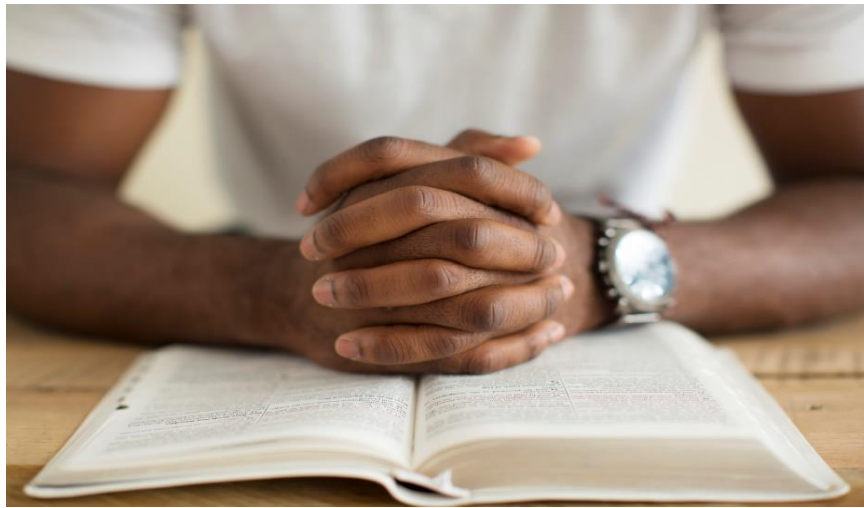


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Detroit Bible Students
P.O. Box 51, Southfield, MI 48037-0051
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THE LORD'S PRAYER

“Now Jesus was praying in a certain place, and when he finished, one of his disciples said to him, ‘Lord, teach us to pray.’” Luke 11:1

Prayer is an integral part of all the religions of the world. It is the worshipper's avenue of communication with the deity; a vehicle by which petitions for help or favor are sent upward. There are many kinds of prayers. The prayers of many religious groups are scripted and ritualistic. The worshipper recites or chants the appropriate prayer. Is this the kind of communication called prayer in the Bible? What are the Bible guidelines? How should we pray? For what should we pray?

The Jewish people were familiar with prayer. There are many prayers recorded in the Old Testament. Moses prayed for God's mercy and forgiveness for the Hebrews when they angered Him by their rebellion. “O Lord GOD, do not destroy Your people and Your inheritance whom You have redeemed through Your greatness, ...” (Deuteronomy 9:26-29) Manoah prayed for guidance after learning that the child Samson whom his wife was to bear must be raised as a Nazarite, (Judges 13:8) and childless Hannah prayed to have a son. (1 Samuel 1:11)

When the Assyrian king Sennacherib sent Israel an ultimatum asserting that Israel's God was impotent like the gods of all the nations he had already conquered, King Hezekiah laid the letter before God and prayed, “O LORD, the God of Israel, enthroned above the cherubim, you are the God, you alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth; you have made heaven and earth. ... Truly, O LORD, the kings of Assyrians have laid waste the nations and their lands and have cast their gods into the fire, for they were

not gods, but the work of men's hands, wood and stone. ... save us, please, from his hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that you, O LORD, are God alone.” (2 Kings 19:15-20 *English Standard Version*)

There is no need to guess whether these prayers were answered. The events are recorded in the Bible. God brought the Jewish people into the Promised Land. Samson grew into a mighty hero who defeated the Philistine invaders of Israel. Hannah had her son, Samuel, who became a great Judge in Israel. An angel of the LORD slew the armies of Sennacherib and delivered Israel.

From these Old Testament prayers, it is clear that the Jews knew how to pray. However, by the time of Jesus, Judaism had become ritualistic and formal. The Law that they had been given at Sinai had become an idol in itself. Four hundred years had elapsed since their last prophet, Malachi, and many heathen practices and ideas had insinuated themselves into their thinking. The Pharisees had become a clergy class that regarded itself as the sole authority concerning correct belief and worship.

The gulf existing between the Pharisees and the common people was illustrated by Jesus in the parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector. (Luke 18:9-14) While the Pharisee was thanking God that he was better than other men, the publican acknowledged his sin and begged God for His mercy. Jesus said the tax collector was the one who received God's blessing.

The common people were drawn to Jesus, not only because he healed the sick, but also because he reflected the mercy of God. Unlike the rigid, legalistic teachings of the Pharisees, Jesus spoke of the love of God and gave them the hope of the Kingdom that would come. When officers sent by the Pharisees were challenged about why they had not arrested Jesus, they answered, "No one ever spoke like this man!" (John 7:46 *English Standard Version*; Matthew 4:23) Therefore, Jesus' disciples recognized that there was a need to learn a way of approach to God that was different from that taught by the Pharisees. Observing how Jesus prayed, one of the disciples asked, "Lord, teach us to pray." (Luke 11:1) The Lord then proceeded to outline what we know as "The Lord's Prayer."

In Matthew's account of this prayer, Jesus begins by telling his disciples how they should NOT pray. Matthew 6:5-15 (*New King James Version*) begins, "And when you pray, you shall not



be like the hypocrites. For they love to pray standing in the synagogues ... that they may be seen by men. But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father ...

And when you pray, do not use vain repetitions as the heathen. For they think that they will be heard for their many words. Therefore do not be like them."

Then Jesus said, "In this manner, therefore, 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 this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, As we forgive our debtors. And do not lead us into temptation, But deliver us from the evil one. [For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever.] Amen.

Despite Jesus' instruction that we should not make a great show of our prayers or use vain repetitions, the Lord's prayer has typically been used in both these ways in many churches. Jesus' preface "In this manner pray" suggests that his words were intended as an outline for proper prayer for the Christian not just another ritual prayer. What does it teach us about prayer?

Lesson #1: We must have accepted Jesus as our personal Savior.

Our Father in heaven: If we have taken the name of Christ, we have the privilege of addressing the God of the Universe as "Father." In Romans 8:14-17 we are told that if we have accepted Christ as our Savior and have committed ourselves to being led by God's will, God has adopted us as sons and we may call Him, "Abba! Father!" Paul said, "He that cometh to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him." (Hebrews 11:6) It is a mistake to think we have an audience with the LORD if we have not accepted the salvation He has offered, and we are not trying to live according to His ways.

Lesson #2: We must always remember and acknowledge God's Majesty.

Hallowed be Your name: Approaching God in prayer must always be done in humility, never forgetting His greatness and glory. Because it is the Creator of all things that we are petitioning, we must ask what we will meekly, never presuming or demanding His blessing.

Lesson #3: The Gospel of the Kingdom must be our first concern and doing God's will our first desire.

Your kingdom come, Your will be done: The Gospel of the Kingdom was the central focus of the ministry of Jesus. (Matthew 9:35; Luke 9:11; 19:11,12; Acts 1:3) The healings he did were a demonstration of the blessings of the Kingdom. (Isaiah 35:5,6) The healings Jesus did were temporary, mere samples of the blessings to come. Lazarus, though raised from death by the Lord, eventually died again, but in God's kingdom mankind will be restored to the perfection lost in Eden. Sickness and death will be done away with forever because man will have learned the results of rebellion and will choose to obey God's will. (Revelation 21:1-4)

Jesus came to bear witness to the Kingdom and to die to secure it as Adam's substitute in death. (1 Corinthians 15:21,22,45; John 1:29; Acts 3:19-21) In everything he did he acknowledged his Father's will. Praying in the Garden of Gethsemane for some relief in what he knew was coming, he concluded his request with, "nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt." (Matthew 26:39; Luke 22:42) If we are faithful Christians, our lives and our requests must also be in accordance with God's will. (1 John 5:14)

Lesson #4: God's Kingdom is promised for this earth.

ON EARTH as it is in heaven: Although this is the first petition in the Lord's prayer, it has gone mostly unheard by the millions who recite this prayer regularly. Most people hear this as a WISH rather than a divinely decreed INTENTION. Without realizing the impossibility of their position, most churches have expected that somehow by some effort of the church, the dark, sinful world is to be converted to righteousness. Does it not occur to those who hold this view that if God intended the world to be converted now, He who created the universe and all things in it has the power to make it happen without relying on the efforts of feeble men?

However, God created man with a free will because he wants WILLING obedience not servile worship. He has allowed the experience with sin for man's education to provide him with an informed choice when the time of judgment comes in the Kingdom. Meanwhile, God has had another plan in place as the world is learning the exceeding sinfulness of sin. (Ephesians 1:4-10) God has been calling a Church for his Son to be joint-heirs with him and part of the Seed which will bless all the nations of mankind. (Acts 15:14-18; 1 Corinthians 1:26-29; Romans 8:17; Galatians 3:8,16, 29)

The Bible refers to the followers of Jesus as "saints," or "set apart" ones. (Romans 1:7; 1 Corinthians 1:2; Ephesians 1:1;

Philippians 1:1) However, despite the common idea of sainthood, these have no power to bring God's will to earth until they themselves are purified from the defilements of their own sinful flesh. The greatest apostles fought the sin inherent in themselves as the children of Adam. (Galatians 2:11-13; Romans 7:14-18) The Apostle John wrote, "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. ... And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous." (1 John 1:5-10; 2:1,2)

The work of the "saints" now is to bear witness to the love of God and the blessings coming for all the families of the earth in the "times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began." (Acts 3:21; Galatians 3:8) By their own struggles with sin, they are learning to be priests of God in His Kingdom (Revelation 20:4,6) to help resurrected mankind walk up the "Highway of Holiness" to perfect life. (Isaiah 35:8) By the transforming of their minds to be like Christ's, they are being prepared for the work of restoring mankind to harmony with God. (Romans 12:1,2; Philippians 2:5-8)

Lesson #5: We must be continuously feeding upon God's Word if we wish to know His will and ask what He would be pleased to give us.

Give us this day our daily bread: Although we should always thank God for the provision of food and shelter, this portion of the Lord's prayer does not primarily refer to the bread needed by our physical bodies, for Jesus said, "do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink." (Matthew 6:25) His reference is to the spiritual food needed to nourish our "new creatures." (John 6:33,35,51; John 17:1-3,6-8; 2 Corinthians 5:17) Jesus said, "It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God." (Matthew 4:4 *ESV*) We must learn from the Word of God what He would want us to have. The Apostle James wrote, "You ask and do not receive because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures." (James 4:3 *NKJV*) If we hope to receive what we pray for we must ask according to God's will.



Lesson #6: We must seek to copy God's ways.

And forgive us our debts, As we forgive our debtors: Jesus defined this himself. "If you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses." (vss.14,15) Jesus clearly illustrated this with the Parable of the Unforgiving Servant (Matthew 18:21-35) in which a King forgives an enormous debt owed him by one of his servants, but this same servant then refuses to forgive a small debt owed to him by a fellow servant. This angers the King. His servant's failure to give the same mercy he received results in the King's ordering his arrest and punishment until he pays all of his debt. The lesson is that since God has forgiven our enormous debt of sin, we should also

be merciful with our brethren. The principle is that the standard we set for others is the one by which God will judge us.

Lesson # 7: We must turn away from our formerly sinful lifestyle and sever all ties that lead us into evil paths.

And do not lead us into temptation, But deliver us from the evil one: James wrote, "God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone." (James 1:13) *The New International Readers Version* words this verse, "Keep us from falling into sin when we are tempted. Save us from the evil one." This rendering is much more consistent with the character of God as stated by James and seen throughout the Scriptures. The Greek word translated "temptation" has the thought of being tested or tried. The request is that God will protect us from being tested by Satan as our Lord was in the wilderness. (Matthew 4:1-11)

Peter warned, "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about seeking whom he may devour: Whom resist steadfast in the faith." (1 Peter 5:8,9) God will not hear our prayers if we are consistently living a sinful lifestyle. (Psalm 66:18 *New International Version*) However, we have no strength of our own with which to resist the Devil. We are the weak things of the world (1 Corinthians 1:26-29) whose only strength is through Christ, (Philippians 4:13) so help from God to overcome the allurements of the world is our constant prayer need.

[For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever.] This phrase is bracketed because it is not found in the oldest Bible manuscripts. It was added in sometime around the 4th or 5th Century, perhaps as a study note. Subsequent copyists wrote it into the text thinking it belonged. Now we have access to older manuscripts and know it was not original, so newer translations do not include it. It is also absent in the Luke 11 record.

When asked by his disciples, Jesus gave them an outline of acceptable prayer. That they understood it as such is shown by the absence of any further reference to this prayer in the Acts or Epistles. What our Lord's prayer taught is that we must come before God in humility, acknowledging his Majesty. We must look to His Kingdom as the culmination of His plans and His will must be our law. Adopting the mind of Christ must be our life's work. We should seek the "bread of life." We need not ask for temporal things for God knows our needs and bestows His best gifts on those who leave the choice with Him.

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