

The Lords' Prayer bible study

Bible passages: Matthew 6:5-15, Luke 11:1-13

Intro

In Matthew, the setting for Jesus teaching which includes the Lord's prayer is in the middle of the "Sermon on the Mount". This begins with the upside-down nature of the Kingdom of God (Blessed are the poor in spirit....) followed by describing us as salt and light in this world before giving a series of examples of where the Jewish people listening to him have taken God's law and by not understanding the heart of it have gone astray. In most cases Jesus then makes the original law more difficult to keep! In this context he speaks about the hypocrisy of standing in public making it obvious that you are giving to those in need, praying and fasting so show people how spiritual you are. Because Jesus prizes humility, he tells people to go into their own room and pray privately as well as hiding any signs that you have been fasting and giving to those in need as your Father in Heaven is fully aware of what you are doing and that is enough. The teaching is directed to a large crowd and in this context of understanding the spirit (as opposed to the letter) of the law. As well as saying that you should pray in private so that there is no hint of boasting about how spiritual you are, Jesus also highlights the phrase about forgiveness – challenging us that if we do not forgive others then we cannot expect God to forgive us. Challenging as usual!

In Luke, the setting for the same example of how we should pray comes in a very different context. Later in Jesus' ministry when he has sent out 12 and then 72 followers to do the things that he has been showing them, they see Jesus regularly taking time to pray and abide with his Father in Heaven – on one of these occasions his closest followers approach him and ask him to teach them to pray (in the same way that John the Baptist had taught his disciples). Jesus responds by teaching them a prayer with a structure of 6 simple elements – with a strong hint that this is how he prays and that the content here is enough for our prayer life abiding with our Father in Heaven. Jesus emphasises persistence in prayer with a promise that what we ask will be given, if we seek we will find and if we knock the door will be open. "Nag me and nag me again" says God when it comes to prayer! There is a promise of good gifts, as well as the power and presence of the Holy Spirit for those who do.

Our Father in Heaven, hallowed be your Name

Think about your identity: you are a child of God, invited to call God Father in the same way that Jesus did.

Now think about God's awesome holiness: what words would you use to describe God in this way?

Can you put these two things together to get a fully formed image of who you pray to? Perfect, holy in heaven AND our father.

Your Kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven

God's Kingdom: what does it look like so that we know what we are praying for?

What is your favourite Kingdom parable or saying of Jesus?

If you are stuck, here are just a few...

Matthew chapter 13: verses 31-32, 33, 44, 45-46, 47-50

Mark chapter 4: verses 1-20, 21-25, 26-29, 30-34

Luke 9:62, 18:24-25

How would you describe the Kingdom of God in our context? Remembering that Jesus spoke to farmers, fishermen, builders, religious teachers in their language – what language would you use now?

In what ways do we see the opposite of the Kingdom of God in our city, nation, world? Be prompted by the discussion about God's Kingdom you have just had!

... pray that God's Kingdom comes and his will is done, just like it is in heaven, in these areas.

Give us today our daily bread

What things do we need (as opposed to want)? Make a list of them.

We are encouraged to pray that we have these things each day, and I believe we are meant to pray the same for our neighbours. I like to pray for “enough to live and enough to give” for me, my family, my neighbours and the organisations I am part of.

Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who have sinned against us

Approaching God for forgiveness in Jesus name, understanding that he died for us and that this is the first part of the process of changing our lives to be more like the person God created us to be is central to our faith. The prayer Jesus taught us directly relates this to our willingness to forgive others as God forgives us.

How easy do you find it to:

- Ask God for forgiveness
- Ask other people for forgiveness
- Forgive other people who have wronged you?

Do you think that it is necessary for others to say sorry to you before you are required to forgive them?

Do not lead us into temptation but deliver us from evil

Think about the things you are tempted to do wrong (or the temptation can be to not do something!). We are encouraged to ask God not to lead us into those temptations. What does that look like in practice? Do you remember to pray this prayer?

Take a look at 1 Corinthians 10:13, an amazing promise to claim.

Think about bad things which have been/are being done to you, untrue accusations that come your way, doubts that form in your mind, your certainty of salvation. How do you overcome these things?

Take a look at Ephesians 6:10-18, and be encouraged to seek God’s help with all of these things

For yours is the Kingdom, the power and the glory forever and ever

The final phrase simply reminds us who it is that we are praying to, putting all things into perspective.

From your experience, experience of people you have known, or from the bible – briefly share a few stories of God’s kingdom, power and glory.

A way to use this prayer

Looking at the 6 simple elements to this prayer which Jesus taught his disciples, the crowd who heard the Sermon on the Mount and us – one way to use it is to pray each day around the 6 phrases allowing the Holy Spirit to stop you on one of them and concentrate on it. Why not try that this week?