

Church of All Nations

July 27 2025

Lord's Prayer

A few introductory comments and then a couple of more focussed comments on phrases from the Lord's Prayer.

Of the four gospels Luke is the one that most emphasises prayer and that all major events in Jesus life are soaked in prayer.

Today's passage has as its text the most famous prayer in the world and begins with Jesus "praying in a certain place." When he has finished praying, one of his disciples asks, "Lord, teach us to pray..." (11:1). What do you think this anonymous disciple meant?... give us some words, a formula to recite, or lead us, show us, in what spirit, we are to pray.

Just as the Parable of the Good Samaritan from two weeks ago is the answer to a question "Who is my neighbour" so the Lord's Prayer that we say each week together is the answer to the request, "Lord, teach us to pray". In response, we have Jesus offering a three-part teaching, including a prayer, a parable about prayer, and some sayings about prayer. A bit ironic that we have made the words of the Lord's Prayer a routine, maybe even a rote prayer for the request of the disciples is not "Teach us a prayer," but is instead, "Teach us to pray," and there is a difference. Not just a set of words to learn rote, but to pray in the spirit of Jesus, to be taken up into his relationship with the One he teaches us to call Father.

Prayer... vexed question. Why do some get healed and some not? Strength of praying? Fervour of outpouring, strength of faith. Probably I first got plunged into the anguish of this issue when a person greatly admired Libby Raddcliffe, kicked a piece of coral in Pacific Islands and her wound turned septic and poisoned her blood ;and despite world wide outpouring of prayer she died. A hero within the radical discipleship movement. You will all have experiences of prayer "working" and prayer "not working". Mystery we cannot fathom. As Mac reminds us continually we do need a decent dose of humility when

pondering the eternal questions of faith and prayer in particular today. And I have no doubt at all that our doubts and questions and confusions are more than accepted and received by God and the mere fact we have them and ask and implore God is a sign of our desire for the kingdom to come... even as we were taught to pray.

It helps me to know even Jesus had his battles with prayer. On his final night on earth he anguishes with God in prayer and asks, pleads, that if there is any way he can achieve his calling, live out his faithfulness without being nailed to a cross then please God may it be so.. And despite his tormented prayer the bitter cup of suffering would not pass from Jesus. The next time we know Jesus prayed, he was crying out in dereliction, "My God, my God, *why?* Why have you forsaken me?". But before he bowed his head and died, Jesus said to this same Father, "Into your hands do I commit my spirit."

Here's what strikes me about how Jesus teaches us to pray. It's not about asking God to do or give particular things in specific circumstances. It's bigger than that. It is about the future and our responsibility for bringing about that future.

The promise of a future is a thread that runs through today's gospel. Listen to how Jesus describes that promise: "He will get up and give him whatever he needs," "It will be given you," "You will find," "The door will be opened." Again and again he speaks of a future to come. That's not, however, a promise that we will get whatever we ask for.

Prayer does not guarantee an outcome, undo the past, or offer an escape from life or the circumstances of our lives. It keeps us open to the future.

A couple of comments more specific to Lord's Prayer - It is significant that the Lord's Prayer is in the plural. Our Father, forgive us, grant us.

It is not my prayer. It is our prayer. It is the prayer given by Jesus to his Church, rather than to each individual, one at a time. That's why when we use it in worship, we always pray it out loud in unison. Now this doesn't mean that you shouldn't use it unless you are praying with others in a gathered group. Certainly, you can use it when you are praying alone. But you still don't pray "My Father, feed me, forgive me, deliver me," do you? Because part of what the prayer is doing is reminding you that even if you are unable to gather with others at a particular time, the prayer that you offer is still offered as part of the church and "in unison" with the church. Sure, you can't hear the other voices joining with you at that moment, but Christ's church spans the globe and spans the centuries, and the Church's prayer rises like incense before God without ceasing, and so all we are ever really doing is joining in. We don't

create prayer, or make it happen; we simply join in. We add our voices to the prayers of the Church that are rising in Christ every minute of every day from every corner of the planet.

we are invited to address God the same way that Jesus addresses God, and that is with a name that is unique to the relationship Jesus has with the One he calls Father. It is not that we stand independently as children of God, as Christ's equals, but that we are gathered into him, and in him, we share in his relationship to the Father. A loving parent. Of course we know that not all parents are loving, capable, compassionate,

And if your father was distant, abusive, absent, too busy to notice, inadequate emotionally, well find another term that can express your deepest desires, your acceptance as a loved child of the Great Father and Mother of us all.

Third, "Your kingdom come," we pray. Note that we pray for God's kingdom (reign) to come, not for us to make it to God's kingdom. Many religions see this world as something from which we eventually escape to go elsewhere to be with God, but Jesus does not teach that. Jesus teaches us to pray for the kingdom to come here. He teaches us to pray for the marriage of earth and heaven, not our transfer from one to the other. The earth and our physical bodies are all part of God's promised future.

It's curious that Jesus more than once illustrates prayer with images of exasperation. In Luke 11 we have a friend at midnight baying for bread from someone already tucked cozily into bed. A few chapters farther on in Luke we find the parable of the unjust judge who finally gives in to the persistent widow not for any noble reason but just to get her off his back.

It is about how we humans, though evil, still do good things for our children. How much more will the loving Father give us good gifts and the Holy Spirit. "If you ask for an egg, you're not going to get a scorpion. Ask, and it will be given; search and you will find; knock and the door will be opened." The main thing Jesus is saying to his followers in these sayings, is "Lighten up. Don't get so worried about it!" God is good, and God loves you. God is going to accept your prayer and respond with delight, so don't get so anxious about whether or not you get it right. Even evil people, says Jesus know how to give good things to their children who they love, so how much more will your Heavenly Father respond lovingly to you.

Sometime we get very caught up in worrying about it and getting the words right and it stifles our prayers. I think it is partly because we have always been fed so much God as great and mighty king type images. When people are going to be introduced to the Queen of England, or the Governor General or someone, they often go to etiquette classes for a few weeks to learn how to

speak properly to royal dignitaries, or their representatives. And we get caught up in all the majestic images of God and see ourselves in that same sort of position as we come to God in prayer. We worry about the correct form of address and the suitable respectful and worshipful type language.

But Jesus is saying don't worry about all that. Instead of the image of a loyal subject bending the knee before the monarch, Jesus gives the image of a little child running in saying, "Mummy, Daddy, I wanna egg." That says Jesus is much more like the relationship between us and God when we pray. It is a spontaneous outpouring of our love and affection and wants and needs. And God responds in delight

CS Lewis was the author of the widely read children's books, *The Narnia Chronicles*, as well as many novels for grown-ups and books on issues surrounding the Christian faith. The movie *Shadowlands* (directed by Richard Attenborough and produced in 1993) tells Lewis' story, focusing in particular on his relationship with his wife, Joy Gresham. Gresham and Lewis meet while Lewis is a don at Oxford University.

After Joy is diagnosed with cancer the couple marry. The movie invites us to witness their love, their pain, their grief, their struggles with faith and God. Eventually Joy dies.

At one point in the story a friend says to Lewis, "Christopher can scoff, Jack, but I know how hard you've been praying; and now God is answering your prayers."

Lewis replies "That's not why I pray, Harry. I pray because I can't help myself. I pray because I'm helpless. I pray because the need flows out of me all the time, waking and sleeping. It doesn't change God, it changes me."