

Title: The Lord’s Prayer: A model for learning to pray

Subtitle: Praying involves boldness, childlike trust, and perseverance

In today’s Gospel, the disciples come to Jesus and ask him for one thing. They could have asked for many things, but there was only one thing that they wanted. They wanted Jesus to teach them to pray. Of all the things that the disciples got wrong, this one they happened to get right.

They had observed that before every major decision that faced him, every significant turning point in his ministry, and every crisis that confronted him, he consistently consulted with his Father in prayer.

They were attracted by what they saw. It was as if they said, “**I want what I see in you, and I am hungry to learn more.** *If prayer can do that for you, then teach me how to do it too.*”

If we want to be like Jesus—if we want to experience the warmth of God’s presence that would set our hearts aglow with spiritual power and grace—we must also learn how to pray as Jesus prayed.

The first thing Jesus teaches us about prayer is that we can approach God with childlike trust, believing He is our Father. To address God as “Father.” implies that we can address God as confidently as a child would say, “Daddy.” The Apostle Paul insists, “you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons and daughters, by whom we cry, ‘Abba! Father!’”¹ But this kind of intimacy many find intimidating.

Once two workmen were high in the recesses of an old” Catholic church, working on scaffolding, out of sight. A little

¹ Romans 8:15

old lady knelt below alone, silently praying, counting her rosary beads. One workman looked at the other and decided to have a little fun. So he called out from behind the rafters, “This is the Lord.” But the lady didn’t say anything. So he said again, “This is the Lord speaking.” She said nothing. The third time, he said, “This is the Lord!” The lady looked up and said, “Hush your mouth, boy. I’m talking to your Momma!”

Thankfully, we can come directly to God the Father, knowing that He longs to provide for all we need: guidance, help, comfort, and even the bare necessities of life. It also implies coming to God in simplicity and openness. We don’t have to put on airs or come with any pretense of being other than who we are.

This reminds me of a well-known story about a man who had given up on any prayer attempt until a friend said, “*‘Joe, **prayer is just a simple matter of having a conversation with Jesus.** Here’s what I suggest. **Sit down on a chair, place an empty chair in front of you, and see Jesus on the chair in faith. Then speak to him and listen in the same way you’re doing with me right now.***’”

So, he tried it and found it to be helpful. When that same person died a few weeks later, his daughter noticed something strange because they found his body with his head resting on a chair beside his bed.

Isn’t this restful confidence what we all hunger for? To be loved just for who we are and to have a close and intimate relationship with our creator. A relationship where we can tell him what we think, how we feel if we’re happy or sad, or angry or upset. This is how the Psalmist prayed. This is how men and women of the Bible prayed, and this is how we are to pray.

Therefore as we begin using the Lord's Prayer as a model, we first learn to hallow God's name and see ourselves and our needs in terms of his kingdom.

Since we don't ordinarily use the word "*hallowed*" these days, we must go back to its use in history to gain insight into its meaning.

To the ancient Greeks, "*hallowed*" meant something unique and separate from all other commonly used things. And to the ancient Hebrews, a name was more than a label. It signifies not only the character and nature of a person but also their personality—their very essence. So when we pray, "*Hallowed be Your name,*" we are really saying, "*Lord, we choose to give You the unique place in the universe and in our lives which your loving, holy nature deserves.*" The focus is not on ourselves and our circumstances but on God, which enables us to view our needs from the perspective of who He is. But there is also something more, for if our God is holy and we are his children, then we too are also called to be holy because we are part of his family.

St. Augustine once said that man has at the core of his being a God-shaped vacuum—an emptiness only God can fill. When we worship God, we place him at the center of our being, and he comes in to fill that void and satisfy the longings of our souls.

That is why we pray, "*Your kingdom come, your will be done.*" If we pray this way and really mean it, it naturally involves the surrender of our wills to God. In another sense, prayer is much like a self-fulfilling prophecy that empowers us to take on our role in bringing God's Kingdom to completeness. Therefore:

- I cannot say “***our Father***” if I’m living only for myself. This is not an “I-me-my” prayer; it is a “we-us-our” prayer—a family prayer.
- I cannot say “***Father***” if I don’t try to act like His child.
- I cannot say “***hallowed be Thy Name***” if I am not striving for holiness, with a hunger and thirst to be more like Jesus.
- I cannot say “***Thy Kingdom come***” if I’m not doing my part to hasten his will and reign on earth, which includes my life and those around me.
- I cannot say “***Thy will be done***” if I am disobedient to what I know is his will.
- I cannot say “***on earth as it is in Heaven***” if I’m unwilling to serve Him here and now.
- I cannot say, “***give us this day our daily bread***” if I’m not relying on Him to provide for all that I need.
- I cannot say “***forgive us our debts***” if I harbor a grudge against someone.
- I cannot say “***lead us not into temptation***” if I deliberately place myself in its path.²

As we look at the context of this model prayer, you will see that it is followed by an illustration that stresses insistent, tireless asking. Jesus said, “***Ask and keep on asking. Seek and keep on seeking. Knock and keep on knocking.***”³ Each action implies a greater urgency and determination than the last.

Because he is “our Father,” we can pray “relentlessly, shamelessly, rudely, discourteously, and constantly. What Jesus tells us about prayer makes no sense except on family terms. To trust and yet relentlessly bug is something only a little child

² Paraphrased from the Rev. Bob Leroe

³ Luke 11:9

would do with their parents. Only a child would have the unmannerly presumption to continue to tug on their Father's sleeve, oblivious to how annoying it may seem. Therefore, it is only as we think of ourselves as children that this type of prayer makes sense.

The Apostle John wrote in his first Epistle, ***“Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed upon us that we should be called children of God. And that is what we are.”***⁴

And therefore, it makes sense that we should pray as children who have been given full rights to approach the throne of God's grace with confidence for all that we need.

Look at our Old Testament story from Genesis, where Abraham keeps asking God for more and more mercy as he intercedes on behalf of Sodom and Gomorrah. In this matter, Abraham keeps asking for one more thing, one more thing, one more thing as he asks God to spare the city on behalf of the righteous who may live there. Abraham's prayers are his way of repeatedly and shamelessly knocking on heaven's door. And it shows us just how powerful and effective our prayers can be.

Therefore let us ask the Lord, **“To teach us to pray.”** And let us take our place as His children, who he longs to receive and bless. And let us pray for His kingdom to come and His will to be done on earth as it is in heaven, trusting in him to care for us, forgive us and work through us as he leads us not into temptation but delivers us from evil. Amen.

⁴ 1 John 3:1