

The Lord's Prayer

Luke 11:1-4

Once Jesus was in a certain place praying. As he finished, one of his disciples came to him and said, "Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples."

Jesus said, "This is how you should pray:

"Father, may your name be kept holy.
May your Kingdom come.
Give us each day our daily food,
Forgive us our sins,
for we keep forgiving those who owe us.
And don't lead us into testing.

We often pick up passages like this and forget that Luke places this teaching in a context which should help the reader understand it. The writer of this gospel, Luke, has been reminding us all the way through the book that Jesus is a person of prayer. He prays before major decisions, he fuels his healing and miraculous ministry with prayer, he withdraws to solitary places and spends time with God, his daily connection to God and fellowship with God comes through in story after story.

The two stories just prior to the prayer and a story afterwards are a vital part of understanding this prayer. The story of the Good Samaritan shows what it means to love others as we love ourselves. Samaritans of Jesus day were like the Palestinians of today. So you could title the story The Good Palestinian if you were using today's language. The story shows what it means to be a neighbour to another human being.

When you think about it, God is the ultimate Good Palestinian. He comes to a world beat up by sin and the devil and risks his life, even sacrificing himself to deliver us. He tends to our wounds and makes us part of his family. So the fact is, God is the hero of the story of the Good Samaritan, for all human kindness flows from his presence and image within us.

Jesus asks the question, "Which one became a neighbour to the man attacked by bandits?" So too, God became our neighbour and moved into the neighbourhood, Emanuel, "God with us." And what kind of heart response would the wounded man have had towards his rescuer? A response of heartfelt love and gratitude.

It is this love and gratitude that shapes the next story, that of Martha and Mary hosting Jesus. Both women are sharing their love for Jesus - one tending to his needs and one basking in his presence. Both expressions of love are beautiful, but worship comes before works. Jesus teaches that delighting in the presence of God is our first priority and that doing things for God, which is also essential, comes after. We are to live a life of service for God that flows out of our worship of God. Worship is not just found in our gathering together physically or virtually, or in singing to Jesus. Worship is simply enjoying the presence of God.

And it is out of this story of love and worship that the disciples ask Jesus to teach them to pray. Jesus spoke to God with intimacy and intense love. The disciples saw and heard that and wanted to imitate his walk with God. So they asked, "Won't you teach us to pray, you know, like John taught his disciples to pray?"

And Jesus happily obliged.

Out of a heart full of adoration and love for God who loves us, we pray

Our Father,

We ask that your name be treated as holy by all.

We ask that your rule over this earth be evident here and now,

Give us today the food we need for this day,

Forgive our sins, for we forgive all who owe us anything.

Do not bring us into the time of trial.

Five requests.

- 1) That the world recognize the holiness of God and live in respect of Him. Honouring God's name means honouring God himself. Jesus' story of the Good Palestinian shows God's incredible love for all as God becomes neighbour to humanity left broken and bleeding by the roadside of life, trashed by sin and evil. Our response to that love is to adore and honour our Heavenly Father. We long for all people to experience God's love and respond with honour and allegiance to Jesus Christ.
- 2) That God's rule over the earth be complete, eradicating evil and injustice. Our prayer is that the wrongs experienced by the poor and the "lesser-than's" in society be set right. We join in a spiritual protest march saying the lives of all skin colours matter to God. We believe that we are part of God's agenda to bring His peace into the world. We have the ministry of reconciliation - not just between God and humans, but between human and human as well. We long for reconciliation, not just between God and people, not just between aboriginal and non-aboriginal, but between husbands and wives, children and parents, political leaders and protesters, police and criminals. That's the kind of world God wants.
- 3) That God provide our daily needs. Just today's mind you, not that we have security for the future in bank accounts, investments or properties, or even full pantries, and freezers. The assurance that we will have enough for tomorrow doesn't come from human plans and preparations, though the Bible clearly promotes wise planning and stewardship. Our security for tomorrow and the future lies in Jesus, not the physical assurances we gather around ourselves. We are blessed with many physical assurances of future security, but many of our brothers and sisters around the world have no such safety net. Some don't know if they will have food this evening. Some live under the threat of violence or the loss of their livelihood day after day. Where is their security? It is in Jesus, and Jesus alone. Let us not abuse the blessing we have been given, but live lives of gratitude and generosity.
- 4) That God forgive us for our wrongdoings based on our continuing commitment to forgive those who have offended or "owe us" anything. One way to view sin is that it creates a debt before God that we owe but that we can never repay. Luke talks a lot about forgiving debts, and his teaching on money is pretty powerful - "to be a disciple you need to give up all your possessions" (Luke 14:33), but that's a topic for another sermon. Clearly though, God's forgiveness to us is deeply connected to our forgiveness to others. We ask for forgiveness as those who are forgiving and being forgiven.

- 5) That God would spare us from the time of testing. Whether the testing is personal and immanent or whether it is coming at the end of the age whose timing is unknown, testing tries to erode our faith with questions like,
 - 1) If God is good, why is he letting this happen to me?
 - 2) Wouldn't it just be easier to go with the flow and not stand up for Jesus?
 - 3) I thought that the Christian life was supposed to be easier than this. Why am I finding it so hard?
 - 4) etc. etc.

Self doubt and doubting God are all mixed up with unmet expectations, losses and grief, failure and guilt. Yes God, please spare us from these times of distress.

So how are we doing on praying for these five things?

1. Are we tired of praying that the world would acknowledge God and live lives of respect and obedience to Him?
2. Are we giving up asking for God's kingdom to be realized on earth, trading this request for something like, "Jesus come soon and get me out fo this place"?
3. Are we taking God's provision of our daily needs for granted and falling into a thoughtless ritual of giving thanks for those needs being met?
4. Are we asking for God's forgiveness while we hold a grudge against another person created in God's image?
5. Are we assuming life will go on without much interruption (hardly credible these days) and thus forgetting to pray for deliverance from trial? Or are we experiencing trial and beginning to doubt the goodness of our Father in heaven?

Remember that this whole prayer is grounded in God's amazing love for us and our loving gratitude to Him. But that reality is easy to forget when life whirls around us in all its complexity. Why does God allow many in the world to dishonour him? Why does it seem we fall farther and farther from the world God intended? Why do so many in the world lack food and drink when there is enough for everybody? Why does unforgiveness and animosity haunt our lives, our families, our communities, and our nation? Why do we still experience such trials when we have prayed repeatedly for God to deliver us from them? With so few answers, why keep praying?

So Jesus tells another story.

It's the middle of the night in a small Palestinian village when a group of strangers shows up looking for the relative that could give them shelter on their journey. The coming is a surprise to the relative and for all who live in the homes with windows wide open. All the light sleepers in town are awake by the time the travellers find the right house. Then the host has to quickly find some bread to set before the guests. He hurries to the house next door and asks his neighbour for some bread. The neighbour does the unthinkable and tells him to get lost, he's

too lazy to get out of bed. That kind of behaviour in a mideastern village would shame a household right out of town. It simply would never happen. But even if centuries of cultural training and the importance of doing honourable thing wouldn't motivate the neighbour get up, the simple desire to deal with the issue and get back to sleep would have him get up and give the guy some bread.

God is the opposite of that lazy neighbour. He would be at his neighbour's door first, offering bread and wine and whatever else may be needed.

So Jesus says,

“And so I tell you, keep on asking, and you will receive what you ask for.

Keep on seeking, and you will find.

Keep on knocking, and the door will be opened to you.

For everyone who asks, receives. Everyone who seeks, finds. And to everyone who knocks, the door will be opened.

Jesus teaches “Don't give up on praying for what I taught you. God is good. He will give you the best. Keep praying this prayer and God will show you answers.”

This isn't an invitation for us to tell God what to do in any or every situation; we seldom know what would be best ten days from now let alone for human history. It is an encouragement to keep on praying how Jesus taught us to pray and trust God with the outcomes of our prayers.

If God's love came down from heaven and cared for your wounds and healed your grace-starved soul when you were his enemy, then do you think he'd withhold a good gift from you when you are his child? Of course not. He loves giving good gifts to his children.

So keep on praying that the world would come to reverence the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Keep on praying that more and more people will give their allegiance to Jesus and let God's kingdom come in their lives.

Keep on asking and giving thanks for God's daily provision for you.

Keep on asking for forgiveness and keep on forgiving as we live out God's love among the people God has given us for neighbours.

And keep on praying for protection from the temptation to compromise, to quit sharing our story, to go with the flow and not boldly proclaim our allegiance to Jesus as Saviour and King.

May God make it so in my life and yours.