

The disciples' prayer

Introduction

Series on prayer:

Bible teaching includes both principles and models of prayer:

[Story about receiving letters and making phone calls] Prayer been described as like a phone call in response to a letter (the Bible)

5 "And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. 6 But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

7 "And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words. 8 Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. 9 Pray then like this:

*"Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name.
10 Your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
11 Give us this day our daily bread,
12 and forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.
13 And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.*

14 For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, 15 but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

Matthew 6 v 5 - 14

Similar passage to the one in Luke 11 which Jesus speaks in response to disciples interrupting Jesus praying to ask him to teach them to pray.

Why do we pray?

If God knows already what we need before we ask him (v. 8) why then do we pray?!

Covered more in later sermons in the series, things to note though:

- Prayer is personal - we all pray differently.

"What a man is alone on his knees before God, that he is, and no more"

Robert Murray McCheyne

Impossible to do a 'do this and your prayer life will be perfect' sermon/ book/ seminar.



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- Prayer is about relationship, so we can grow in it and learn more as the relationship grows.
- We pray so that our dependence on God increases. When we pray we are saying that we trust God to answer;

9 And I tell you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. 10 For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened. 11 What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will instead of a fish give him a serpent; 12 or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion?

Luke 11 v 9 - 12

A child expects to receive what they need, and so do we, the asking is an expression of trust in the person you are asking.

- We pray so that our relationship with God will increase. When we are fully open and honest before God, so we discover more about him, and allow him into more of ourselves so our relationship deepens (a bit like a marriage again!)
- When we pray, God involves us in something bigger than ourselves - the advancement of the kingdom of God.

Thomas Fuller described the Anglican prayers as being like the big clothes that parents buy children for them to grow into - sometimes we pray beyond and above ourselves, and we are growing into a life of prayer and a life of service before God.

The Lord's prayer

Or should that be the disciples prayer?

This is a model (c.f. principle)

Teaches us about prayer and about God.

Opening line, then two groups of 3 lines.

First three lines are about God, second three are requests being presented to God.

No great theological point to make about this, but points to correct balance in our prayer life (as we'll see).

A model for prayer means that sometimes we pray through it and expand upon each of the individual sections (C.S. Lewis called this 'festooning', the Puritans called it 'branching').

Our Father in heaven...

Prince Michael of Kent: how to address a royal:

'Prince Michael':

In the British Royal Family a son of a monarch is a royal prince and he is given the title of duke on his marriage. Prince Michael's father, Prince George, was made Duke of Kent when he married Princess Marina of Greece, Prince Michael's mother. The title Duke of Kent was inherited by Prince Michael's older brother. If his parents had more sons they would also have had the title of Prince, only the eldest inheriting the ducal title.

Princess Michael:

Traditionally, all wives of male members of the British Royal Family, the aristocracy and members of the public take the style and title of their husbands. Diana, Princess of Wales was not "Princess Diana" as the media called her, because she was not born a British princess. Her correct title was The Princess of Wales and when she divorced she became Diana, Princess of Wales. When the present Duke of Gloucester was still Prince Richard prior to the death of his father, his wife was known as Princess Richard. It just so happens that Prince Michael is the only grandson of a king titled HRH who is a second son and so there are no other princesses with the name of their husbands. The other princesses in the British royal family were all born into the royal house.

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The aramaic word for 'Father' here is 'abba', which is both the word that children use for their earthly fathers, but is also the word an adult would use to address their father.

Points to a relationship based on love and trust, and reminds us that we are in the care of our Father - a sign of authority and warmth, of protection and freedom, of intimacy and of love.

'in heaven' does not imply God's distance and remoteness, rather it points to his sovereignty and control, his power and his status as supreme ruler over all things.

So in the opening stanza we see a contrast of the intimate and the powerful, the great contrast that is Jehovah - holy and merciful, intimate and powerful, ruler of all things and interested in me.

So when Jesus taught on prayer, he first acknowledged the wonder of who it was we were praying to...

Hallowed be your name...

Sarah's name change, my children's names. Icelandic tradition of giving children their father's name.

'Hallowed' means sacred, holy, venerated. In the bible a person's name is a description of their character. In this context God's name is everything that the bible and creation tell us about who God is.

God's name is important - one of the 10 commandments in Exodus 20 is to not take the Lord's name in vain (20 v7). This means that God doesn't want anything to be done that would impact his reputation, his name.

So the first part of the disciples' prayer talks about who God is, and if you were using this as a model you could worship God for who he is - perhaps even finding one of the names of God in the bible and expanding on that a little, or just expressing how amazing God is.

Your kingdom come...

This is about involving us in something bigger than ourselves. The Kingdom of God speaks of his active reign where his will is fully realised. The Kingdom is a place of holiness and of healing.

When we pray that the kingdom would come, we are inviting God to increase his rule in our lives, and in the life of the church. We are praying that he would increase our love for him, that we would increasingly reflect his character (his name), honour him, to bring good news to the poor and needy, to make the world in which we live a better place.

If using this prayer as a model, at this point you could pray for the church to increasingly reflect the identity of God, you could ask that his name would be increasingly made known in the nation, you could pray that people would increasingly know who God is, you could pray for the poor in the country, city or street where you live.

Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

This is about God's will (as opposed to God's rule in the last line) - the two are connected and so belong next to each other (in fact this line is missing in the passage in Luke). The will of God here is the 'revealed' will of God, the things that God has said in scripture that he wants to happen, activities that bring him pleasure. It also points to the future, to the place of perfect revelation of God's will, heaven.

At this point it would be appropriate to pray for the church to grow, for people you know to come to know God.

End of part one

The opening part of Jesus' teaching on prayer focusses on the identity and power and will of God. As our prayers are all about our increasing our trust in him, and deepening our relationship with him, so it is appropriate to focus on him as we start to pray. Acknowledging him as Father and as all powerful creator, as being worthy of praise and honour, and praying for his will rather than ours to be done before presenting requests to him seems to be entirely appropriate. Is this what praying into the will of God means?

Give us this day our daily bread

The first request of the list is in essence an acknowledgement of our need for God. There's an implication in this that it's not only physical food that's being referred to, but everything we need to survive. Jesus is suggesting we ask God to sustain us for life, and in so doing our faith in him and trust in him rises as we acknowledge that God is the source of our life, of our food, of everything that we have.

This is therefore both a request for God to give us the things that we need, and a statement that all that we need comes from God.

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Model: it's appropriate to ask God for stuff - and acknowledge the things he has given us in the past, and gives us now.

Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors

In the passage in Luke, the word for debt is replaced by the word sin, which is easier to understand. Jesus isn't saying at this point that our forgiveness is not complete -

8 but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. 9 Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God.

Romans 5 v 8 - 9

1 There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

Romans 8 v 1

We are fully justified at the point of salvation, all of our sins past, present and future are fully forgiven when we accept Jesus as our Lord and Saviour. Rather, it is useful for us to remember that we are forgiven, to confess our sinful attitudes and behaviors to him, as we work in partnership with him to become more like Christ.

9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

1 John 1 v 9

Our faith increases, and our understanding of grace increases as we confess, we acknowledge our weaknesses and then enable God to work in our lives to remove them.

Also in this is the idea of forgiving other people. The end of the passage contains a stark warning about forgiveness and how it is our responsibility to become more like God in our attitude to people - just as we are forgiven for things we don't deserve to be forgiven for, so we are to forgive others who have wronged us even if they don't deserve forgiveness. Matt 18 v 21 -

21 Then Peter came up and said to him, "Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?" 22 Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you seven times, but seventy times seven.

23 "Therefore the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants. 24 When he began to settle, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents. 25 And since he could not pay, his master ordered him to be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and payment to be made. 26 So the servant fell on his knees, imploring him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.' 27 And out of pity for him, the master of that servant released him and forgave him the debt. 28 But when that same servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii, and seizing him, he began to choke him, saying, 'Pay what you owe.' 29 So his fellow servant fell down and pleaded with him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you.' 30 He refused and went and put him in prison until he should pay the debt. 31 When his fellow servants saw what had taken place, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their master all that had taken place. 32 Then his master summoned him and said to him, 'You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. 33 And should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?' 34 And in anger his master delivered him to the jailers, until he should pay all his debt. 35 So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart."

Matthew 18 v 21 - 34

Model: when we pray we should confess our sin, and also expect to have God draw to mind people that we also need to forgive.

Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil

The final part of the prayer deals with the struggle with temptation. Temptation here can refer to either temptation or testing. Although God himself never tempts anyone, he does sometimes allow trials and hardships to come, and we can be strengthened by them. The thing here though, is that we should not invite temptation or testing, because sometimes it leads to sin. Being delivered from evil can mean either evil, or the evil one - either through resisting him (resist the devil and he will flee), or by turning to God and relying on him for direction in our lives.



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Model: not only do we pray to be kept away from situations that could lead us to sin, we should expect God to draw attention to areas in our lives that lead us away from him. We can also pray for people or situations that are hard, and ask to be kept away from them.

Summary

This prayer gives us an insight into what prayer should look like - a mixture of praise and asking, a mixture of heavenly and earthly, a mixture of the seen and the unseen. Think about what it would be like if there was a lack of balance in the life of a christian; too much focus on 'heavenly things' and they neglect the calling of God to be part of a church, to serve people, to love the poor and to preach the gospel to the lost; too much focus on earthly things mean we can neglect the reason we are to do these things in the first place - to give honour and glory to God, to win souls for him and to bring his kingdom to earth.

When we pray, when it's hard sometimes it can be helpful to work through the 7 parts of the this prayer; not as a system for finding perfection in our prayer lives, rather as an indication of correct balance in our lives, and because this is the starting block for how Jesus himself taught us how to pray.