

Prayer Everywhere

Prayer Tool: How to Pray the Lord's Prayer

What?

The Lord's Prayer is the most famous prayer in history, crafted by Jesus himself. This prayer tool will unpack its significance and demonstrate how it can be used as a model and a map.

Why?

"To this day I am still nursing myself on the Lord's Prayer like a child, and am still eating and drinking of it like an old man without getting bored of it." Martin Luther

"The Lord's Prayer correctly understood is one of the high roads into the central mystery of Christian salvation and Christian experience." N.T. Wright

"To cultivate a deeper prayer life all you have to do is say the Lord's Prayer, but take an hour to do it." Timothy Jones

Bible reference

"This, then, is how you should pray: 'Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today 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 the evil one.'" Matthew 6:9-13

A quick introduction to the Lord's Prayer

When the disciples asked Jesus to teach them to pray, he crafted a meticulous, memorable, rhyming prototype.

The Lord's Prayer are words we can actually say – and when we repeat these familiar lines, we echo the words of Christ himself, alongside billions of Christians throughout time, all over the world.

This prayer given by Jesus can be used in two quite distinct ways:

As a model. The Lord's Prayer serves as the ultimate prototype. It is a condensed liturgical poem clearly intended for frequent repetition. *It teaches us what to pray.*

As a map. The Lord's Prayer guides us as we express the things on our hearts. Each line can be applied and expanded in personal conversation with the Father. *It teaches us how to pray.*

Do it: How to pray the Lord's Prayer

The Lord's Prayer as a model: knowing what to pray

It was traditional for rabbinic bands at the time of Jesus to have their own unique creedal prayer. John the Baptist's followers seem to have had such a prayer because, when Jesus' disciples asked, 'Lord teach us to pray,' they added 'just as John taught his disciples.' (Luke 11:1)

They weren't just asking Jesus for a few good prayer tips. They were also saying 'We need a statement of faith!' This makes the Lord's Prayer the earliest Christian creed, given to us by Jesus himself some three centuries before the Council of Nicaea.

As such, it is our primary doctrinal foundation for life and faith, well worth repeating regularly so that its foundational truths can slowly shape our hearts and our minds.

An easy way to build the Lord's Prayer into your regular routine is to set a daily reminder for midday.

This will be annoying. That's the whole point. It will interrupt your relentless busyness with a reminder to pause and put first things first, to focus for a minute on what you most truly believe.

And this is not a new idea. In fact the *didache* which was written in the first century AD instructs the first Christians to pray the Lord's Prayer 'three times in the day' - probably mirroring the three fixed times of prayer in the temple, at 9am, midday, and around 6pm.

Understandably, some people worry that mechanical recitation might turn into the kind of 'vain repetition' that Jesus explicitly warns us against, just before he gives the Lord's Prayer in Matthew 6.

Clearly it's important that we don't recite the Lord's Prayer mindlessly, or treat it superstitiously- but rather use this powerful prayer to shape our lives and earth our beliefs.

The Lord's Prayer as a map: knowing how to pray

The Lord's Prayer is also a map that helps us to pray our own prayers from the heart. When Jesus said, 'this then is how you should pray,' he was telling his disciples to use it more as a guide than a destination.

Many people find prayer difficult. We get distracted and struggle to know what to say. But praying the Lord's Prayer is a simple answer to these problems.

Just its first two words, 'Our Father' prompt us to pause and pray for our families. 'Hallowed be your name' is an invitation to worship. 'Let your Kingdom come' is an opportunity to request help for the particular people, places and situations on our hearts. 'Give us this day our daily bread' invites us to pray about our most practical needs. 'Forgive us our sins' is a challenge to name the ways in which we have sinned.

Prayed in this way, each phrase of the Lord's Prayer becomes an invitation to embark upon our own personal adventures of adoration, petition, intercession, confession and spiritual warfare.

Books on the Lord's Prayer

- The Lord's Prayer – William Barclay
- Fifty-Seven Words That Changed The World – Darrell W. Johnson
- Praying the Lord's Prayer – J.I. Packer
- The Lord and his Prayer – Tom Wright