

## Intro

“Teach us to pray”

not uncommon practice; among Rabbis but also among humans as a whole

Significance of this passage

There are probably five sermons in the first four verses alone

not to mention the other 9

(And you may be about to hear at least two of them today lol)

Focusing on vss. 1-4 - “The Lord's Prayer”

Let's go through the “Cliffs Notes” version:

## Line-by-Line/Fun Facts/Cliff's Notes of the Lord's Prayer

“Our”

not “My”

the Lord's Prayer is essentially *communal* - collective pronouns all around

reminder that even in something as private as prayer, we do not cease to be inexorably

interconnected as one human family under the same Divine Parent

“Father;” Holy Name

We assume the place of Christ when we pray (in his Spirit and addressing God thus)

Which means that as we pray for God to uphold the Holiness of God's Name,

we must also be ready to pray in such a way that we volunteer to do the same

Which ought to make us think about the nature of what we pray for

(vss 5-8) Man obviously thought it was worth the ask (hospitality, etc)

“WWJP?” (What Would Jesus Pray?)

don't forget, sometimes that got personal and even critical!

But also of the Loving nature of the One to whom we pray (vss 11-13)

reminds us that God really does want what's best for us, and we ought to

approach God in prayer as a loving parent, not a wrathful tyrant.

Leads us to have some “nerve” in our prayers:

T4P (Cousar): the Gk word, *anaideia*, is possibly mistranslated “persistence;”

“We are not told that he pounded on the door or called repeatedly.”

Other meaning: “shamelessness”

Holy *chutzpah*!

Culpepper suggests that this could be directed at either character in the story

the petitioning neighbor, or pray-er, who is exhorted to persistence and

courage in prayer or the sleeping neighbor, who would be put to shame if he didn't help

*God upholding the holiness of God's Name!*

What follows is a handy guide to things that are always safe to ask for:

Kingdom Come

Luke lacks "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven"

implied in Luke's Gospel that to pray for the Kingdom is to work for the Kingdom inclusive and loving

Daily Bread

Not "everything we want for the rest of time"

providence, not prosperity

no "eat, drink, and be merry" like the rich fool

Forgiveness - as we forgive

Keeps us humble

*Also reminds us to forgive - "for we ourselves forgive..."*

Like it or not, there is a contingency here

"Restore our relationship with you so that we may restore our relationships with our fellow children"

"You are free to love as God loves" from the prayer earlier

The assurance of that forgiveness, coupled with an attitude of humility which comes seeking it, is what helps us to approach prayer without shame

If nothing else, we can rest assured that the Divine parent to whom we pray already knows everything that weighs on our consciences

No Trials (Protection from Evil)

debate surrounding this difficult phrase

(This line probably represents a whole potential sermon)

suffice to say, we pray not to be distracted from doing God's Will

"Teach us *how* to pray" - not *what* to pray, but *how*

not necessarily *prescriptive*, but *descriptive*

This rubric for prayer is as wondrous as it is succinct

But it doesn't represent some magical formula, nor is it a mere rhetorical device.

Rather, it gives insight into the spirit of Jesus' own prayer life, and therefore the prayer life that every Christian ought to pursue

Look at the petitions which Jesus offers and see what it is we're meant to focus on:

A closer relationship with God, our Divine Parent

God's Kingdom to come (and will to be done)

Our basic bodily needs to be met (so we can better serve)

Forgiveness for ourselves and the strength to forgive others

(Therefore, closer and healthier relationships with God and our fellows)

Mercy enough not to be tried or tempted away from God's Will

All of this sounds a lot like "*Life, and life abundant*"

James Carse: "The only proper response to God is to ask for that one thing we can truly receive, and which we can have only by receiving it - life itself. We can ask for nothing less if we truly ask."

"In answering our prayers, God does not respond within a world; God responds with a world."

Jesus never claims that we will receive each specific thing for which we ask in prayer, but rather "The Holy Spirit," which "...creates, sustains, and empowers the church to continue what Jesus began to do and to teach." (Craddock, PtNCL) and brings with it courage, boldness, and power - but only for doing that which is the Will of God.

All we can truly ask for in prayer is the fullness of the disciplined life and all it brings with it!

And if we really mean it when we pray, "your kingdom come," that's all we'll want!

### **Why pray?**

So, if all we get to ask for is what God already wants, and if God is going to do what God's going to do, why bother to pray? What is there to gain?

Disciplining/harnessing a human need

Prayer is a cultural universal - a human need

not unlike eating or breathing

Don Aycock likens the disciplined prayer life to the discipline of diet and mealtimes, rising beyond the spasmodic behavior that is regulated by nothing but momentary visceral needs

Nurturing a relationship with our Divine Parent

Invitational, not compulsory

We could decide today not to pray again as long as we live

But I don't think we'd like to

Difference between praying as the discharge of a perceived duty vs nurturing a relationship

calling parents when we need something OR reporting for duty

vs entering into conversation with a loving and beloved friend and family member  
Jesus' example - man goes to a *friend*, not a stranger, asking for help  
someone with whom he had a preexisting relationship

*We ought not be afraid to pray*

calling home regularly and often, not because we must, but because we want to  
Personal, Intimate, and Two-Way Communication helps us understand God and ourselves  
*just as much listening as speaking, if not more*

Prayer teaches us to bare our whole self, our innermost soul, to God;  
and, perhaps more importantly, to shut up and listen!

Kierkegaard: "The function of prayer is not to influence God, but rather to  
change the nature of the one who prays."

We find this especially true in our "unanswered prayers"

causes us to ask, "How much do I really want this?"

"is what I want what God wants?"

Leaves us having grown through the experience of waiting and doubt

Prayer helps us live and grow as spiritual beings

Prayer invigorates and nourishes us in way we can't fully understand or articulate

*Prayer as the in-breath and out-breath of the spiritual life*

Spirit ~ *Spiritus* ~ *Ruach* ~ *Pneuma*

*Pneuma* as Spirit and Breath

contrast with *Psyche* (animating force of the body)

reminder that when all that is perishable has passed away, it is in Spirit, in  
*Pneuma*, that we are joined as one in the Body of Christ.

Two-way communication; two parts to a breath

In-breath as we listen for the "still, small voice" of God

Out-breath as we give to God our hopes, desires, and concerns

Just as athletes learn to train and discipline their breath, so too can we condition  
ourselves to pray more frequently, more faithfully, and more fervently; to greater effect

We see it in the example of Jesus

remember that Jesus was always praying, especially in Luke's gospel

And those were just the prayers that people saw enough to record!

*"Pray without ceasing" can refer to a state of prayerful awareness of the Holy Spirit*

Aside: Why liturgical (scripted) prayer?

For the same reason we adhere to certain training regimens

Prescribed workouts; *Zumba class!*

As someone with shelves full of prayer books and who has a liturgical bent  
There are those who are gifted, not unlike poets, with articulating the human condition  
and longing for God, and whose insights bear fruit when shared in group prayers  
and for them we give thanks

N.T. Wright: “Formal prayers, including official liturgies for services in church, are vital  
for most people for their spiritual health, but they are like the metal shell of a car”

(from me) it may be all that those around us see, but what moves it and supports  
it is arguably more vital

We need to make sure that our prayers are not so sporadic and spasmodic as to be self-centered, nor  
so perfunctory, so mechanical, as to be rendered meaningless.

Prayer should feel as natural and as life-giving as eating, sleeping... *or breathing*

So, I'll ask again: Why bother to pray?

*Well, why bother breathing?*

The world will go on without each of us if we decide to drop dead today, so why bother?  
Because, in the mystery of faith, each of us is both one of a billion *and* one in a billion

We matter; our lives matter; they matter to God, and to those around us  
and our spiritual lives matter, at least just as much and arguably more so  
so why would we let our spiritual bodies suffocate?

*We pray, church, because it provides us with the vital energy necessary to be the Church.*

*And that's what we're here to do!*

## Summary/Good News!/Exhortation

Fosdick quotes an unknown Sufi on prayer: “There are three degrees in prayer. The first is when it is only spoken by the lips. The second is when with difficulty, by a resolute effort, the soul succeeds in fixing its thought on divine things. The third is when the soul finds it hard to turn away from God.”

I hope we find that to be true.

I hope we leave here today with the feeling that prayer is worthwhile.

I hope we consider it a worthy use of our time, energy, and attention.

I hope that we learn to consider the rhythm of prayer in our spiritual life just as natural, and just as vital, as the rhythm of our own respiration.

And I hope that we find it pleasant and rewarding.

Good News: We are *invited* to converse - at any time, anywhere, in any circumstance - with a Loving Divine Parent who truly wants what's best for all of us; not because we must, but because we may - and hopefully because we want to.

We are *invited* into an ongoing and eternal conversation which promises not to leave us the same as it found us; but which rather promises to lead us closer to who we're meant to be.

We are *invited* in this and every moment to draw our breath in both the material and spiritual world.

*May we breathe deeply of The Holy Spirit as we pray along with the whole Body of Christ to Our Father, knowing that He is Faithful and Good.*

*And may we do so joyfully, as often as we can - even with every breath we take. AMEN*