

“The Lord’s Prayer”
Why do we do that? part 2

Matthew 6:5-15

[60] Welcome.

Holy Spirit, you sustain us with life and breath. Come, fill your church with your presence. Show us how you intercede on our behalf with inexpressible longings. Teach us to be united in our love of Jesus Christ, whom we worship and adore. In his name we pray, Amen.

[61] When I was 12 years old, I went through a rite of passage called confirmation. Does that word bring back pleasant memories? Or strike fear in your hearts? I will tell you what it meant for me. Confirmation meant I had to meet with Reverend Doctor Ronald Carter after several weeks of grueling memorization, and I had to take a test. If I passed the test, I would be a full, professing member of the Tawas United Methodist Church. If I failed, the pastor, church, and my family would disown me, at least, that’s how I felt. It was a big deal. I had to memorize the 23rd Psalm, the Apostle’s Creed, the books of the Bible in order, and the Ten Commandments. (Number 11 is “Thou shalt not complainth about thy mother’s cooking.” I got that one wrong!) And, of course, the Lord’s Prayer. I distinctly remember sitting in Pastor Carter’s office, sweating, and thinking, “I’m not going get enough points to pass.”

[62] Listen, I had a good pastor. He did confirm me. I also had wonderful Sunday School teachers. I memorized a ton of information about the Bible, and I am grateful. But there was one piece missing. I never asked, “Why?” Why did we have to memorize those words? Why did it matter to our faith? Like frustrated math students, we asked, “When are we ever going to use this stuff?”

Have you been there? Have you ever longed to ask, “Why do we do that in church?” Or worse, have you become so accustomed to certain traditions in the church that they have lost any real meaning?

I’m hoping you answer yes to at least one of those questions, because in our message series right now we are looking at some very important words we say and sacraments we use in the United Methodist church, and for each one, I

simply want to ask, “Why?” and “What does this mean?” Last week we looked at Communion. Today we focus on the Lord’s Prayer.

[63] The Lord’s Prayer is a special prayer, taught by Jesus himself. It is found in two passages in the Bible, in Matthew 6, which we read earlier, and in Luke 11. In Luke, the prayer is preceded by his disciples’ request: “Lord, teach us how to pray.” (Luke 11:1) This is significant. The disciples didn’t ask how to prophesy. They didn’t ask how to do miracles. They said, “Lord, teach us how to pray.” This should be our first request as well. We will accomplish nothing on our own if we don’t pray. The disciples knew this simple fact, and they went to the Master of prayer to get help.

How many of you are really comfortable praying out loud, especially in public? Is it difficult for you? I have great news. If Jesus taught his disciples how to pray, we can learn, too. The Lord’s Prayer is not the only way to pray, but it is an exemplary model. If we understand the words and structure of this prayer, we will be able to pray confidently in our own lives. I guarantee you, if you take the time to understand the Lord’s Prayer, you will be able to pray in any situation.

[64] So let’s look at the content of this prayer. The first line of the Lord’s Prayer is, “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.” Hallowed is just a fancy word for holy. The beginning of the Lord’s Prayer is an expression of praise. The easiest way to start a prayer is by simply telling God who He is. Praise is saying, “This is what I like about you.” The Third Commandment teaches us God’s name is holy. A beautiful way to start your prayers is praising God for being holy, gracious, loving, kind, understanding, perfect, just....Whatever you most love about God, start your prayer with that.

[65] The second line is “Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth, as in heaven.” When we pray, we need to remind ourselves whose priorities matter: God’s, not ours. In every prayer, we should be asking God, “What is your will?” We tend to get things really messed up when we ask for our own will. Nothing we pray for will ultimately matter if it is not God’s will.

When we pray for God’s kingdom to come and will to be done on earth, we echo the very words of John the Baptist (Matthew 3:2) and Jesus himself (Matthew 4:17). “The kingdom of heaven is here!” We believe that in heaven, God’s will is done perfectly. As the church, we are also advancing God’s kingdom

on earth, here and now. God’s kingdom is seen when we have peace, love, compassion, morality, truth...all these things are already in heaven. Pray that God’s will would be done on earth, too.

[66] The next line goes, “Give us this day our daily bread.” In biblical times, bread was a staple of the diet: hearty, whole-grain wheat, full of protein and nutrients. It was very difficult to live without it, as opposed to today. This part of the prayer is asking for more than just a slice of Wonder Bread. We are asking for the means to live. In our prayers, we usually supplicate, or ask for the things we need or want.

Notice the prayer doesn’t say “weekly”, “monthly”, or “yearly” bread. Instead, we mean, “God, give us just what we need, no more. Allow us to live in the present, and trust you for today.” This is a prayer asking God to help us not to worry. Worry is the opposite of daily bread. Worry is fear that we won’t have enough tomorrow. In Matthew 6, Jesus commands us not to worry. Paul says it again in Philippians 4: Don’t worry. Rather than let the fear of the future rob us of the joy of the present, we should, in the words of Dale Carnegie, “live in day-tight compartments.” God, just give us what we need for today, and it will be enough.

[67] The next line of the Lord’s Prayer is, “Forgive us our sins, as we have forgiven those who have sinned against us.” This is the confessional part of the prayer. Romans 3:23 explains, we have all sinned. We have all messed up. We all need to simply say, “God, I’m sorry.”

Confession is a lot like vomiting. We all carry sin inside of us, and it corrupts us. It poisons us. God doesn’t want sin to remain in us. We need to confess to God and to one another. Every time we pray, we should admit our sin.

Prayer is not just about our own forgiveness, either. Read the next words: “as we have forgiven those who sin against us.” Jesus said, how can you expect God to forgive if you do not? (Matthew 6:14-15) That is easy to say, harder to practice. What if we are really hurt? What about when we’ve been obedient and still taken one on the chin? Are we still supposed to forgive? Yes. Always. None of us deserves God’s grace. And yet, we receive it. None of us can pray this prayer and think, “But not so-an-so. I’m never forgiving them for what they did!”

Holding a grudge is like drinking poison and expecting the other person to die. We must forgive. A church that doesn’t practice forgiveness is no church for

me. And when I mean forgiveness, I don’t mean a token, “Yeah, all right, OK, I forgive you, you lousy so-and-so.” I mean the deep, pride-swallowing, throat gulping, freedom-giving forgiveness that flows from the grace of God and the blood of Jesus Christ.

[68] The next line is, “Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.” What is it saying? God doesn’t tempt us (James 1:13), but this is a prayer asking for strength in trials. There is some irony here – we may pray not to be led into temptation, but then we go looking for it. Have you heard the old joke, “Lead me not into temptation; I’ve already found the shortcut.”

Why would we pray a prayer like this, and not mean it? “God, keep me from temptation and sin, but not tomorrow night at 8 pm.” When we pray this line, we are asking God to give us the strength to resist what is contrary to God’s will. Remember, we started by praying for God’s will. We need to realize that in our God-given freedom, we have the responsibility to turn away from sin, to not enter the situations and relationships that are going to trip us up.

The second part of this request could be “deliver us from evil”, or “from the evil one” – there may be more than one interpretation here. This is a spiritual warfare prayer! We are praying against the devil. When we pray this prayer, we are fighting a spiritual battle. We are poking the devil in the chest, saying, “Not in God’s house!” We should be sweating when we say this phrase!

[69] The last part of the Lord’s Prayer, “for yours is the kingdom, the power, and the glory forever” is actually a doxology not in the oldest manuscripts of the bible. We don’t know if these are Jesus’s original words. So, is it OK to say them? In my humble opinion, yes. In everything we do, God is supposed to get the glory. The church exists to bring God glory by being part of God’s kingdom on earth. This last part of the prayer is both a praise and a thanksgiving. We praise God for who God is, and we thank God for what God has done. This is an appropriate conclusion to the model prayer.

[70] Every prayer should include four elements: Praise, Confession, Supplication (or asking), and Thanksgiving. There are some acronyms to help you remember, for example: P.A.T.H. Praise, Admit, Thank, Help. Praise God. Admit or confess your sin. Thank God for what God has done. And ask for Help, for what you need. Another acronym is A.C.T.S. Acknowledge who God is (Praise).

Confess - admit your sin. Thank God for what he’s done. And supplicate – ask for what you need.

We might say the Lord’s prayer partly out of tradition, partly out of habit. It’s commonly used in churches, sometimes with slightly different wording. But it’s important that we remember why we say what we say.

[71] Honestly, you can use many different models to pray, but the important thing is that your prayers come from the heart. There is nothing wrong with saying the Lord’s Prayer, every Sunday, as long as you remember, God is listening! So pray for God’s will in your life, and let your spirit match your words when you pray.

Memory Verse

Romans 8:26

“We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express.”

Reflection questions

1. When have you wanted to ask “Why do we do that?” in church? Did you feel like someone was ready to listen to you?
2. Do you have a model prayer that you use in your personal life? If so, where did you learn it?
3. How comfortable are you praying out loud? Why?
4. How can you apply the 4-part structure to your prayers? (Praise, Confess, Thank, Ask.)
5. Use these acronyms to remember a simple structure for prayer:
ACTS – Adore, Confess, Thank, Supplicate.
PATH – Praise, Admit, Thank, Help.