

No.1 The Lord's Prayer – Introduction

How would you describe the Lord's Prayer? Would you say, 'it is the words Jesus taught us to say when we pray', or perhaps 'the words we recite in church every week', or perhaps 'the most important Christian prayer', or something else?

It is surely not by chance that it is set at the very centre of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount teaching; such is the importance He places on prayer, and Jesus is teaching in these verses how to pray; perhaps not so much what to pray but what to pray about.

Read Matthew 6: 5-8

Jesus starts with teaching how not to pray, apparently condemning existing practices. How are the Pharisees praying, and what is their mistake? How also are the pagans mistaken? Jesus paints a vivid contrast between two alternatives in order to indicate His way more plainly. His way, the Christian way, is to focus on meaningful communication; to pray with our heart not our lips. To seek God's warm embrace; to enjoy the pleasure of His company. In the example given by Jesus, neither Pharisee nor pagan are thinking about God, but about themselves.

Some find verse 6 open to interpretation. Do you think Jesus is giving a direct instruction or something else? Discuss.

Verse 8 "Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him." How should we reconcile this verse with Jesus saying immediately after "This then is how you should pray"?

Read Matthew 9-15

If, like me, when reciting the Lord's Prayer, you occasionally stumble over the words, with momentary memory loss, do you think that might inhibit your prayer somehow? Do the exact words said correctly and in the right sequence have some special force? Did Jesus give a direct instruction to 'use these words when you pray'? Both John Stott and Tom Wright suggest that the Lord's Prayer is best understood as a framework or perhaps a scaffolding on which and from which to build our communication with God; not that reciting this prayer exactly is anything less than wholesome communication, but encouraging us to deep contemplation of the worship, thankfulness and requests we are making. To pray this prayer with sincerity expresses the priorities of a Christian. Do you agree?

Thoughts to take into the week:

Prayer is one of life's great mysteries. At its lowest, prayer is shouting into a void on the off-chance there may be someone out there listening. At its highest, prayer merges into love, as the presence of God becomes so real that we pass beyond words and into a sense of His reality, generosity, delight, and grace. Tom Wright

What is the meaning and what are the ramifications of starting our prayer 'Our Father'?

Prayer: I find that your will knows no end in me. And when old words die out on the tongue, new melodies break forth from the heart. Praise you Father. Rabindranath Tagore