

## How Now Shall We Pray?

### Rediscovering Jesus' message in the Lord's Prayer

By Sonya Snyder

One of our deepest longings is to be connected to something greater than ourselves, something that gives meaning to our lives, something that lives on forever in and with us. Prayer can be the conduit to the connection that we seek, and is, in the form closest to God's plan, satisfaction of the longing itself.

Jesus, throughout his three-year ministry, spent inordinate amounts of time in prayer, when compared to the time busy executives today spend in prayer. Perhaps it is more telling than we'd like to admit, that many of our modern priorities are not where they should be. Especially if Jesus, by his consistent example, thought prayer was critically important enough to make it a priority in his whirlwind, controversial, world-changing, brief ministry, perhaps we should consider it, too.

Jesus' example was so impressive that the disciples finally asked Him to teach them how to pray. His response took up a key portion of Matthew, Chapter 6, as He specifically detailed the outline of the perfect prayer that He offered as an example to His followers in verses 9-13.

While people today will often recite the words mindlessly in a group, or

even chant them repetitively without much thought, it doesn't diminish the value one can glean from the words – and the outline of them. It's a hungry Christian who takes the time to search the order of them, the focus of them, and how they were chosen for a broader understanding of who God is. It's a place in the Bible that offers the hungry Christian a meal. The Lord's Prayer is still possibly the most effective tool we have to teach our children and ourselves how and what to pray, if our focus is to do it God's way.

The purpose of prayer can be more than just asking our Lord and Savior for our daily needs, though those are admittedly important, and part of it. Primary is the need to know how to commune with God in a manner that satisfies... and satisfies beyond all earthly understanding. At the same time, being taught to be able to offer up prayers that are pleasing to and answered by God, is a gift that Jesus gave to the disciples, and ultimately through their writings, to millions the world over.

To begin the journey to learn how to pray, the learner must first be made aware that pride has no place in prayer. We must learn to- and be willing to- pray by God's rules, on God's timetable, aligned with God's will, for the purpose of

communicating and praising the Creator. The Lord's Prayer is a perfect place to begin this lesson, and the perfect place to rest in God's love to show us the way.

Let's take a look at each line of what Jesus gave us as His example. This "how to pray" model is like you're aunt's favorite recipe that never fails. Let's also see if, neatly gleaned from the beautifully clean and orderly pattern of the words, we can begin to establish alternatives to doling out stock and frivolously repetitive sentences to God - memorized sayings that sometimes have little meaning for our lives. Think of the absurdity to do otherwise - if you wouldn't talk to your best friend that way, why would you talk that way to the One who loves you more than your best friend ever could?

It is also important to know who you're going to be speaking to. Prayer was designed and breathed into us as a yearning for communion, for intimacy with our Creator. It was meant to be offered to God -- and not to be offered to any other.

It makes sense, then, to use the formula offered in the order and words of the prayer itself, by God Himself. The prayer can be a basis for all prayer language to our Father, who, in turn, will use our prayer language to assist His work in us -- His molding and shaping us into His image.

## The Lord's Prayer

Let's notice how the prayer is focused on the power and the glory of God, and not on man, and yet it begs an intimacy with the One being communicated to, again, found in the Holy Bible, in the book of Matthew, chapter 6 and verses 9-13:

*"9 After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name.*

*10 Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.*

*11 Give us this day our daily bread.*

*12 And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.*

*13 And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen."*

Now, let's look a little closer at this golden gift from God, in the exact order and pattern with which it was given to us:

## "Our Father, Who art in Heaven"

This use of "Abba" as father is an Aramaic word denoting an intimate, beloved and revered leader of the family, the highly respected and yet utterly adored head of the home. We, being on Earth, are His adopted family when we accept Jesus' gift of sacrifice and substitutional atonement for our sins through His death and resurrection to new life. We will one day join Him in glory, where He has gone ahead of us to prepare a place for us (see John 14:1-7) and as the Holy Spirit intercedes

on our behalf to the Father, as we pray in His will, while on this Earth. This is shown graphically in the Biblical book of Romans 8: 25-27:

*“But if we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it. 26 Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. 27 And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God.”*

## **"Hallowed Be Thy Name"**

To hallow God's name is an understanding of the power, glory and majesty of the all-powerful God, our Savior who is all knowing, all sustaining, all judging and of all righteousness.

Jesus was speaking to His Jewish disciples, so the impact and meaning of this went even deeper than what 21st Century readers might initially realize – according to traditional Jewish teaching, a person's "right living" would declare God's name hallowed, as in the example given in the book of Isaiah, chapter 5:16: "But the LORD Almighty will be exalted by his justice, and the holy God will show himself holy by his righteousness." Conversely, and seriously taken was the implication that to not live rightly was understood as a sign of blasphemy and taking irreverently the name of God.

## **"Thy Kingdom Come, Thy Will Be done, On Earth as it is in Heaven"**

To ask for "Thine kingdom to come" has many far-reaching implications, least of which is that we humans, who like to set up our own little kingdoms, must be willing to let our kingdoms fall and replace them with God's kingdom, in order to be in the will of God.

In the book of 2 Tim. 2:12 we also read: "If we suffer, we shall also reign with Him: if we deny Him, He also will deny us:" And in Rev. 1:6 it states: "...and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen."

Many disciples wondered whether Jesus' kingdom, His Earthly reign, was going to come in their lifetime, or even while He was still with them on Earth, as can be seen by their questions to Him in Acts 1:6: "When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel? " but this is a reference to His return and subsequent eternal rule, and how it would be set up in God's time.

## **"Give us This Day our Daily Bread"**

This is clearly Jesus' loving invitation to us to bring our requests to God for those things we have need of. It is interesting that the way it is written does not paint a picture of storing up goods, but rather, that every day's gift from God – who knows what we

have need of, be enough for us, be it food, clothing, healing or spiritual needs for ourselves and for those the Holy Spirit puts it on our hearts to pray for. In the book of Matthew 6:8 “for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him.”

### **"And Forgive us our Debts, as we Forgive our Debtors"**

I am always amazed by how lightly people repeat these words. They are actually a warning that we will be judged by how we judge others, as the Bible also backs up in Matthew 7, verse 2 “or with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.”

Again, if we go back to traditional Jewish teachings we would see that the Jews compared sin to a debt to God, a debt that needed to be repaid though redemption and sacrifice. Today as born-again believers, we have only to go to our loving Father and confess our sins, and repent of them and make the situation right if we can, to be in fellowship with our Savior.

It is also important to note that we are praying for forgiveness to a Savior who paid a horrific price because of our debts to Him. How shallow and evil then, not to forgive an Earthly offence of any size. We will never be able to forgive the size of debt that was forgiven of us, by Jesus. Our response, when wronged, is in direct proportion to how much we truly appreciate and understand the sacrifice Jesus made on our own

behalf. Jesus made the way clear to take on our offenses, to pay for our sinfulness, so He could then redeem us back to Himself.

### **"And Lead us not into Temptation"**

God never tempts, but temptations abound in our sinful world. Jesus Himself was tempted severely in the desert and throughout his ministry by Satan, as mentioned in Matthew 4: 6-7:

*"6 And saith unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down: for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee: and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone.*

*7 Jesus said unto him, It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God."*

Note that Jesus' answer to the temptations He was facing in this passage and others was to quote scripture and claim the truths of God as written in scripture. That is another excellent example to follow as we live day by day.

It is also important to note here that some trials we face are sent to us in order to help get us ready for something coming down the road. Hindsight is often 20/20 as God reveals to us in time, the purpose for some of these kinds of trials. Often times, if we are honest with ourselves, we would realize that without the trials, we would not have been ready or capable to succeed during a situation or experience that

later befell us. God's grace knows what we have need of, every step of the way. On the other hand, like Job, sometimes we must face the reality that we may never know the cause, until we go home to be with our Lord.

## **"But Deliver Us From Evil"**

As I've mentioned, these trials and the growth that follows from the lessons learned, can often help deliver us from evil later on, especially if we are open to God's teachings and learn the lessons early, when the price is small.

## **"For Thine is the Kingdom, and the Power and the Glory Forever"**

What an awesome God we serve! Psalms 8:1 puts it a way that always gives me goose bumps every time I say it "O LORD, our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth! Who hast set thy glory above the heavens." I often begin my day saying this in my mind as I wake up; it never fails to set the day in better perspective. We serve an awesome God, and on top of that, this awesome God loved us enough to do the unthinkable – to sacrifice and die for us. Jesus paid the price we could not pay, for a debt He did not owe. That's the glory forever, for the believer.

## **"Amen"**

It means "So be it". Amazingly, it's all God's plan. Much better than any plan we could devise.

So the next time you pray, read the Lord's Prayer and then tailor your prayer after these key points that Jesus taught His beloved disciples. The disciples who were blessed by the phenomenal experience of seeing Jesus pray to His Father, of seeing God in Earthly form pray to God in Heaven. This example left them so hungry for that kind of communion, they begged to be taught.

My prayer for you is that you may also have that same burning desire that Paul details, to walk with your Lord in prayer every minute, praying constantly, as he admonishes us in the book of 1 Thessalonians 5, verses 16-18: "16 Rejoice evermore. 17 Pray without ceasing. 18 In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you."

Remember this, as you and your family grow in your walk with God through the understanding of The Lord's Prayer.

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