

Praying the Lord's Prayer: A Resource for Small Groups

Vineyard Columbus

October/November 2019

1 Introduction: How to use this material in your group

The primary purpose of this simple resource is to help you and your group grow in your life of prayer over the next several weeks. Use this material as a guideline, not a rigid template, as you work through the Lord's Prayer with your group, and keep in mind that the main point of this resource is not merely to help you think and talk about prayer, but to actually help you *pray* more often and more deeply in the string-of-pearl moments of your daily lives. You will find a few guidelines below regarding how to use this resource in your group. May God meet you and bless you and your group as you press into the ways of prayer that Jesus taught!

- Ideally, print out a copy of this material for every member of your group. Alternatively, you can text or email a copy of this .pdf to everyone in your group so they can access it on their phone or other device when you meet.
- Consider reading the 2-page “general reflections on the Lord's Prayer” (see below) aloud in your group the first night — you might consider having different group members take turns reading parts of this short section aloud, and may choose to lead a brief discussion about it afterwards, asking group members to share their own reactions, reflections, and experiences.
- The material which follows the general reflections is divided into seven sections, which closely follow the seven “movements” in the Lord's Prayer. Depending on how many group meetings you decide to devote to this material, you may want to cluster two or more sections together on any given week.
- Before each section, we have included one or more Bible references thematically related to that section of the Lord's Prayer. You might choose to spend a few minutes reading these texts aloud and discussing them as you consider that particular section of the Lord's Prayer with your group.

To help start the discussion, we have also provided some questions following the suggested texts — feel free to use those questions or not, and/or to come up with questions of your own. Do not feel like you need to read and discuss all the texts provided, or to use any or all of the questions — remember, these are merely guidelines.

- The most important part of this exercise is to actually spend some time praying together as a group, with the movements of the Lord’s Prayer providing direction for your prayers. For each movement of the Lord’s Prayer, we have provided “starter prayers” to help you and your group press into that portion of the Lord’s Prayer more fully. Following the starter prayers for each movement, you will find a prompt inviting a response from you and your group. It is important to leave some time for the people in your group to offer their own prayers in keeping with that week’s movement or movements in the Lord’s Prayer, so don’t rush this time, and don’t be afraid of more silence than you are generally comfortable with. It sometimes takes real time for people to arrive at and speak out their prayers, so be sure to be patient and leave time for people who are slower to pray out loud in a group. And if your group is large, you might consider breaking into smaller groups for the time of response.
- Finally, another alternative, particularly later in the series, is to simply ignore the suggested Bible texts and questions, and to take a half hour or so to pray through this entire “expanded” Lord’s Prayer together, using the starter prayers and response prompts provided. Also, encourage your group to use this “expanded” Lord’s Prayer in their own private lives of prayer — remember, Jesus intended this prayer as a model and springboard for our own life of prayer, not merely as a prayer to repeat word-for-word. May God bless you and your group as you press into praying as the Lord himself taught us to do!

2 Some general reflections on the Lord’s Prayer

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus gives us some basic instructions regarding prayer:

When you pray, you are not to be as the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners, in order to be seen by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. But you, when you pray, go into your inner room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees in secret will repay you. And when you are praying, do not use meaningless repetition, as the Gentiles do, for they suppose that they will be heard for their many words. Therefore do not be like them; for your Father knows what you need, before you ask Him. Pray, then, in this way... (Matt. 6: 5-9)

In light of these instructions, it is perhaps odd that we often engage with the Lord's Prayer in ways that sometimes embody the very things that Jesus told us to avoid. It is certainly fitting that virtually every Christian tradition has historically employed the actual words of the Lord's Prayer in its normal practices and liturgies, and the words of Jesus in this prayer as recorded in the Gospels are one of his great gifts to the church, and likely the most widely memorized text of Scripture both within and beyond the church. Yet sometimes the very familiarity of this prayer — the fact that we can so easily recite it unreflectively, depending more on muscle memory than on personal engagement with God — should give us pause. If the Lord's preamble to his prayer is to mean anything, it must certainly include a clear warning to avoid the perennial temptations of both the ostentation of the Jewish leaders in their prayers, and the vain repetition of the Gentiles in theirs.

So there is indeed great benefit to repeating the Lord's Prayer, but if that is all we ever do with it, we will miss out on much of the depth that it can bring to our life of prayer, and risk returning to the very ways of praying that it was meant to replace. For this prayer that Jesus has given to us is a springboard, a template, a pattern, meant to move us into the way God intends for us to pray — it was never meant to be merely a limiting, rote prayer to be repeated as an incantation. It rather stands as an invitation to intimately seek the Lord, to shut the door of our inner room and seek him in that private place. And that "inner room" can be our car when we are driving down the freeway, or the quiet of our own heart in the middle of a busy day — it need not be a special prayer closet (though it is a good thing if we have one), but it is any time or place where we turn ourselves toward God and seek him according to the pattern Jesus set in the Lord's Prayer, whether in part or in its entirety. The prayer that Jesus gave us teaches us to pray into the right things and in the right ways, to remember who God is and who we are, to seek the progress of the kingdom of God in the world, to remember the gift of our fellowship among the people of God, and to remember and embrace our complete dependence on God's mercy and love in every aspect of our lives. In light of this, the following "expanded" Lord's Prayer is simply a few first steps of creatively praying into the pattern that Jesus sets for us in the prayer he modeled for us — worship and adoration of God, intercession for people and nations, humble requests for our own basic needs, confession, forgiveness, and the pursuit of protection from the evil that dwells both within and outside of ourselves. Importantly, all of this is undertaken with an eye to the "we" and "us" of Christian community, for we are not isolated individuals, but are integrally bound up with the people of God, the church. And so we pray: "*Our* Father... , give *us* this day... , forgive *us our* trespasses as *we* forgive... , lead *us* not... , and deliver *us*..."

And finally, in each of the seven movements of this simple yet expansive invitation to prayer, we are also gently invited to pause and reflect before the God to whom we are praying, that by the light of his presence and the leading of his Spirit, we might find the way to broadly and deeply open ourselves to him in a growing life of prayer. And so we pray...

3 Praying the Lord's Prayer

Movement One — Our Father...

- Suggested text: Psalm 103
- Suggested discussion questions: What do you learn about the fatherly love of God from this Psalm? How does that make you feel?

A starting prayer for Movement One... We begin, O Lord, by remembering your abiding, fatherly love for us. Apart from your love, O Lord, we are nothing — we are wholly and completely lost. Your love is the source of our very life, and the cause of our joy. You look upon us with a kind and gentle eye, your words to us are tender, and you discipline us only and always out of your abiding love, and only and always for our good. When we are far from you, O God, you pursue us and you run after us; you put your ring on our finger and your cloak over our shoulders; you kill the fattened calf and celebrate on our behalf when we return to you. Your heart is warm and welcoming to us; you delight in us as your beloved children; you take pleasure in us and you enjoy us. You provide for all our needs, and you give us good gifts that far exceed mere necessity. You are extravagant in your love for us, O God, and we choose to receive and to rest in your love as the foundation of our very lives.

Response: This is a time of calling to mind and speaking back to God the wonders of his love as each of us enjoys and experiences it, and of offering back to him our heartfelt thanksgiving for our every experience of his love, no matter how small.

Movement Two — Who is in heaven...

- Suggested text: Psalm 148
- Suggested discussion questions: In this psalm, verses 1-4 focus on the heavens, and verses 7-12 focus on the earth. In each of these domains, who is exhorted to praise the Lord? Is anyone or anything excluded from this list? According to the psalmist, what is it about God that should lead the inhabitants of heaven and earth to praise the Lord? Can you think of some other attributes of God that have to do with him being “in heaven” and reigning over all things?

A starting prayer for Movement Two... We continue, O God, by remembering that while you are indeed our caring and loving Heavenly Father, you are also the creator and sustainer of the heavens and the earth, and you uphold all things by the word of your power. You are the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. You are the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace, the King of Kings, and the Lord of Lords. All power and wisdom and knowledge are yours, and nothing is too difficult for you. You are far above all rule and

authority and power and dominion and every name that is named, not only in this age, but also in the one to come. You know all things, you can do all things, you have created all that is, and you hold the entire universe in your hands. To you, a thousand years are as a day, and a day as a thousand years — you are outside of all time, eternal, and infinite in being. You are above all things, and all things belong to you. You are our Creator and Lord, our great and mighty God, the Lord Almighty, and we worship you.

Response: This is a time of calling to mind and speaking back to God the reality and fullness of his power and wisdom, knowledge and authority, and to offer him praise in keeping with these things.

Movement Three — Hallowed be your name. . .

- Suggested text: Psalm 96
- Suggested discussion questions: What are the qualities and attributes of God that lead the psalmist to urge us and all creation to praise God? To be perfectly holy means to be set apart and distinct from all else, to be free from imperfection, and to be perfect in all one's virtues. What are some ways that God is set apart and distinct from all else, free from imperfection, and perfect in all his virtues?

A starting prayer for Movement Three We also remember, O God, that you are holy. Your ways are not our ways, and your thoughts are not our thoughts. Every virtue has its origin and fullest expression in you, and no evil is to be found in you. You are perfectly good and righteous, true and just, faithful and beautiful and pure. You are light and life, free and perfect, set apart from all creation, and yet you embrace us and reveal yourself to us. You are the one true and holy God, and we worship and adore you. You are worthy of our praise, and of our very lives, and we offer both our praise and our lives to you.

Response: This is a time of calling to mind and speaking back to God his virtues and excellencies, and of worshipping and praising him for his holiness.

Movement Four — Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. . .

- Suggested texts: 1 Kings 4:20-25; Hebrews 8:10-12; Rev 21:3-5
- Suggested discussion questions: As you read the description of the blessing and abundance of the height of Solomon's kingdom in 1 Kings, as well as the description of God's coming kingdom in Hebrews and Revelation, what are some of the particular ways you sense God leading you to invite his kingdom to come — in your own life, your family, your workplace, your community, your city, your nation, and in the world? What are some

of the characteristics of God's will and his kingdom, wherever they are found?

A starting prayer for Movement Four... So because we know you as our Holy Father in Heaven, we welcome your rule and your reign over all things. We joyfully welcome your triumphal entry into every corner of creation, and we commit ourselves to joining you in bringing your kingdom to the world. We bring before you now our families and our communities, our cities and towns and neighborhoods, our own nations and the nations of the world, our own people, as well as all other tribes and tongues and nations and people. We pray that you would bring your just and righteous rule to all these places and peoples, that you would bring peace and justice, healing and health, salvation and beauty to all places and all people, and that you would use us as your partners and agents for your good purposes and for the sake of your glorious kingdom.

Response: This is a time of interceding for our families, our communities, and for the world.

Movement Five — Give us this day our daily bread...

- Suggested text: Psalm 145
- Suggested discussion questions: In Psalm 145, David outlines both some of the ways God reveals his greatness and some of the ways he provides for him, and for all people, in small and large ways. As you read this psalm, what are some of the aspects of God's provision, large or small, that stand out to you? Take some time to reflect on and share as a group both some of the ways God has already provided for you, and that you are thankful for, as well as some of the things you need from him right now.

A starting prayer for Movement Five... And though we commit ourselves to your mighty rule and reign, and we invite your kingdom to come, we also acknowledge that we are but dust. We are women and men of flesh, weak and full of need. Everything we need comes from your hand, O Lord, and we thank you for your provision to us far beyond our every need. And because we know you, we are unashamed to come before you with even the smallest of our daily needs — food and drink, wisdom in our families and in our work, practical direction in our finances, in our homes and in our households, and in the ordinary worries and burdens of our ordinary lives. So help us call to mind with gratitude and without shame our daily needs, and to bring them before you, O lover of our souls, and provider of our every need.

Response: This is a time of bringing our personal needs to God, and for offering our heartfelt thanks to him for his provision in every area of our lives.

Movement Six (Part 1) — And forgive us our trespasses...

- Suggested text: Psalm 51
- Suggested discussion question(s): This psalm is a prayer David wrote after his sin with Bathsheba and his murder of Uriah, her husband, and stands as perhaps the best biblical model of what true repentance looks like. As you read and reflect on this this psalm, how would you describe David's act of repentance, and how he seeks forgiveness from God? Based on this psalm, what would you say are the key ingredients of true repentance? According to this psalm, what is some of the potential fruit of true repentance?

A starting prayer for Movement Six (Part 1)... And not only are we needy, Lord, but we are sinners. Even our most righteous works are but filthy rags before you, and tainted by sin and imperfection. We fail in word and deed, in thought and feeling, in purpose and intention, and we need your help in even knowing and bringing our sins before you. And so we ask that you would help us call to mind and bring our sins before you, confident that as we confess our sins, you are faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all that is unclean in us. We rejoice that you so graciously and completely forgive us, Lord, and we come before you boldly and without shame to receive your mercy and offer our thanksgiving.

Response: This is a time for taking some time to seek God to reveal to us our own sins, and to privately or publicly confessing our sins to God, for asking forgiveness, and for offering our gratitude to God for his mercy.

Movement Six (Part 2) — As we forgive those who trespass against us...

- Suggested text: Matthew 18:21-35
- Suggested discussion question(s): According to this famous parable that Jesus tells in response to Peter's question regarding the forgiveness of others, what is the foundation of our own ability to forgive? What does Jesus imply will be the effect on our own relationship with God if we fail to forgive others? Take some time to discuss why it is often difficult to forgive others.

A starting prayer for Movement Six (Part 2)... And as forgiven people, O Lord, we give ourselves to doing unto the people of our lives even as you have so graciously done unto us. We ask your help in identifying the places where we have been wronged, and who has wronged us, and yet where our hearts are still hard and unforgiving. Do a work of grace in us — give us desire to forgive where we have none, and power to forgive where all we have

in us is judgment and bitterness. Make us like you, O God — make us able to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us, even when they are bone of our own bone and flesh of our own flesh. We choose to forgive others even as you have forgiven us, and we ask your help as we give ourselves to doing so.

Response: This is a time to call to mind those toward whom we hold bitterness and unforgiveness in our heart, whether friend or foe, neighbor or stranger, near or far, and to privately bring them before God, forgiving them, even as we pray for help in doing so, and pray for God’s favor and blessing upon them.

Movement Seven — And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. . .

- Suggested texts: 1 Corinthians 10:12-13; Psalm 31:14-20
- Suggested discussion questions: This text from 1 Corinthians primarily addresses evil and temptation over which we have some control, and that often arises from within our own hearts, while the text from Psalm 31 largely addresses threats and evil that arise from outside of ourselves. What kinds of temptation might Paul be referring to here? What kind of threat is David referring to? What are some other evils and temptations, internal or external, that we might seek God’s help with and protection from?

A starting prayer for Movement Seven. . . Finally, O Lord, we look to the future before us. We are aware of the evil that dwells both in our own hearts, and that crouches at the door of our lives through no fault of our own. We are aware that our battle is not in the end with flesh and blood, but with the powers and principalities of hell. So we ask, O God, that you would give us victory over our own evil hearts, keep us from external temptation that will turn us away from you, and give us courage and strength to resist evil when it comes, and from wherever it comes. Root out the evil thoughts and inclinations within us, even as you protect us from evil that comes upon us from others, or from outside us, mysterious and unknown. Keep us from the evil one and from those who serve him. Keep us from fire and flood, earthquake and storm, violence and injustice, accident and injury, sickness and despair, and from all that would hurt us and harm your good purposes in and through us. For apart from you, O Lord, we are at the mercy of our own hearts, and of the evil that surrounds us in the world. Lord have mercy, Lord have mercy, Lord have mercy!

Response: This is a time to call to mind the evil inclinations of our own hearts, the things that regularly tempt us, and the evil around us in the world, and to seek the Lord’s protection and help in overcoming these things.

Closing — For yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen and amen!

Response: To close, spend some time to once again speak out prayers of thanksgiving and praise to the Lord in light of the fullness of his rule and his reign over all things.