

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the one who teaches us to pray, Jesus Christ our Lord, amen.

Today we embark on a 4-week journey through the Lord's Prayer. I wondered why the smart people who did the planning for this lectionary series chose the Lord's Prayer as our final series for this summer. After reading an article called Relearning the Lord's Prayer, I wondered no more. In a survey conducted in Brittan children between the ages of 6-12 years of age are only half as likely to know the Lord's Prayer as children of that same age group were just 40 years ago. I believe we have a crisis even more profound than our current Pandemic. We are in danger of seeing the disappearance of faith in Jesus Christ as our savior in our lifetime... Children are not being brought up in the faith as most of us were. They don't know even the most basic truths contained in the Bible and it's about time Christians stand up and claim our birthright and teach our children things like the Lord's Prayer, the Ten Commandments, the Creeds and all those wonderful stories we grew up on from the Bible. So, I'll now get off my soapbox and we can begin looking at the most important prayer you could ever teach your children and grandchildren.

The Lord's Prayer is one of the most unifying set of words ever put down on paper. What more does our world need now than something that we can all rally around? Is it a coincidence that as we've lost ground in church and Sunday School

attendance, violence has increased, and our society's moral standards have dropped through the floor?

What is it about the Lord's Prayer that makes it so vital to who we are as Christians? It's said at worship services all over the globe every Sunday. We use it to close our Church Council meetings and at the end of our Bible studies. This prayer gives us hope for the future. We trust that we are heard by the Creator, God Almighty and that's precisely where we begin today. We start by seeing what the Bible has to say about prayer overall, then we'll look at the beginning of the prayer from both Luke's and Matthew's perspectives. By way of coming attractions, next week we'll uncover the good news about God's Kingdom coming to earth, then we'll look into the petition where we ask God to provide us with our Daily Bread, and finish this series with a sermon on forgiveness. That will finish up our summer sermon series. After that we'll head into fall by going all the way back to the beginning and read through the major stories from the book of Genesis.

So, as we begin to look at the Lord's Prayer today, I thought we should start by taking a look at what the Bible says about prayer in general. Prayer is a really important topic throughout the Bible, in both the Old and New Testaments. In fact, overall, prayer is mentioned in some form or another 442 times. The Bible has a lot to say about prayer and God's people are commanded to pray. Prayer isn't some option like electronic reclining seats in your car. Prayer is the engine that

makes our relationship with God possible. People have long prayed to God when they were in peril. As far back as Genesis, God's people used intercessory prayer to ask God to spare the lives of their family and friends. Prayer was an integral part of who Jesus was. He prayed before every big decision, before he started his ministry, and at the hour of betrayal. Jesus was known to pray all night long and he prayed so fervently that he literally sweated blood. I think the most important thing I get from reading the passages on prayer is we are to make it a priority in our lives. Whether you formally pray 5 times a day, from morning prayer to Compline or have more of an ongoing casual conversational prayer life with God; prayer is the primary way we establish and grow in our relationship with God.

So, what about this specific prayer we call The Lord's Prayer? It's recorded in the Bible twice. In these verses I just read from Luke and also in the sermon on the mount from Matthew's Gospel. The two versions are different and in some ways those differences are significant. In case you missed it, Luke's version omits the "Our" from the Our Father. Also, Luke doesn't include Father's dwelling place. There's no reference to our Father who art in heaven... It begins very simply, Father, hallowed be thy name. In fact, Luke never tells us God's dwelling place is in heaven throughout his entire Gospel. Perhaps Luke doesn't want us to get the idea that God is located far away in the great by and by, but rather God is everywhere right here and now. On the other hand, God in heaven is one of

Matthew's favorite expressions. God wants us to have both understandings of this prayer. Jesus wants us to use this prayer as a model to help shape our specific needs and to give us a way to access and address God. It tells us how to pray and what to pray for. God also wants to unite us all into one Body of Christ and so gives us both versions as a model for prayer and as a specific format to use in prayer. By having a common prayer that we recite often, we become one under the name of Jesus Christ. By memorizing these words and reciting them every chance we get, we're reinforcing our relationship with God and with each other. In times of great struggle, when we can't even think straight, we have comforting words that just flow from our lips because we've been repeating them over and over since we were children ourselves. I fear for what the next generation will do when they have struggles and don't have a relationship with Our Father who art in heaven to fall back on...

We don't just send our prayer heavenward to whom it may concern... The Lord's Prayer is addressed to Father God. We're not talking to just any father, but to the Father of all creation, even if Luke leaves that part out... The prayer Jesus taught us is prayed directly to God the Father of all creation whose very Name itself is Holy. In the ancient world your name meant something. A person's name was tied directly to their character and it was their identity. When you knew someone's name you had a deep relationship with them because you knew their

reputation and what kind of person they were. That's what makes addressing our prayers directly to God so important. We're binding God to his own reputation and to his promises of forgiveness and eternal life. Today little Dawson has become a recipient of those same promises and your Kami and Josh and all the rest of us have promised to teach her this prayer. May God give us the courage in this secular age to fulfill those promises we made today.

In his book, *Alone With God*, John MacArthur says, "In fewer than seventy words we find a true masterpiece of the infinite mind of God. No one else could compress every conceivable element of true prayer into such a brief and simple form—a form that even a young child can understand, but the most mature believer cannot fully comprehend..." The most mature believer may not be able to comprehend, but that doesn't stop us Lutherans from asking the famous question, "What does this mean?" After each and every part of the prayer. We all learned in our Catechism classes to ask what does it mean when we pray Our Father, who art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Luther teaches us that God invites us to believe He is our real Father and we are His real children, so we will pray with trust and complete confidence, in the same way beloved children approach their beloved earthly father with their requests. Again, Luther says, "Of course, God's name is holy in and of itself, but by this request, we pray He will make it holy among us, too. This happens when God's Word is taught clearly and purely, and when we

live holy lives as God's children based upon God's Word. Help us, Heavenly Father, to do this! Anyone who teaches and lives by something other than God's Word defiles God's name among us. Protect us from this, Heavenly Father!"

In this short introduction at the beginning of the Lord's Prayer we say a lot about who God is and why we can trust our needs and even our wants and desires to him. I love starting all my prayers to God, Our Father. From the first words it gets me out of my own head. I don't pray to my Father, we pray to our Father. Prayer is meant to be something we do together as a family. Even when I pray in my bedroom with the door shut, I still begin with "Our Father." God isn't my personal genie granting me three wishes every time I pray... God is "our" father and when I pray to our Father, I'm automatically acknowledging my place in the family as one of God's children. I'm not an only child... When I remember this, it helps me be a little less selfish in my prayer time. Praying to Our Father helps to keep us all in unity. In this way my prayer becomes our prayer.

May we each commit to improving our prayer life with God. May this study of Our Lord's Prayer renew our joy and give us confidence to boldly stand, kneel, or lay prostrate before the Lord Our God trusting in God's holiness and goodness. May we redouble our efforts to teach this prayer to our children and grandchildren so that unity of spirit can be revived across our lands. May God's power work in us pass along the blessing of prayer for generations to come. Amen.