



Worksheet 12: Lord's Prayer

The Lord's Prayer is the most important and familiar prayer of the Christian faith. It is used around the world in multiple languages. When the first disciples asked Jesus, "Teach us to pray?" (Luke 11:1), he gave them this model prayer. The version in Matthew 6:9-15 is slightly longer than Luke 11:1-4. Since the earliest centuries the church has drawn on Matthew's version adding a concluding sentence, a doxology. By praying the Lord's Prayer we participate in the prayer of the whole church throughout time and space.



Present and Future Orientation

The Lord's Prayer has a strong focus on God's kingdom and the certainty of its final coming. We pray for God's future reign to come into the present. We do not pray to go to God's kingdom, rather that God's reign come on earth. And we petition God for current needs.

Structure of the Prayer

The Lord's Prayer is made up of three parts. First is the address to God, "Our Father in heaven." In Roman Catholic tradition the prayer is known as the 'Our Father'. God's transcendence (beyond-ness) is declared but also God's closeness. Just as Jesus called God by the intimate name of 'Abba, Father,' so we can call on God as our loving Parent. Next comes three 'your' statements in relation to God's name, kingdom and will. We honour God by our words and actions. We pray that God's reign of love, justice and peace will come. We ask that God's will for the well-being of all be carried out on earth as in heaven in the fulfilled realm of God. Our primary loyalty, beyond all other loyalties, is to God and God's will.

Second are petitions to God to meet our basic and deepest needs. These are requests in relation to 'us'. So we pray for daily bread which implies the necessities of life. We know we constantly come short of God's will, so we ask for forgiveness. In doing so we recognise that we in turn are to forgive others. The prayer recognises both those who sin and the 'sinned against'. We face various trials and temptations in life and so we ask to be saved from, or in, these times. The request is not that we never face any trials but that God will save us and enable us to come through them. We also ask to be delivered from evil. The greatest evil is to turn from God. Instead we pray to remain faithful to God and to become the person God wants us to be.

Third is the conclusion or doxology which reaffirms that God's reign has come in Jesus and will come in its fullness, that loving power and glory belong to God. God is the Creator, Redeemer and Fulfiller of all. So we say 'Amen', so be it, along with the whole church and with Jesus.



Note

This sheet is part of a series on theology in the 21st century. It is prepared for the Assembly by the Working Group on Doctrine as a discussion starter for small groups, in congregations, faith communities or other settings. It may also be used for personal reflection. Low resolution copies of this sheet can be downloaded free of charge from the Doctrine website: www.assembly.uca.org.au/cudw

Questions

- Recall a significant time when the Lord's Prayer was especially meaningful in your Christian life.
- Consider how you might use the Lord's Prayer as a source for meditation and a means of challenging your own life as a follower of Jesus. What does each petition mean for your living the Christian life?
- How can we avoid the Lord's Prayer becoming so familiar it loses its meaning?
- In what ways might we use the Lord's Prayer more creatively in worship?

Further Reading

Vicky Balabanski, 'An Earth Bible Reading of the Lord's Prayer; Matthew 6:9-13', in *The Earth Bible*, Vol. 1 (Sheffield University Press, 2000), pp151-161.

Karl Barth, *The Christian Life*, (Edinburgh: T. T. & Clark, 2004)

Leonardo Boff, *The Lord's Prayer*, (NY: Orbis, 1983)

John Dominic Crossan, *The Greatest Prayer*, (NY: Harper One, 2010)

Gerald O'Collins, *The Lord's Prayer*, (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2006)

N. T. Wright, *The Lord and his Prayer*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996)

William Willimon & Stanley Hauerwas, *Lord Teach Us: The Lord's Prayer and the Christian Life*, (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996)

Why are there different versions?

The traditional version in English goes back to the Book of Common Prayer (1662), while the modern version used in the UCA was endorsed in 1988 by the English Language Liturgical Consultation. Because the Lord's Prayer is a model prayer, not a set formula, each can play a part in the church's common life. One phrase in particular sounds significantly different. 'Lead us not into temptation' is now translated as 'save us from the time of trial.' While the former seems more literal, God does not lead us into temptation (James 1:13). Rather, we ask God to save us from trial or temptation, and if we are in it, pray that God will rescue us.

Shaped by Prayer

By praying the Lord's Prayer and reflecting on its content, we let it shape our lives to the way of Jesus and shape us as a community of his disciples. Praying the Lord's Prayer helps us to be attentive to the God to whom Jesus prayed and to the way God is at mission in the world.



Story

In a prison camp in WWII, on a cold dark evening - after a series of beatings, after the hundreds of prisoners of war had been marched before the camp commander and harangued for an hour, when the prisoners had been returned to their dark barracks and told to be quiet for the rest of the night, - someone, somewhere in one of the barracks began to say the Lord's Prayer. Some of his fellow prisoners lying next to him began to pray with him. Their prayer was overheard by prisoners in the next building who joined them. One by one, each set of barracks joined in the prayer until, as the prayer was ending with, "Thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory" hundreds of prisoners had joined their voices in a strong, growing, defiant prayer, reaching a thunderous, "Amen!" And then the camp was silent, but not before the tables had been turned, the prisoners had thrown off their chains, and a new world had been sighted, signalled and stated. (Willimon & Hauerwas, p.108)

Ways to use the Lord's Prayer

1. In personal devotions – remembering that in doing so we are invisibly linked to the 'groans and sighs' of humanity and all creation.
2. In groups as a common prayer – remembering that it is a communal prayer we were given. So we pray 'Our' Father in heaven... Where more than one language is spoken in your community, take the opportunity to pray the prayer in different languages.
3. In worship in various places in the liturgy where it is appropriate - particularly at the end of prayers of intercession and in Holy Communion.
4. In pastoral contexts – where people need to feel enveloped by the community and comfort of the church's faith.



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