

## *A Journey Through The Lord's Prayer*

### *“Lord, Teach Us to Pray”*

[Luke 11:1-4](#)

Today, we are starting a new 7-week sermon series called, “A Journey through the Lord’s Prayer.” Most people who are church regulars are familiar with the Lord’s Prayer or the Our Father as called by our Catholic brothers and sisters. It is a part of the church’s liturgy, no matter if you are in a contemporary or traditional service. And we tend to say it without paying much attention to the words of the prayer because they are so simple and familiar.

Yet, we still find it to be meaningful to recite the prayer together as a community of faith. The plain but profound words of the Lord’s Prayer are a source of comfort to many Christian believers. Throughout my 26 years of ordained ministry, I have witnessed those who were suffering from dementia or Alzheimer’s disease still able to recite the Lord’s Prayer even long after the names and faces of their own family members were completely erased from their minds.

In the first church I served, I had an elderly church member who was living at a nursing home. Since we didn't have many home or nursing homebound church members to visit, I went to see her every month. But, because of her dementia, she did not remember who I was. So, I had to reintroduce myself to her, every time I visited her. Yet, there was one thing she never failed to remember. Yes, the Lord’s Prayer that we always prayed together at the end of our visit! One time, she stopped in the middle of the prayer and said, “Pastor, you missed a word!” And she was right. It was the first year of my ordained ministry and because it had been only 4 years since I moved to the States, I was still trying to memorize the Lord’s Prayer in English...

Certainly, the Lord’s Prayer is the most important prayer ever prayed by believers. It is one prayer that is shared among Christians across all denominational, national, ethnic and generational boundaries. I am sure every minute of every day, somewhere in the world, someone is praying the Lord’s Prayer in his or her mother tongue. Probably, even at this very moment, somewhere in our nation, some people are reciting the Lord’s Prayer together in worship, in Sunday school, or in a prayer gathering.

The Lord’s Prayer is found in two places in the Bible: Matthew 6:9-13 and Luke 11:1-4. As we heard from today’s scripture reading, in Luke’s account, Jesus gives this prayer to his disciples when one of them asks him to teach them to pray. As you might have noticed, some phrases that are included in the Lord’s Prayer we pray are missing in Luke’s version.

In Matthew’s account, the Lord’s Prayer is recorded as a part of Jesus’ long teaching session, called the Sermon on the Mount. In the middle of his teaching, right before he taught his disciples the model prayer, Jesus gave them some advice about how to pray. He said, “When you are praying, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do; for they think that they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. Pray then in this way” (Mt. 6:7-9).

Apparently, Jesus was promoting the simplicity of his prayer in contrast to the Gentiles' tendency to speak with many words. We tend to believe that a long prayer is more sincere than a short prayer, and that a prayer with eloquent words is better than a prayer with plain words. But, here in the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus puts that belief into question.

To help his readers better understand Jesus' criticism of the Gentiles' long prayers, in his book, *Jesus through Middle Eastern Eyes*, Kenneth Bailey talks about their culture of using many words. He writes,

“When they addressed their gods (which usually included the reigning emperor), the Gentiles used long salutations. They wanted to be sure to use all the correct titles lest the god (Caesar?) take offense. How ponderous this could become appears in the titular names for Galerius Caesar? In the early 4th century, a Christian historian named Eusebius quoted a decree issued by Galerius easing the persecution of Christians just before the age of Constantine. It opens:

The emperor Caesar, Galerius, Valerius, Masimianus, Invictus, Augustus, Pontifex Maximus, Germanicus Maximus, Egypticus Maximus, Phoebicus Maximus, Sarmenticus Maximus [five times], Persecus Maximus [twice], Carpicus Maximus [six times], Armenicus Maximus, Abendicus Maximus, Holder of tribunical authority for the 20th time, emperor for the 19th time, consul for the 8th, Pater Patriae Pro-Consul...” (p. 92).

Apparently, Galerius Caesar wanted to be addressed in this way. Having more names and more titles meant more authority and more power. “You have so many names.” More than once I have heard this comment about my name being hyphenated. Well, mine is nothing in comparison to this emperor!

Bailey further writes,

“In the modern world, we are drowning in words. Each day, we are bombarded with thousands of billboards, ads, letters, magazines, newspapers, television commercials, radio broadcasts, spam, catalogs, junk mail, phone calls, text messages, faxes and endless e-mails... We are immersed in words and in the process, they have become cheap. Rarely, are words as pearls, carefully selected and artistically strung on a golden thread called a sentence. Jesus invites the reader to step into a world where words are few and powerful. In such a world, each word must be examined with the care it deserves” (pp. 93-94).

Examining each word of the Lord's Prayer with care, the care that it deserves -- that's what we will seek to do for the next several weeks as we take time to go over each phrase of the prayer. The words found in both Luke and Matthew's accounts are similar. But, we are going to work with Matthew's version because it is more comprehensive than Luke's. And also, Matthew's version is what is commonly prayed by Christians throughout the world.

The Lord's Prayer can be broken down into 6 sections. The first and the last sections can be categorized as praise: The first goes, “Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name,” and the last says, “For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory for ever.” So, the Lord's Prayer begins and ends with praising, worshipping God. Between these two statements of praise, there are 4 petitions: 1. “Thy kingdom

come, thy will be done.”; 2. “Give us our daily bread,”; 3. “forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.”; 4. “And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.”

Starting with the first line next Sunday, we will examine one of these 6 phrases each Sunday and continue to reflect on the weekly phrase as we go through the week. But, this week, I invite you to pray the Lord’s Prayer in its entirety. The prayer is so short that it will take less than 30 seconds for you to recite it, even going at a moderate pace. Whether you are reciting from memory or reading it in its written form, please do not rush through it. Take your time and pray the prayer with sincerity.

Can you commit to praying the Lord’s Prayer twice a day, once in the morning and once in the evening? Or, how about 3 times a day, once in the morning, once mid-day, and once in the evening? Or at sunrise, at three o’clock in the afternoon, and at sundown, as the Jews in Jesus’ time did. It will be still less than 2 minutes of your day! It doesn't sound like a huge commitment, does it?

But, if praying the Lord’s Prayer three times a day sound like too much, if carving out two minutes a day for the Lord’s Prayer is too big of a commitment to take on right now, try to at least commit to praying it once a day at a time of your convenience. Remember that it will take less than 30 seconds. And try to continue to pray the Lord’s Prayer at least once a day for one month or for a year if you can. I can tell you this with confidence. When earnestly praying the Lord’s Prayer everyday becomes your lifestyle, you will notice that you have changed. You will notice that your world has changed, as well. Because you will experience the power of prayer, especially the prayer Jesus taught us to pray.

The Lord’s Prayer is not merely some beautiful words and phrases to be recited in private or in public worship and other Christian gatherings. Instead, it is the prayer by which we are to live in the world. Jesus teaches us this prayer, so that we can properly align ourselves to God and God's will. Jesus teaches us this prayer, so that we can be forgiven and forgive. Jesus teaches us this prayer, so that we can be provided for and protected. Jesus teaches us this prayer, so that we can become active participants in God’s kingdom building work in the world.

As we Journey through the Lord’s Prayer for the next several weeks, may this wonderful gift Jesus gave us change the way we understand God, ourselves, and the world! May we grow deeper in our faith and become more devoted followers of Jesus!

Amen.