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The Lord's Prayer as a Transformative Pattern



Paul Anderson on April 4, 2018

Topics: Prayer Spiritual Disciplines



Do you struggle with your prayer life? I do, and I think most people do as well. Jesus challenged his disciples in the garden: Could you not wait with me [in prayer] one hour? I have trouble with five minutes! If you're like me, upon entering a time of personal prayer you might find your mind wandering or yourself thinking about the demands of the day. Things to do, concerns about loved ones, pressures of the day, a twinge of guilt about an insensitive remark or a selfish deed —these distractions interrupt my prayer time; I imagine I'm not alone. But what if these distractions are actually the most pressing items we need to lift to God in

prayer? Perhaps our inward “distractions” are the very things we need to offer back to God as a life-based outline of a prayer agenda.

I wonder if the lifting of these concerns to God might even fit a pattern of prayer that becomes a part of our spiritual growth and transformation. In my early adulthood I came across a pattern of morning and evening prayer, ordered around Ben Johnson’s pamphlet “The Great Discovery” and William Sangster’s booklet *Teach Me to Pray*. Since then, I have adapted it around the Lord’s Prayer, which I’m coming to see as less of a text to be recited and more of a transformative pattern of prayer, helping us to go deeper into the life with God. Instead of 5 minutes being too long, I find that 15 or 20 minutes for prayer are often not enough. When God works in our lives, all things indeed become new!

The Bible describes several types of prayer, and yet all of them involve some aspect of what Abraham Heschel calls the human-divine dialogue. Words may be used if helpful to us, but God looks beyond our words to our hearts, and the communion that happens between ourselves and God is beyond what words can describe. The apostle Paul speaks of “unceasing prayer” (Ephesians 6:18 WNT) as intercession empowered by the Holy Spirit. It is not simply we who pray, but the Spirit who prays through us (Romans 8:26-27). Indeed, we are invited into an intimate, ongoing relationship with

God, within which we go through the day immersed in prayer, while at the same time carrying on the business of the workaday world. Developing a life of unceasing prayer, though, begins with immersing ourselves in the life of the Spirit, and such is helped by a discipline.

Really focusing on a particular kind of prayer as an intentional focus for a few intense moments helps us become immersed in praise, or thanksgiving, or dedication, or intercession, or petition, or prayer for protection, or meditation. It helps us develop sensitivity to the Spirit’s leadings, and morning and evening patterns of prayer can be of great help in our spiritual development. In the Gospel of Luke we read that Jesus’ disciples come to him and say, “Lord, teach us to pray” (Luke 11:1-4 NRSV). In the Gospel of Matthew (Matthew 6:1-15) we find Jesus gives his followers an approach to praying that poses a contrast to public performances and rote repetitions. Ironically, Christians sometimes use the Lord’s Prayer exactly as that to which Jesus contrasts it. What Jesus provides them involves not a quotation to be recited as a vain repetition,

but a pattern to be personally embraced, suggesting how we might approach God meaningfully in prayer.

If you would like to try the following pattern based on the Lord's Prayer as a morning discipline of prayer, allow at least 10 or 15 minutes at the start of your day. Feel free to make adjustments as you need to; the goal is centering our lives on Christ.

A Morning Pattern of Prayer

Upon waking, turn your thought immediately to God. Either breathe a hymn of praise to God ("When morning gilds the skies my heart awaking cries: 'May Jesus Christ be praised!'") or muse over the psalmist's words, if helpful ("Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name" — Psalm 103:1 NRSV). Find a place in which you can lift your heart authentically to God, and spend several minutes on each of the following themes. Brood over each until you are saturated with this particular aspect of prayer based upon the Lord's Prayer. Then, see what happens to the rest of your day. A balanced spiritual diet prepares us for living each day to its fullest. Nothing delivers us from a spiritual roller coaster like developing a grounded life of prayerful intimacy with God.

Our Father in heaven (Receiving the Divine Embrace)

Dwell on the wondrous fact that Jesus invites us to call God our "Father." This does not mean, of course, that God is not also like a Mother to us; indeed, God's nurturing and strengthening love embrace us in ways beyond our deservedness. Thank God for his goodness; his blessings are far beyond what we know. Elsewhere, Jesus calls God "Abba, Father" — a term similar to "Daddy" in English—the sort of endearing term a child would use to address a loving parent. Paul, in his writings, also uses this term. Come to God openly, as a child embraces the love of a divine father or mother, first thing in the morning. For of such is the kingdom of heaven.

hallowed be your name. (Adoration and Thanksgiving)

We praise God for who God is; we thank God for what God does. Let your awareness of God's majesty, goodness, and grace fill you with praise and adoration. Praise is not part of a transaction we produce; it is the only appropriate response to the authentic contemplation of God's

glory. Jesus invites us to join the rest of creation in acknowledging the glory and holiness of the Creator. Praise God that God is the God God is, and let your life be filled with adoration and praise at the beginning of the day and otherwise. Also, thank God for what God has done. Our blessings are beyond what we can imagine; take the time to thank God now for family, friends, health, life, grace. Ponder each blessing until you are filled with gratitude. Thanksgiving is an action that is never wasted! Let your life be an ongoing chorus of blessing, thanksgiving, and praise to God.

Your kingdom come.

(Dedication and Recommitment)

As well as lifelong vows to God, offer Christ your life anew— totally and unreservedly—at the beginning of this day. Foresee and forethink the obligations of your day, and envision God’s presence with you throughout the day as you meet those obligations. Respond to all things as though God were working in them and through them; we live by faith, not by sight. You can better face the already-scheduled events of the day and even developments that are unforeseen through this discipline of offering your life to God afresh. “Coincidences” happen; openings emerge; things we’d planned go better, and even surprises are more readily met by a life immersed in prayer.

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

(Intercession and Uplifting the Needs of Others)

Lift also the needs of the world and the needs of others in prayer, interceding on behalf of those persons and situations for which God has given you a special concern. Keep a prayer list, if you desire, or simply pray for those whom God brings to your attention as you are mindful of such. Lift up family and loved ones, friends and colleagues, projects and responsibilities, ministries and outreach opportunities — as partners in furthering the active reign of God. The kingdom may indeed come today, even in subtle ways, as people live in dynamic responsiveness to his leadings and embody the way of the kingdom in the world. Intercession is where the history of the world is changed; it is there that the true business and work of life are carried forth. Intercession is the spiritual work—the heavy lifting we do as partners with Christ in the world, praying in his name because we have discerned and believe that it is according to his will.

Give us this day our daily bread.

(Petition and Uplifting Personal Needs)

Now lift to God your daily needs. God knows what we need even before we ask, and yet Jesus invites us to lift our needs to God in prayer. Amazing! The prayer of petition appropriately follows our adoration of God and our intercession for others, and yet an authentic sense of our need before God helps us be evermore keenly aware of our absolute dependence upon God for all things—even life itself. Lifting our needs to God, individually and corporately, also helps us release the particular ways we feel our needs should be met. In thanking our heavenly Father for provision ahead of time, desiring that our needs be addressed in God’s ways and in God’s timing, we assert our faith in what God is doing around us and within us.

And forgive us our debts/as we also have forgiven our debtors.

(Confession and Forgiveness)

Receive now God’s forgiveness and grace, availed through Christ Jesus, and extend such to others. He bore the sins of humanity on the cross, but acknowledging our sins and our need for grace leads us into the prayer for mercy. Christ died and rose for you and me. Those who extend mercy receive mercy, and our extending of forgiveness and grace deserves to be of the same character as that which we have received—or would like to receive. Turning to God with the conscious request for forgiveness further asserts our sense of humbled need before God. So, receive now the forgiveness and grace of God by faith, and extend forgiveness and grace to others by your faithfulness.

And do not bring us to the time of trial; but rescue us from the evil one.

(Deliverance and Empowerment)

Trust God now for protection and empowerment. The prayer for deliverance from harm and ill asserts our trust in God’s care and protection, both in ways we anticipate as well as in ways we cannot imagine. While trials bear within themselves potential for developing strength of character, Jesus also invites us to pray for protection and empowerment along life’s way. Affirming the power and protection of God emboldens our courage and deepens our faith. As George Fox often declared, “The Power of the Lord is over all!” Abide now in the power of the resurrected Lord; it is available to all who believe.

**For the kingdom and the power; and the glory are yours forever.
(Centering and Meditation)**

Close your time as you began it, with lifting praise to God and making your life a “living sacrifice” offered to his glory. Go through your day attending the business at hand, but also lifting prayers of adoration and intercession as you feel led. Attend the subtle promptings of the Spirit and live responsively to the divine will. This is the “centered” life—one that is attentive and responsive to the workings of Christ at the center of our lives. Give this day to God alone; dedicate it to the furthering of the way and work of the kingdom; extend the kingdom today by at least one life—yours.