

Prayer: The Lord's Prayer

Review

- “Continuing a conversation that God has started,” our prayer should be rooted in what God reveals of himself in his Word. Healthy relationships require not just talking, but listening!
- To root our prayers in God's self-revelation, we need to:
 - 1) be *intentional*, 2) be *biblical*, 3) be *expectant*, and 4) cultivate *meditation*.
- Meditation means filling our minds and hearts with the truth God reveals in his Word: “Meditation is thinking a truth *out* and then thinking a truth *in* until its ideas become ‘big’ and ‘sweet,’ moving and affecting, and until the reality of God is sensed upon the heart,” (Keller).
- There are 3 keys to biblical meditation (cf. the “devotional compass diagram”):
 - 1) Ask good questions: God? Man? Christ? Christian?
 - 2) Use implications: contrast, foreshadowing, fulfillment, etc.
 - 3) Turn Bible truths into prayers: praise, confession, thanksgiving, petition

The Lord's Prayer: Its Value and Our Temptation

The Lord's Prayer may be the single set of words spoken more often than any other in the history of the world. Jesus Christ gave it to us as the key to unlock all the riches of prayer. Yet it is an untapped resource, partially because it is so very familiar... The whole world is starving for spiritual experience, and Jesus gives us the means to it in a few words... It's so familiar we can no longer hear it. Yet everything we need is within it. (Keller)

The Lord's Prayer: Text and Structure

- The Lord's Prayer is the prayer that Jesus taught his disciples to pray (Matthew 6.7-13):

And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. Pray then like this:

Our Father in heaven,
 hallowed be your name.
 Your kingdom come,
 your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.
 Give us this day our daily bread,
 and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.
 And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.
 [For yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory, forever. Amen.]

- The Lord's Prayer contains a *preface*, six *petitions*, and a *conclusion*.¹ The first three petitions focus on God, and the latter three focus on the needs of believers and the church.
- The Lord's Prayer can be prayed *verbatim* and used as a *framework* for building prayer.
- Martin Luther wrote on the Lord's Prayer in several places. Calvin wrote on it his *Institutes* (III.20.34-49), and Reformation catechisms end by expounding it: *Westminster Larger Catechism* 187-196, *Westminster Shorter Catechism* 100-107. and *Heidelberg Catechism* 119-129.

¹ The conclusion to the Lord's Prayer is omitted from most Bible modern translations, due to questions about whether it was part of the original text of Matthew or a later addition. It is absent from some important New Testament manuscripts from the years AD 300-400 (*Codex Sinaiticus* and *Codex Vaticanus*), and from the commentaries of Tertullian (AD 160-225), Origen (AD 185-254), and Cyprian (AD 200-258). Yet is attested in early writings such as *The Didache* (AD 50-150) and *The Apostolic Constitutions* (c. AD 380). It is now generally thought that the conclusion was added later, when the prayer began to be used in worship. Whether it is part of the original text of Matthew or not, the conclusion is biblical, for it is a paraphrase of 1 Chronicles 29.11: “Yours, O LORD, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the victory and the majesty, for all that is in the heavens and in the earth is yours. Yours is the kingdom, O LORD, and you are exalted as head above all.”

The Preface: God's Gospel (“Our Father in heaven...”)

- “The preface... teacheth us to draw near to God with all holy reverence and confidence, as children to a father, able and ready to help us; and that we should pray with and for others.” (*WSC 100*)
- “We ought to offer all prayer to God only in Christ’s name... in calling God “Father,” we put forward the name “Christ”... By the great sweetness of this name he frees us from all distrust, since no greater feeling of love can be found elsewhere than in the Father.” (*Calvin*)

1st Petition: God's Wonders (“...hallowed be your name.”)

- ‘Hallow’ literally means “to make holy.” But God’s name is already holy. So what are we praying? That God’s goodness in all forms would be recognized and magnified by those inclined to deny or forget it:
- “Acknowledging the utter inability and indisposition that is in ourselves and all men to honour God aright, we pray, that God would by his grace enable and incline us and others to know, to acknowledge, and highly to esteem him, his titles, attributes, ordinances, word, works, and whatsoever he is pleased to make himself known by; and to glorify him in thought, word, and deed: that he would prevent and remove atheism, ignorance, idolatry, profaneness, and whatsoever is dishonourable to him; and, by his overruling providence, direct and dispose of all things to his own glory.” (*WLC 190*)
- “[God’s] might, goodness, wisdom, righteousness, mercy, truth – these should captivate us with wonderment for him, and impel us to celebrate his praise.” (*Calvin*)

2nd Petition: God's Kingdom (“Your kingdom come...”)

- “That Satan’s kingdom may be destroyed; and that the kingdom of grace may be advanced, ourselves and others brought into it, and kept in it; and that the kingdom of glory may be hastened.” (*WSC 102*)
- “Asking God to extend his royal power over every part of our lives – emotions, desires, thoughts, and commitments... to so fully rule us that we want to obey him with all our hearts and with joy.” (*Keller*)

3rd Petition: God's Plans (“...your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.”)

- “Help us and all people to renounce our own wills and without any back talk to obey your will... Help everyone carry out his office and calling, as willingly and faithfully as the angels in heaven.” (*HC 124*)
- “Grant us grace to bear willingly all sorts of sickness, poverty, disgrace, suffering, and adversity and to recognize that in this your divine will is crucifying our will.” (*Luther*)

4th Petition: Human Life & Society (“Give us this day our daily bread...”)

- “That of God’s free gift we may receive a competent portion of the good things of this life, and enjoy his blessing with them.” (*WSC 104*)
- “This petition includes everything that belongs to our entire life in the world... whatever pertains both to the domestic and to the neighborly or civil relation and government. For where these two things are hindered... the necessities of life also are impeded, so that ultimately life cannot be maintained. And there is, indeed, the greatest need to pray for temporal authority and government, as that by which most of all God preserves to us our daily bread and all the comforts of this life.” (*Luther*)

5th Petition: Guilt & Grace (“...and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.”)

- “That God, for Christ’s sake, would freely pardon all our sins; which we are the rather encouraged to ask, because by his grace we are enabled from the heart to forgive others.” (*WSC 105*)
- “This condition... is not added because by the forgiveness we grant to others we deserve his forgiveness, as if this indicated the cause of it. Rather, by this word the Lord intended partly to comfort the weakness of our faith. For he has added this as a sign to assure us he has granted forgiveness of sins to us just as surely as we are aware of having forgiven others...” (*Calvin*)
- “If we retain feelings of hatred in our hearts, if we plot revenge and ponder any occasion to cause harm, and even if we do not try to get back into our enemies’ good graces... and commend ourselves to them, by this prayer we entreat God not to forgive our sins.” (*Calvin*)

6th Petition: Protection & Rescue (“And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.”)

- “That God would either keep us from being tempted to sin, or support and deliver us when we are tempted.” (*WSC 106*)

Activation Tip #6: Try employing the framework of the Lord’s Prayer in your prayers this week.