
Our Father in Heaven

Sermon • Rev'd John Shoaf • 27 July 2025

Colossians 2:6-19 • Luke 11:1-13



May the words of my mouth and the thoughts of our hearts give glory to you, O Lord. Amen.

The Lord's Prayer is the perfect prayer. It gives us everything we need; covers all the angles; can be used any time — and particularly when we don't know how or what to pray for, we can remember Jesus' words to us. We use it to start or to end longer periods of prayer. We can remember it easily and always keep it with us. We can point to it as “the prayer Jesus taught us” or as some say, “the prayer we love the most.” Among all the gifts Jesus gives and has given us, it is a great and lasting one.

It came about, it seems, because the disciples one day saw Jesus praying. Now, the whole job of a disciple, or student, is to follow their rabbi, or teacher. In Israel at the time of Jesus, some 2000 years ago, there were itinerant teachers or rabbis, who gathered together numbers of disciples. These were people who were attracted by the teacher's way of speaking, or some charisma that the teacher had. They followed the teacher, hungry for the learning which he could impart to them. I get a picture in my mind of groups of people walking about, this way and that, following one or another teacher. As Jesus often did, they

would stop in some place and sit down in a circle around the teacher while he explained something to them about God or about worship.

As Christians we often talk about imitating Christ. We want to learn to act like him, to speak like him, to have the same habits of faith, humility and forgiveness which he has. Christ's disciples were the same, and of course they had Jesus physically in front of them, and they were with him all the time. They walked with him, they ate and drank with him, they slept together in the same place. A disciple gave up everything — home, job, family, friends — in order to constantly be with Jesus. Following Jesus, learning from him and imitating him was their whole life.

So when they saw Jesus praying “in a certain place,” as the Gospel says, they naturally wanted to learn how to do that too. They would have known what prayer was, but again, they wanted to do it the way Jesus did it. So they said, “Lord, teach us to pray.” And Jesus responded in the words which are now so familiar to us as Christians. Let's look at that prayer in detail.

We begin with “Our Father in heaven.” Who is our Father? God, of course; God is Jesus' Father and the Father of us all, for we were all created by God through Christ. We think of God in heaven, although God is everywhere. It is why Christians traditionally look up, towards heaven, when we pray. Other people put out their arms, with their palms open, which is an attitude of openness and respectful attention to God. It is entirely up to you, but it is important to remember that God is everywhere, all around us, and in us.

Next we have “hallowed be your name.” “Hallowed” means “holy”. What is holy is special, and one way to think about the meaning of holy is “set apart.” We set holy things apart, because we think of them differently. We speak of the Holy Bible because, while it is a book and there are many books in the world, this is a special book, filled with God's word. God's name is also holy, or special. The Jews considered the name of God to be so holy that it could not be written out in full, only abbreviated. If we wish to speak the name of God, we may say Jehovah, which is from the Hebrew abbreviation. But as Christians we usually say “God” with a capital “G”. There is only one true God.

Next, we say, “Your kingdom come.” This is a special wish for the Kingdom of God to come about. We believe that Jesus, who was crucified, died and rose again, will return on this earth someday. We do not know when that will be, and the Bible warns us not to worry about it, for we cannot know. Only God knows. But we continually pray for it to happen, and we long for it to happen, for it will mean the end of all sorrow and all evil, when God's creation comes together in perfect harmony in the presence of God. So including it in this daily prayer is a way of keeping that longing alive.

Besides acknowledging that God is our Father and that his name is holy, we also remember that God's will is above all human wills. We pray that his will will be done, both on earth and in heaven — that is, everywhere. And God's will does prevail, even if sometimes we don't know it or understand it.

So far we have been talking about the nature of God: he is our Father, his name is holy, his kingdom will come. Now we shift a little bit and we humbly ask for what we need. First, "Give us today our daily bread." "Bread" of course means food, for we cannot live without food. We have physical needs, which God knows because God made us this way. This part of the prayer points to the fact that all things come from God: the air we breathe, the food we eat, the clothes we wear. These things may be harvested or manufactured by humans, but ultimately, they exist due to God's creativity, which is infinite. God knows we need these things to live, and so we humbly pray that we may have them.

Next, we pray for forgiveness. We did this earlier in the service, when we confessed the things we have done wrong to others, and asked God to forgive us. But we do not just ask to be forgiven; we also pray that we may forgive the wrongs that other people do to us. You can't have one without the other. If God is to forgive us, then we must also be forgiving in our turn. This goes back to what I said earlier about imitating Jesus. Jesus is infinitely forgiving, and if we are to be like Jesus, we must be forgiving too.

Next, we ask to be protected from evil. We pray, "Save us from the time of trial, and deliver us from evil." What is the time of trial? All of us experience difficult times, times when we don't know where to turn or what to do; times when we are tested by events beyond our control. It may be a family or a work situation; it may concern a big milestone or turning point in our lives; it may be the death of someone we love. Whatever it is, we may always turn to God for help. So in this part of the prayer, we ask that we may avoid those difficult times; but when they do come, we ask for God's help to get through them. In this prayer we are opening ourselves up to God and inviting him into our lives. We are saying, in effect, "Lord, we know that the times will come when only you can help us, and we ask you to be with us."

The last part of the prayer, as we say it today, is added to what Jesus taught us; but it is based on his teaching in the Bible. It is a way of concluding the prayer and again acknowledging that God is our God and is in control of our lives, and will be forever. We say, "For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours, now and forever. Amen."

I'm sure that for many of you, much of what I've said today is not new; but it is worthwhile to review this prayer from time to time. Most of us have it memorised, which is good, but sometimes when you memorise something and say it off by heart, you stop thinking about what you're saying. You just rattle it

off and there it is. So I recommend that when you say this prayer, and you should say it every day, you slow it down a little bit. Think about each phrase as you say it. Dedicate it all to God. As we have seen, all of it is important. And slowing down a bit also helps you to be receptive to what God may be trying to tell you. All prayer is a conversation between you and God, and in a conversation, we listen as well as speak.

Thanks be to Jesus Christ, who in his love for us, teaches us how to pray. May we always be open to our Father in heaven. Amen.