

Introducing the Lord's Prayer

It is significant that Jesus provided his disciples with what we call 'the Lord's Prayer' in response to their request that he teach them to pray; and this was just after they had witnessed him in passionate communion with his heavenly Father.

One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he finished, one of his disciples said to him, 'Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples.' (Lu 11:1)

Jesus' own prayer life had obviously made a deep impression on them, which the disciples had observed many times, since Luke was the gospel writer who provided that insight, and he says more about Jesus' personal prayer-life than any of the other three gospel writers. However, both Matthew and John show Jesus in his most raw and personal prayer exchanges with his Father – Matthew in the Garden of Gethsemane moments, and John in Jesus' so called 'High Priestly' prayer in John 17.

It is believed by some that Jesus based this prayer model on a rabbinic formula of simple statements that are, in fact, a series of topics, which are easy to remember. Be that as it may, it is a brilliant outline!

We will be working from Matthew 6:9-13, and we are going to look at the structure of the prayer outline before we begin to work our way through its content. However, Jesus had already said a number of things about prayer prior to the instruction of the outline in Matt 6:5-8:

⁵ 'And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. ⁶ But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. ⁷ And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. ⁸ Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

The primary point that Jesus is making here is that he knows, both through personal relationship and personal experience, that God is his Father, since he came from God in order to reveal the Father to us and bring us back into the relationship we had been created for in the first place. It is out of this intimate relationship that Jesus is teaching his disciples about prayer!!!

So.....⁹ *'This, then, is how you should pray:*

*"Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,*

¹⁰ your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

¹¹ Give us today our daily bread.

¹² And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.

¹³ And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one, for yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory for ever. Amen."

Jesus' starting point is who we are addressing our prayer to: *Our Father in heaven!*

So straight up, Jesus is teaching them that *this* Father they are addressing in his prayer, is firstly *his* Father, and that *his* Father is in heaven, which is the normal abode for an immortal and sovereign God and is where he also actually came from!!!

And secondly, Jesus is showing his disciples that through their connection with him (Jesus), God is also *their* Father, who he is inviting them to share with him in his relationship with his/their Father!!! He is saying to them, and us, He is OUR Father – Jesus and us!!!

Now, Jesus says some amazing things about his Father and the relationship that he enjoys with him. Let's take a look at some of these insights, all of which are from John's Gospel:

¹⁷ '...My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I too am working.' ¹⁸ For this reason they tried all the more to kill him; not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God.

¹⁹ Jesus gave them this answer: 'Very truly I tell you, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does. ²⁰ For the Father loves the Son and shows him all he does. (Jn 5:17-20)

⁵ Thomas said to him, 'Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?' ⁶ Jesus answered, 'I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. ⁷ If you really know me, you will know^[a] my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him.' ⁸ Philip said, 'Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us.' ⁹ Jesus answered: 'Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. (Jn 14:5-9)

After Jesus said this, he looked towards heaven and prayed: 'Father, the hour has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you. ² For you granted him authority over all people that he might give eternal life to all those you have given him. ³ Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent. ⁴ I have brought you glory on earth by finishing the work you gave me to do. ⁵ And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began. ⁶ I have revealed you to those whom you gave me out of the world. They were yours; you gave them to me and they have obeyed your word.

(Jn 17:1-6)

Our Father in heaven – whom Jesus knows intimately, and is inviting us to share with him in this intimate relationship that bridges the gap between the visible and the invisible, the

temporal and the eternal, the physical and the spiritual – this is the One we are praying to!!!!

Now we come to the actual prayer and its contents that we are to pray to our heavenly Father!

The first three topics are all about God:

Our Father in heaven – Jesus is keen for us to realise that we can approach our Father in the same way that he does, since he is his father as well – it is an intimate and loving relationship; our Father welcomes us with open arms – he is interested in the details of our lives.

His holy name – Jesus wants us to recognise that even though this is an intimate and loving relationship, he is still our sovereign God who is holy and totally worthy of our reverence. We will be looking at what this means and how we can honour him.

His kingdom, or his sovereign rule, which is both in heaven and on earth – again, we will be looking at the applications of the realities and responsibilities that this provides us.

The next three topics are all about us:

Our daily bread – not just talking about food, but it is a starting point for everything else we need for our daily living.

Our personal relationships and obligations – do to others as you would like them to do for you. The starting point is within ourselves; those are the things we can learn to control. We cannot control what is happening in somebody else's life.

Our personal relationships – those areas of our lives that cause us to struggle with temptations of various kinds, recognising that behind those temptations lurks the enemy of our souls seeking opportunity to entrap us in our areas of weakness, which we all have.

It is generally accepted that the traditional ending to this prayer was added some time later to give the prayer a fitting ending, finishing at the same place that we started – with worship, praise and thanksgiving to the one who has made it all possible – our Father, through his Son and his Spirit. Whatever the actuality is, it is a wonderful ending to a brilliant outline for personal prayer.