

“Standing In the Need of Prayer”

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Scripture:

Luke 11:1-13 (NRSV)

He was praying in a certain place, and after he had finished, one of his disciples said to him, “Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples.” He said to them, “When you pray, say: Father, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread. And forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us. And do not bring us to the time of trial.” And he said to them, “Suppose one of you has a friend, and you go to him at midnight and say to him, ‘Friend, lend me three loaves of bread; for a friend of mine has arrived, and I have nothing to set before him.’ And he answers from within, ‘Do not bother me; the door has already been locked, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot get up and give you anything.’ I tell you, even though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, at least because of his persistence he will get up and give him whatever he needs. “So I say to you, Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for a fish, will give a snake instead of a fish? Or if the child asks for an egg, will give a scorpion? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!”

Luke 11:2 Other ancient authorities read Our Father in heaven

Luke 11:2 A few ancient authorities read Your Holy Spirit come upon us and cleanse us.
Other ancient authorities add Your will be done, on earth as in heaven

Luke 11:3 Or our bread for tomorrow

Luke 11:4 Or us into temptation. Other ancient authorities add but rescue us from the evil one (or from evil)

Luke 11:11 Other ancient authorities add bread, will give a stone; or if your child asks for

Luke 11:13 Other ancient authorities read the Father give the Holy Spirit from heaven

Sermon:

Relationships are hard. I checked on Amazon to see how many books on relationships they sell and it's over 400,000. Over 400,000 books on how to have a better relationship with another human. Husbands, wives, mothers, fathers, children, relatives of all kinds, friends, enemies, bosses, co-workers – every kind of human relationship you can think of – there's a book on how to make that relationship better. Basically, that's what Jesus' disciples are asking him – how do we have a better relationship with God?

Good communication is the foundation of any strong relationship, and poor communication can be the death of relationship. This is just part of the human condition; this need to continually work on our communication skills with each other.

Have you ever had a fight with someone, and after much contentious conversation and angry words, either you or the other person or both of you realize that the whole argument was based on a miscommunication? And you're like, "Oh, well, that was silly then...never mind." Another good argument wasted all because of miscommunication. If you've had an argument like that, you know that you never want to have another one. When you care about the relationship, you want to communicate in a way that shows your love and appreciation for the other person.

Jesus' work was focused on teaching people about the nature of God and how God desires to be in relationship with us. The disciples desire that relationship, so they want to know how to communicate with God. Back in those days, as it still is in some religions now, it was common to repeat certain prayers at certain times of the day, and Jesus' disciples are asking him to teach them how to pray – how to communicate with God.

What do you say to someone you love? What words do you use to express your love, admiration, and respect? How many of you, when you've had some important words to say, such as a marriage proposal, a speech, or a job interview, how many of you have practiced speaking the words? Tried several different versions? Gone through several drafts? When you have something important to say, you want to get the words just right.

So, when the disciples ask Jesus to teach them how to pray, and Jesus responds with these 5 little sentences, it's no wonder that these words have been preserved throughout history, and become the most common prayer in the world. Such is the importance of the Lord's Prayer, that the Catechism of the Catholic Church teach that it "is truly the summary of the whole gospel."

I also found this quote from an article published in 2007 that states. "On Easter Sunday 2007, it was estimated that many of the two billion Roman Catholic, Anglican, Protestant and Eastern Orthodox Christians who were sharing in the celebration of Easter would read, recite, or sing the short prayer in hundreds of languages." Although Christians often disagree on many things, the words of the Lord's Prayer unite us."

Today we are looking at the version of the Lord's Prayer found in the gospel of Luke, but the more familiar wording is found in Matthew. Here in Luke we have just these 5 short sentences, as our model for prayer. What I want us to do today is to try to make this prayer

our own. To personalize it so that it reflects our relationship with God, because from first to last, this prayer is about relationship, beginning with what we call God.

I made a little template of sorts, and each of you should have one in your bulletin. If you'd like, you may take it out and as we go through the prayer, you can write in your own words for each phrase.

Jesus said to call God, "Father" but maybe for you Father doesn't work so well. Maybe you didn't have such a great relationship with your dad, or maybe you didn't have a dad at all. At any rate, what do you call God? What is your relationship with God like? Is it intimate and close? Is it like family or friend? Whatever name or title you commonly use to refer to God, just write that in the space there.

The end of the first sentence, 'hallowed be your name' describes Jesus' reverence for his father, and Jesus' desire to see God's name held up with honor and respect. How do you feel about God? How do you want God's name to be heard? Is God holy, which is what hallowed means? Is God awesome? How do you want God's name or being to be thought of? You can just note that on that first line too.

"Your kingdom come" is the second phrase, and expresses the desire for the place where God dwells to be found among humankind. To bring all that God is to us here on earth. Is this your desire, too? How would you express that wish in words? How do you see God's kingdom happening here? What would that look like? Write that down.

Those first two sentences talk about the realm of God and our relationship to it, and now these next three talk about the human realm, and God's relationship to it. God is holy and God reigns in glory, and yet we are invited into such an intimate relationship, to the Holy One, the same relationship that Jesus had – that of a loving parent and much loved child. Just as a loving parent desires to meet the needs of their children, so God desires to meet our needs.

'Give us each day our daily bread' is such a simple sentence but carries such a wealth of meaning. Notice the seeming lack of manners, the imperative tone, the implicit belief that this request will be granted. This is not the groveling plea of a slave, this is the confident, even brazen demand for that which is necessary to live! Bread -the basic food of life. "God, you know I need it, and I know I need it, so I'm asking for it, feed me." And notice, too, the word 'daily' – I'll ask knowing that God will give me what I need for today, and I'll have enough faith to believe there will be more when I ask again tomorrow.

But food will not be enough to sustain us in this life, if our lives are controlled by sin and selfishness. So we are taught that as we forgive others, we will also be forgiven. I personally like the language of the Matthew version of the Lord's Prayer – 'forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors,' because we don't always hurt others intentionally, sometimes it's just a slip-up or an accident. Sin, to me, speaks of intentionality, whereas 'debts' can mean we may owe someone an apology, even though our actions were unintentional. Whatever it is you need from God in this way, however you need God to help you get along down here, write that petition down.

How's your prayer coming? When you thought about 'daily bread' what did you write in? Was it about bread, or about some other basic need? Perhaps you wrote down 'love' or 'peace' or 'rent' or ...what?

What was the next need you had? Was it for forgiveness? Maybe it was a need for understanding, or more faith. What did you petition God for?

The final request in Jesus' prayer is for safety from evil. I don't know about you, but lately this seems to be our common need. God will never lead us into evil, and our world sure needs to be led away from the evil of violence, so where are you asking God to lead you? What evil do you need to be kept away from, or what safe place do you need God to lead you to? That will be the last line of your prayer.

As you look over your prayer, and maybe you want to refine the language a bit, tweak a word here and there, let me emphasize, again, the intimacy and the boldness of the prayer that Jesus' taught us. If there's one thing I firmly believe about God, it's that God knows me better than any human ever can, and God loves me, anyway. I can come to God in all my messy humanity and with all my struggles, and I can freely ask for help. I have no need or reason to hide my wants and desires from God, and I can boldly ask for whatever it is my heart desires knowing that God will give me what I truly need.

I find the key to this whole section in the last line of our text. "If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him?" Remember, Jesus came to show us the Father, God, and the nature of God is relationship. When my desire is for a closer relationship with God, that is what I will receive. God knows what we really need, this text tells us, and God gives us more than we ask for. We ask for bread, but God gives us the Holy Spirit, because only when we are in relationship with God, are we truly satisfied.

The prayer as it occurs in the ESV version of Matthew 6:9-13

Our Father who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name.
Thy kingdom come,
Thy will be done,
on earth, as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread,
and forgive us of our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.

The quite different form in the ESV version of Luke 11:2-4

Father
hallowed be your name.
Your kingdom come.
. .
Give us each day our daily bread,
and forgive us our sins,
for we ourselves forgive everyone who is
indebted to us.
And lead us not into temptation.