition or line addressing God.

Our Father who is in heaven. What do we notice about the Lord's Prayer?

What's one of the first things we notice? to draw on its structure as a model for prayer in general?

Well, one of the first things we notice is that we're not instructed to race into God's presence with our needs.

[15:46] Instead, the first half of this prayer focuses on God himself. Focuses on God. Lancelot Andrews was a 17th century Anglican bishop and in one of his 19 sermons on the Lord's Prayer he said this, if a man did make a prayer he would begin at daily bread.

But Christ in this prayer teaches us first to seek the kingdom of God just as we learn in the rest of the Sermon on the Mount. We start with God and his glory in prayer.

So in order to start with God we actually have to stop. We have to stop and be still long enough to shut out all the voices clamoring for our attention whether they come from the mass media an irritating colleague at work our children who are coming at us all at once a crowded inbox or the noise of our own crowded hearts.

we need to be still long enough to know to know that he is God and that he is really here. And what a relief it is when we do this just to let it dawn on us once again that it's not me at the center of the universe as Francis de Sales put it when you prepare to pray you must say with your whole heart and in your heart oh my heart my heart God is truly here.

Jesus has prefaced this prayer with an address that can aid us in doing just that a loving attention directed at God the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ and this God we discover here is our Father.

[17:34] The Kaddish I don't know if I'm saying that right I'm probably not but it was an Aramaic synagogue prayer which concluded every synagogue service and it would have been very familiar to Jesus' disciples this sort of prayer it has some striking similarities to the Lord's prayer since it went something like hallowed be his great name in the world which he created according to his will may he establish his kingdom during your life even speedily and soon so say amen and yet what would have been a radical departure from the familiar for Jesus' Jewish hearers is the invitation to join him in addressing God as Abba dear father an intimate address implying confidence love even boldness and trust rising directly out of Jesus' own unique relationship with the father Calvin said this actually my son Sam was looking over my shoulder when I had Calvin's name written down he said mom do you mean John Calvin there he said yeah

I do Sam and he said well maybe you should tell them because they might get confused that you mean Calvin and Hobbes so I thought I would just make that distinction for you here yes this is John Calvin who said this he said by the great sweetness of this name our father he frees us from all distrust since no greater feeling of love can be found elsewhere than in the father it means that all of the petitions in this prayer are framed in this atmosphere of trust in God the father of our Lord Jesus Christ a point that's underlined in Luke's gospel which of you fathers if your son asks for a fish will give him a snake instead or if he asks for an egg will give him a scorpion God knows how to give good gifts in a broken world and of course the father named here is our father we come to the father through Christ in the fellowship of his people down through the ages all over the world with the people sitting beside me at church

Sunday by Sunday even the ones who annoy me or scare me maybe especially them above all else said Cyprian in the third century the teacher of peace and the master of unity does not wish us to pray individualistically or selfishly as if we are concerned only about ourselves we do not say my

father in heaven or give me this day my daily bread Augustine said it this way here also there is an admonition to the rich and to those of noble birth so far as the world is concerned that when they have become Christians they should not comport themselves proudly towards the poor and the low of birth since together with them they call God our father an expression which they cannot truly and piously use unless they recognize that they themselves are brethren our father who is in heaven in heaven in the heavens the reminder here is not so much of God's address as if the prayer needs a postal code to arrive at its destination but we're speaking here of the majesty of the kingship of the one who is also our father there's a healthy tension then in the posture of the disciple who prays this prayer maintained between the picture of God as a loving father who is intimately concerned with the needs of his people and who is at the same time transcendent all powerful living Lord of the universe inspiring awe and reverence this is a reminder to acknowledge the reality of the heavenly realm where Jesus now reigns at the right hand of God a reality that intersects our own in ways that we can barely begin to grasp our father who is in heaven hallowed be your name in using a contemporary translation

I don't know about you but I still find myself jumping out of my skin want to insert a robust thy hallowed be thy name but what exactly does it mean to hallow God's name hallow is not a verb we come across much in daily life outside the Lord's prayer it's the verb form of the adjective holy pressed into service here we need a verb for holy when we pray that God's name would be treated as holy of course this implies not speaking irreverently of God but that's only the tip of a very large iceberg as many commentators have pointed out we aren't just wishing God well here you know hallowed be your name have a nice day hallowed be your name expresses the longing that God would have the honour he deserves we don't have to make his name holy as if it wasn't already holy but this is not acknowledged everywhere yet so implicit in this prayer and the next two as well in these two petitions is this wide horizon in view of the day when God will receive the honour and reverence he deserves when his name will be revered in all the earth the day when every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord so in the meantime it is a prayer as well for the holiness of God's people it would have been embedded fairly deeply in the consciousness of Jesus' disciples from their Old Testament scriptures that God's people can both revere and profane God's name by what they do by how they live as Dietrich Bonhoeffer put it this is a prayer that God would protect his holy gospel from being obscured and profaned by false doctrine and unholiness of living so to put it more negatively this means not falling into any grave sin and profaning the name of God we'll go into more detail about that in the second section of the prayer we'd probably spend the whole time talking about this one but for now we can focus on one aspect of this faithfulness in big and little tasks because most of us are attempting to live out the gospel day by day not in a grand way but in little things one of the books that I've well it used to be my favorite book but I've gone off George Eliot a little bit in the last few years but it's Middlemarch I don't know if some of you have read Middlemarch by George Eliot but Dorothea the heroine is one of the best of George Eliot's great-souled women in narrow circumstances she's made all these noble choices which were entirely misunderstood and the book closes with a remarkable commentary on her character [ 24 : 38 ] I'll just read it her finely touched spirit still had its spine issues though they were not widely visible her full nature like that river of which Cirrus broke the strength spent itself in channels which had no great name on the earth no great name on the earth but the effect of her being on those around her was incalculably diffusive for the good of the world is partly dependent on unhistoric acts and that things are not so ill with you and me as they might have been is half owing to the number who lived faithfully a hidden life and rest in unvisited tombs we live in a world which quite superficially values appearances instant results big successes high profile people and it's tough not to be seduced by this in the church and in the mission of the church there are many many small opportunities presented minute by minute to honour God's name small opportunities to suffer and to live out the gospel in hidden ways most of life for most of us is made up of these apparently unhistoric acts so when we miss the holy and the ordinary in the hidden places we're like Jacob who picked out the best campsite he could find on his way to Haran grabbed a stone for a pillow and then after God finally got his attention in a riveting dream woke up and said to himself surely the Lord is in this place and I knew it not how awesome is this place are you sleeping somewhere in your life is there a darkened room that needs this holy transfiguring light somewhere in your marriage your finances your ambitions for your children your willingness to share the gospel hallowed be your name your kingdom come your kingdom come with a church full of children is not wonderful the first half of the Lord's prayer has the day in view when all of these prayers will be

answered in their completion and as an expression of longing for the day when God will reign forever and ever we pray your kingdom come this petition this petition is the most explicit expression of the Christian hope in this prayer

Klaus Bachmühl once said that there are some things in the Christian life we need to be reminded about six times a day and I think this is probably one of them this prayer this hope of the kingdom coming constantly before us the hope the kingdom that's been inaugurated in Christ but is yet to be fulfilled and consummated this hope before us can help us to genuinely live as strangers and aliens on the earth it's easy to get cozy in this life and then to turn around and get angry when we feel like our rights to perfect health comfortable middle class lifestyle and happiness here and now are violated some of you have lived for a season outside your own country or for a very very long time outside the country in which you were born maybe some of you are expatriates right now and I remember very well what it felt like to be a stranger and an alien when we lived in the UK for five years it was unnerving to be an outside a foreigner to have the wrong accent and not to seem I just never seemed to know the right words to think I felt my tongue was this thick in my mouth half the time but it was even more unnerving after living there for five years altogether how coming home meant that home no longer felt like home in England people seemed so reserved at first and then when I got home I was put off by all this superficial friendliness you know in the shops you know please they're coming at me I'm just looking thanks please don't talk to me as though I'm your best friend thank you you know it was very unsettling but of course our citizenship is in heaven and we eagerly await a savior from there that unsettled I don't quite belong here this isn't my real home feeling is what we're getting ourselves into when we pray this prayer authentically God's kingdom will come whether we pray for it or not what we are asking for is to participate in that coming and in doing so the Holy Spirit is also training our hearts to long for it and to look for its coming in its fullness and when we look forward to a day we've all had this experience whether it's a wedding day or the arrival of a baby a graduation day we look forward to a day we think about it a lot we organize our priorities around that day our affection around it our choices and our lives in the present are concretely affected by how we envision the future so in the same way when we pray your kingdom come we're praying that God's kingdom would come for us now here in increasing measure that his kingly rule would be extended in us in the deep places of our sinful hearts and also through us through the mission of the church to our broken world so we know that it's not up to us to accomplish

God's agenda for him but he does allow us to participate and to participate mysteriously even through our prayers for this prayer for the coming of the kingdom your kingdom come your will be done on earth as it is in heaven your will be done on earth as it is in heaven Martin Luther said in his small catechism what does this mean and the answer is to be sure the good and gracious will of God is done without our prayer but we pray in this petition that it may also be done by us how is this done the answer when God curbs and destroys every evil counsel and purpose of the devil of this world and of our flesh which would hinder us from hallowing his name and prevent the coming of this kingdom and when he strengthens us and keeps us steadfast in his word and in faith even to the end this is his good and perfect and gracious will

Augustine said the man who serves you best is the one who is less intent on hearing from you what he wills to hear than on shaping his will according to what he hears from you so this prayer flows out of the last flows out of thy kingdom come God will be king when all the earth submits to his will some commentators especially modern ones point out that the on earth as in heaven bit could be taken to refer to all three of the preceding clauses so that we look for the day when all these things will be answered perfectly and everywhere we're praying at the same time that God's name be hallowed now his kingdom come here his will be done today God's will is something we do not only do when we obey what he commands of us but also in what we suffer Charles Wesley said once that it's given to the young and the strong to do God's will and to the old and the sick to suffer it so this is not actually an easy prayer then to pray honestly

[ 32 : 17 ] I think and it shouldn't be prayed glibly these are the very words that Jesus said in agony the garden of Gethsemane wow Teresa of Avila wisely used to say something like this if you if you are really honest and you look inside and you don't really want the will of God deep in your heart you can begin somewhere one step back and say I want to want your will oh God here's a good place to start if you're not able to start you know that quite that high up the mountain I want to want your will oh God even Jesus before he went to the cross said take this cup from me there are times

in our lives when saying this prayer from our hearts is like climbing a mountain or running a marathon I'm sure each of you has had a time like that it means sometimes the way of the cross and that sometimes means following Christ in the middle of pain it means drawing on the grace of Christ and the power of the Holy

Spirit for the inner resources to do the will of God John Wesley preached on the Sermon on the Mount and on the Lord's Prayer and he attached a hymn a nine stanza hymn to the end of his sermon on the Lord's Prayer and to the end and this one of the stanzas is a meditation on the doing of the will of God and it's a wonderful wonderful verse I'm going to read it for you here spirit spirit of grace and health and power fountain of light and love below abroad thine healing influence shower or all the nations let it flow inflame our hearts with perfect love in us the work of faith fulfill so not heaven's hosts shall swifter move than we on earth to do thy will your kingdom come your will be done on earth as it is in heaven so we're at the halfway mark and let's just revisit again the shape of this prayer just to remind ourselves about how it can teach us to shape our own life prayer in the first three petitions we've begun with

God it's what we would call theocentric we start with God with our eyes and hearts lifted up to the heavens even caught up into the heavens in the words of the benedictus we've been set free to worship God without fear set free from our sins to worship so it should be no surprise then that when we're praying again when we're praying this prayer honestly that the idols that remain in our hearts are often exposed in prayer there are times of course when the words of prayer are not just words that challenge our worldliness but they're also words of comfort strength we pray your kingdom come and that means that we have the day in view when God's kingship will be acknowledged by all when every tear will be wiped away and we need the reminder of this hope in the final victory of God's kingdom and righteousness when the evening news and the suffering of the world is just too much to bear and also when we're going through our own times of grief and loss and even

I think this word can be this can be a word of encouragement for something as apparently mundane as being tired being weary in our roles to pray hallowed be your name and your kingdom come your will be done is to keep the end and the purpose of it all in sight and to implicitly acknowledge that the world does not rest upon my shoulders we are more vulnerable after all when we are tired vulnerable to temptation to discouragement to anger and all kinds of ugly things so we've seen that the future is in view in the first half of the prayer with lots of implications for living a holy life right now but nevertheless it's not the future or the present that's really the focus of these petitions let's remember that it's God himself so now we turn not leaving God's glory behind as Calvin says but bringing our petitions down to earth now in the rest of the prayer now some Christians never do seem to come down to earth do they they seem to be up there in the super spiritual stratosphere even to the extent of blaming demonic powers and spiritualizing everything under the sun in order to avoid human responsibility others of us are so caught up in Christian activism in a needy world that it's hard to imagine squeezing in space for much reflective honesty about themselves before God at all but in the prayer given to us by

Jesus this vision of God's glory as the first and deepest concern of any disciple also gives us the aerial view of our condition that we need in order that we don't just run off at the mouth in prayer babbling meaninglessly to God about what we think we need like to some great counselor therapist in the sky and how he can support our carefully planned agendas by giving us what we want thank you the phrase on earth as it is in heaven I think may operate as a kind of hinge on which the prayer turns connecting heaven and earth since the last three petitions of the Lord's prayer have to do with the most important ways we're radically dependent on our heavenly father to meet our earthly needs God's perfection is now contrasted with our weakness our needs as pilgrim people are in the foreground now with the kingdom of God as our horizon the last half of the prayer reminds me of our son Sam's take on Bunyan's pilgrim's progress he said to me at breakfast one morning just out of the blue he said I remember in that book sometimes you have to take the hard way to get to the good things here we see yet again that in order to see ourselves as we are as needy people as radically dependent on the

[ 38 : 20 ] Lord this is you can see again and again this is the very opposite of doing acts of righteousness to be seen by people what could be further away radically dependent on the Lord this requires some humility and some courage I want to even suggest that humility and courage are much more foundational according to scripture than a habit to a habit of prayer much more

foundational to a habit of prayer and to prayerfulness than discipline some of the structured disciplined people I know still manage to keep prayer a rather safe exercise in their lives insulated from the broken and contrite spirit required of a true prayer of the Lord's prayer so on we go give us today our daily bread oh as we go through this prayer can't we just see that our heavenly father knows what we need the world is too much with us late and soon getting and spending we lay waste our power said William

Wordsworth North America and really all of the western developed world but here in its most pristine form consumerism is written all over us of course in letters almost too large to read I shop I shop I shop therefore I am and yet even here even in an affluent culture such as ours we're taught by Jesus himself to look to God in daily trust for all our material needs embedded in a culture which is dedicated to creating the illusion of ever more material needs so that we'll just spend the largest part of our waking hours dedicated to running around anxiously after these things we can experience a lot of static when we try to hear and we have a special task to trust God in the midst of middle class confusion about our material lives we're an anxious people and this prayer addresses those anxieties head on I just realized I have a lot of John Calvin in here but he had a lot of good things to say about this and he knew in the 16th century he knew that this was tough he said it is then no light exercise of faith for us to hope for these things from God which otherwise cause us such anxiety and we benefit greatly when we put off this faithlessness which clings to the bones of almost all men the fact that we ask that it be given us signifies that it is the simple and free gift of God however it may come to us even when it would seem to have been obtained by our own skill and diligence and supplied by our own hands for it is by his blessing alone that our labors truly prosper

Augustine put it this way when thou sayest give us this day our daily bread thou dost profess thyself to be God's beggar the beggar be not ashamed at this how rich soever any man be on earth he is still God's beggar the beggar takes his stand before the rich man's house but the rich man himself stands before the door of the great rich one so whether in extremity or in humble gratitude we pray for the provision of our daily needs give us today our daily bread and then forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us well Jesus clearly thought that this element of the prayer out of all the others needed some extra commentary

Matthew 6 14 says for if you forgive men when they sin against you your heavenly father will also forgive you but if you do not forgive men their sins your father will not forgive you so according to Jesus God's forgiveness of us is inextricably tied to our forgiveness of others this is not so much a condition for forgiveness the time and the sequence isn't the main point but just like with the parable of the unmerciful servant in Matthew 18 this is about the insincerity of a prayer of forgiveness from an unforgiving disciple I don't need to tell most of you that genuine Christian community is not nice easy or sweet Christians can have very very high expectations of one another ideals standards we can be easily disappointed in one another should this surprise us or shock us oh no after all we are still sinners and the enemy loves to sow division among us love it but it is often these very difficulties that drive us back to the cross back to grace apart from the love of God shed abroad in our hearts we are sunk relationally we experience this for instance in marriage living closely with another person

I once told a friend not long after I got married that being married is like living with a mirror and I don't always like what I see another friend of mine used to say to me that after she got married that she realized she wasn't as nice a person as she thought she was I thought that was a good way of putting it forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us is the reminder that we need to be realistic about the dark destructive and powerful pull of sin in our own lives the reformers recommended something they called lifelong repentance not just once a Christian conversion been there done that or for the really big sins but lifelong conversion the German pietists in the 17th century had a lovely term for this they called it daily gracious repentance a kind of habit of the heart before God a road to travel daily if we want to live by the gospel if our communities are going to reflect the grace of God on which they're based so mature Christians are keenly aware of the presence of sin of strong and sometimes surprising temptations temptations don't go away as we get older they just change they're concerned that they might have a few blind spots they're well acquainted with their own weaknesses and inadequacies without being crippled by these things or despairing about them because it's this very awareness that keeps a mature

[ 44 : 57 ] Christian at the cross utterly dependent dependent once again on what God has done for us in Christ we don't take a step forward without knowing this surely you desire truth in the inmost places we say in Psalm 51 our hearts are a tangle but only the Holy Spirit forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil as with all of the petitions in the last half of the Lord's Prayer if we read the reverse we're aware that we ask for provision in a broken world where there's so much deprivation for forgiveness because there remains a world of sin to battle in our own hearts and we ask that we be kept from succumbing to temptation we ask for deliverance not only from the evil inside ourselves but outside ourselves as Lancelot Andrews put it so well when we pray that we be led not into temptation we desire that we do no evil when we pray that we may be delivered from evil our desire is that we may suffer no evil watch and pray said Jesus at Gethsemane so that you will not fall into temptation most modern versions translate the words deliver us from evil as deliver us from the evil one to pray this way is to recognize that the source of evil is ultimately personal evil has its source in the evil one after quoting all of these many worthies to you this morning it's a line from a Bruce Coburn song that has come to mind you know John Calvin

Augustine Bruce Coburn it's a Bruce Coburn song that comes to mind when I think of the dangerous reality implied in the last petition here we are lovers in a dangerous time dangerous? yeah dangerous wow I thought I lived in lovely Vancouver home of the 2010 Olympics you know but the whole witness of scripture supports the reality behind this petition we are surrounded on every side by idols and the enemies of the gospel ultimately by a roaring lion prowling around looking for someone to devour you in these brief simple words of Jesus we're we're reminded both of our need to ask and taught just how to ask for the help we need to navigate with all these spiritual dangers on every side and we can ask together our own Daryl Johnson from Regent College has just written a wonderful contemporary meditation on the Lord's Prayer 57 words that changed the world and I highly recommend it it's a great Lent book for you where I've often been pointing out this morning again see we're in the blueberry patch again where I've often been pointing out this morning how praying this prayer changes us how God answers it by changing us

Daryl emphasizes the way in which this prayer prayed in faith can draw us into God's work of transforming the world through Christ praying the Lord's Prayer can raise our prayers immediately from this pernicious tendency to self-preoccupation raise it from self-absorption to the cosmic scope of God's mission in the world again John Calvin said our wisdom insofar as it ought to be deemed true and solid wisdom consists almost entirely of two parts the knowledge of God and of ourselves so the Lord's Prayer as a school for prayer is a rich source of exactly this sort of wisdom the knowledge of God and of ourselves dynamically intertwined as a biblical time-honored structure for a deepening life of prayer so it's no wonder that very early on Christians added a doxology to the Lord's Prayer in the second century there was already one attached every once in a while one very similar to the one we all know it's not at all hard to understand the ancient impulse to gather up these petitions in a resounding note of praise to God for the kingdom the power and the glory are yours now and forever

Amen Don't ask me any questions That's a good question I think I understand and you can help me out here those of you who know better than I do but I think I understand given the context of that word in Matthew's Gospel that he's talking about the kind of prayer which is given to impress God to earn something to earn the favor of other human beings or to try to win favor with God through the prayer itself in a sense it's depending not on God but on prayer or depending on prayer for an earthly reward of approval from people and that's the context don't do your acts of righteousness to be seen by men so maybe an equivalent in an evangelical context might be the person who tries to win approval from others for being spiritual tries to pray in such a way that it will impress other people and rather than stumbling out a prayer without thinking deeply about every single word you know when it's a prayer given in faith like that

[ 50 : 41 ] I think that can be distinguished from a prayer the kind of prayer that Jesus was talking about in Matthew 6 I think that's probably true maybe there's probably ways to err both directions and that's why the prayer for material needs is in the dead center of this prayer he you know when you think of Psalm 103 God knows our frame he knows that we are dust he knows that we are dependent on him not simply not just as sinners who need a savior but as creatures who need their creator we are absolutely dependent on him in very real terms and to recognize that every step of the way is an act of faith too and so there have been through church history I just noticed as I was

studying the prayer there have been many attempts to say at different points by different commentators the prayer for daily bread is not a prayer for real material needs at all it's a prayer simply for a spiritual need that God would meet our spiritual needs and I think that's an error in the opposite direction yeah we are children praying to our father he can say no like good fathers do yeah yeah yeah yeah yeah oh yes well there were many cans of worms that I didn't open up today but that was one of them that's right exactly and there's been a lot of debate about exactly you know different versions different translations have sometimes said and do not bring us into evil do not lead us into the time of trial there are many different ways people have tried to get around this trying to set God up as as as one who leads into temptation but I just think even of of after Jesus was baptized right there in scripture it says and the Holy Spirit led him into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil it's not like God is the author of the temptation he cannot author temptation or sin but but he can allow us times of trial and testing and he does and so we need to pray for his protection and rest on the promise that he never gives us any more than we can bear never allows any more than we can bear yeah okay go right ahead and I'll try not to give a silly answer yeah the Greek word in Matthew's gospel is a word is a word for debt but it's another word that really construes sin as a debt we owe and it needs to be paid it's really another word for sin but it is but it is a specific word that means debt and and then in in Luke's gospel the word is the more common word for sin hamartia that's right that's a very that's a very good point and I think it is a challenge to us in a sense all the petitions of this prayer are built on that one like a foundation as we said we're freed to worship a holy God to be a holy people and yet we yeah

I think I think it is a temptation just to be dulled by a secular the secular seat that we find ourselves in and be completely insensitive to to what what a grieving this is yeah hallowed be hallowed be thy name you're right I mean what a word you know yeah yeah we don't use it but I think it is again part of the reason we don't have a word like this is because a word a verb for making holy something holy is because it is such a unique thing to do and and we're pressured in all kinds of ways not to do it yeah and it's part of the enemy's strategy I think to try to make us think we're much more important than we are and much stronger than we are in the face of all this stuff yeah if you could really see how hopeless it was we'd be I think it was Richard Baxter that said know yourself and be prayerless if you can and and and and and and and