

Lead Us Not

By Dr. Dave Neale, Ph.D.

Father, hallowed be your name.

Your kingdom come.

Give us each day our daily bread.

And forgive us our sins,

for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us.

And do not bring us to the time of trial.”

Over the course of the next four weeks I'm going to be bringing messages from the lectionary texts in the Gospel of Luke. This week we have the pleasure of looking at the Lord's Prayer and two accompanying stories Jesus told. The point of which is persistence. Then, from Luke 12 we will do The Rich Fool, which is a story about possessions; the Slaves Who Patiently Wait for their Master, which is a message on patience; and Discernment of the Times, which is a message about perspective. So Persistence, Possessions, Patience, Perspective.

Behind the Text

Here are some basic observations about the most famous and familiar prayer in Christendom, the Lord's Prayer – so-called because Jesus taught it to his disciples when they asked him for instruction in prayer. Joel B. Green likes to call it the Disciples' Prayer, and maybe that is a better way to think of it. Let's think of the prayer as Jesus' gift to us.

The first remarkable thing to observe is that Jesus himself teaches us how to pray. Thus, this brief instruction is really the main teaching we need to understand about prayer. Whether your prayer life is what you might wish, or perhaps you feel you don't really know how to pray, this is where we ought to direct our attention.

The ideas are panoramic in scope, as we will see, and deeply meaningful.

And yet, it is very simple. It is very short. It is direct. It is very focussed. It is prayable.

It is amazingly potent.

It has five brief sentences – five pleas.¹

The context of the prayer is intentional in Luke. Matthew makes the prayer part of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 6) and emphasizes humility in prayer (***...don't be like the hypocrites... pray in secret... don't yammer on and on like the Gentiles,*** 6:5-8). But for Luke the emphasis is on persistence in prayer. So you get the prayer, and then two stories to reinforce the persistence theme.

The first one describes our role in prayer:

Vss 5-8 Let us be persistent in prayer, the story of the person knocking on the door at night asking for bread.

God's part is found in vs 9-13 we have these amazing words (a "how much more story"):

"So I say to you, Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened."

In the Text²

Abba, that is, a phrase of familial endearment (like Papa) and it is true, as you may have heard that there are no other examples in the literature of this a form of address for God, save in the mouth of Jesus. So this is a plea for intimacy. Abba.

All of the verbs in the prayer are in either the imperative or subjunctive moods. **Father, hallowed be your name (may your name be revered as holy** - NRSVUE) – this is a personal plea! The verbs are an expression of our hope and intent (Blass, Debrunner, Funk, p. 195).³ "Please Lord, let this be made to come to pass!"⁴

God doesn't **need** me in order to be holy, but I need to aspire to participation in God's holiness.⁵

May your kingdom come. Some might say this is a prayer for the consummation of history. But I think of it in quite the opposite way. This is personal relationship. **Abba.** It is a prayer for the present moment. This prayer expresses a view of life that actually holds the expectation of bringing the kingdom into the present moment.

Do we attain it? Is it becoming a reality? Well, that is the question indeed. But our praying of this prayer expresses our intention and our plea to live a better life in God's will – by what we do.⁶ It is our optimistic belief that that this prayer moves toward realizing God's best for our lives.

We were driving out to Butchart Gardens and passed the Unitarian Church and saw this sermon title for today, *The Myth of Personal Responsibility*. I was affronted because I do not believe personal responsibility is a myth, but our duty in life. And then I realized that this speaker was one of those who use attention getting titles to get people thinking even before the message is preached.

Give us each day our daily bread.

Here the panoramic scope of the prayer appears. From the kingdom of God to the belly of the believer.

The allusion here is 1) to the manna in the wilderness; 2) the entrance to the land after the wilderness wandering, where for the first time Israel at the "produce of the Land of Israel" [Joshua 5:11]; 3) the bread carries a connotation of sacred solidarity with sinners in the gospels ['eat whatever they give you' and Jesus 'ate' with sinners]; 4) and the bread is a symbol of the kingdom to come. In Luke 14:15: **Blessed is the one who will eat at the feast in the kingdom of God.** And, of course, it has echoes in the Lord's Table. Or Jesus, who says, **I have food you don't know about.**⁷

A comment is in order here on "food security", the new way to refer to famine. On the website The World Factbook: On Food Insecurity I counted 46 countries currently in crises over food insecurity. 247 million people are in extreme danger of starvation, today.

We are not so naïve as to think if we pray this prayer and we will never go hungry. People have to leave everything to find food and safety in this hurting world of ours.⁸

I can only ask what it means for us, as people who live in a land of plenty – ‘what can we do to help our neighbor?’ When we who go to bed well fed pray this prayer, we must think horizontally of those who are suffering. Let us give and give and give. **Give us [plural] each day our daily bread** – the third person plural is deeply meaningful in today’s world; who is “us.”

Good news this week on the agreement brokered by the UN on releasing three months of grain stockpiles held in Odessa, Ukraine.

And forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us.

The prayer has two dimensions: The first two pleas are vertical – our relationship to God. The three pleas are horizontal – our relationship to others (as in Jesus’ response to a Pharisee about the greatest commandment).

The teaching here in this reference to the horizontal aspect of our spiritual journey is that the process of obtaining forgiveness is both a divine grace and an act of communal responsibility. It’s not that receiving forgiveness is conditional on forgiving others, but, as Joel Green says, “Instead, Jesus grounds the disciples’ request for divine forgiveness in their own practices of extending forgiveness.”⁹ It is a mindset, a lifestyle of grace for all.

Do not bring us to the time of trial.

This is the most difficult line in the prayer. What does it mean? It’s odd because we are asking God to not do something. God doesn’t lead us into testing does he?¹⁰ Fitzmyer calls the line “not fully logical” (Fitzmyer, 906).

We should remember that Jesus and his disciples are just heading into Samaria in Luke. Jesus’ disciples are taught to pray in the midst of conflict – dangers and distress on the road to Jerusalem - the trip in which Jesus implemented his Samaria Policy. Perhaps Jesus encourages his disciples to make a plea to God to keep them safe in a trying time that stands before them. **We beseech Lord, keep us safe out there. Don’t let us fall into evil.**¹¹

Here are a few other translations some have suggested as easing the obscurity

- Cause us not to succumb to temptation (Green, 444)
- God, do not bring us to a time of testing (Fitzmyer, 906)
- Given the conflict of the Samaria trip, “Jesus advises his disciples to ask God for the favor of being excused from further testing” (Green, 444).

These are all instances of the use of the same word: *πειρασμον*, or *peirasmon*.¹²

From the Text

So the question remains, ‘How do you avoid the time of trial?’

I’m afraid the answer is not very flashy!

Perseverance in the prayerful life.¹³

The point of all of this is that Jesus calls us, his disciples, to persevere in the contest of loyalties we face through reliance on the Spirit and through a solid prayer life. The phrase functions as an exhortation to faithfulness, if not skillfulness in spiritual practice.

I have been struggling all week with this question as I worked with the text: ‘How can I work an illustration into my sermon on the Lord’s Prayer from the F-1 formula racing show I’m watching on Netflix?’

Now I consider myself something of an expert on F-1 racing now that I have watched 5 episodes of the series. These are racing machines raised to its highest possible state of perfection, the men and women around it striving for milliseconds of advantage in speed, the effort and expense of the endeavour just blows my mind. To say nothing of the excitement of watching them zoom around tracks in all these exotic locations.

Each team has two cars. They are exactly the same. Each team has two drivers. They aren’t. The gentleman from Ferrari said with some understatement that, of course, ‘You have to have a fast car to win Grand Prix.’ But you have to have the right driver. Two drivers can be poles apart in results in identical cars. And guess what the drivers do who are not getting the results? ‘It is the car!’

They all say you can never stop trying. Never give up. Even in the face of defeat! Here is the gospel for today: Be persistent in prayer and you will find, not necessarily what you want, but an open door extended to you by God.

Thanks be to God. Amen

¹ Joseph A. Fitzmyer, the great Catholic scholar and author of arguably the most thorough commentary on Luke, calls the first two sentences “wishes” (*The Gospel According to Luke X-XXIV*), p. 898).

² A point of interest. The Lord’s Prayer is only found in Matthew and Luke; Matthew’s version is more familiar and a bit longer. It is probably the one you memorized. The Prayer is what we call Q material, Q being the first letter of the German word for “source,” *quelle*. This is a reference to the source of sayings that Luke and Matthew had but Mark nor John did not. Luke’s version is more likely the original form Jesus spoke, verbal traditions being more likely to expand than contract.

³ While many ancient manuscripts of Luke contain the Matthean addition of ***Our Father, who art in heaven***, the critical text of Metzger says that, in Luke, **Father** is certainly the correct form of the original (*A Textual Commentary of the Greek New Testament*, p.154). “A variety of excellent witnesses resisted the temptation to conform the text to the prevailing Matthean form of the Lord’s Prayer (Mt 6:13).”

⁴ Leviticus 19:12. ***And you shall not swear falsely by my name, profaning the name of your God***; Exodus 20:7, the first commandment.

⁵ It is an expression of our intent. The opposite is to bring shame on the name of God by our conduct in life. Lev 11:45; Isa 5:16; esp. Ezekiel 36:23, ***I shall sanctify my great name... and the nations shall know that I m the Lord, says the Lord God, when, through you, I will display my holiness before their eyes.***

⁶ This is a very Wesleyan concept, the focus on what we do to make the kingdom a present reality, rather than hoping for the end of the world).

⁷ See John 4:31-34, ***Jesus said, ‘I have food that you don’t know about.’***

⁸ In the Times Colonist did you see the article about the young family that had to walk away from everything, car, house, family, money, to escape Ukraine? They somehow got to Victoria and are trying to build a new life from the rubble of the past life. She needed sewing machines to restart a business she had to leave behind.

⁹ Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, p. 444.

¹⁰ No says James 1:13. ***No one, when tempted, should say, “I am being tempted by God”; for God cannot be tempted by evil an he himself tempts no one.***

¹¹ Matthew parallel is Matt 6:9-13 and adds, ... ***but deliver us from evil*** (literally) but some translations take the liberty of rendering it ***the evil one*** (e.g. NIV), which is not widely accepted as its meaning, and has theological implications that are pretty profound. Some ancient authorities add the familiar ***For the kingdom and the power and the glory are yours for ever.*** But it is unlikely that this was original to Jesus.

¹² It is easy to think of Jesus' desert testing (Luke 4), those on the rocky ground who do not survive the "trial" (Parable of the Four Soils, ...**they believe only for a while and in a time of testing fall away**, Luke 8:14) and the garden prayer in Gethsemane where Jesus tells his disciples, **Pray that you may not come into the time of trial** (Luke 22:40).

¹³ It is important to remember that in the testing of Jesus in the desert 'by the devil' is not a dualistic event in which the devil and God square up in a duel. It is a monotheistic event orchestrated by God to affirm Jesus' fidelity to God and to the mission to which he is called.