

Integrating Spiritual Formation
and Leadership Development

The Lord's Prayer

“Lord, teach us to pray...”

“Lord, teach us to pray” implored one of Jesus’ disciples after hearing him pray (Lk. 11:1). The disciples had witnessed Jesus’ personal magnetism and empowered mission that emanated from regular intimate communion with His Father, which surely prompted this request. In response, Jesus gave the Lord’s Prayer that, by the end of the first century, was being prayed three times daily by many. Since then, it has been the most repeated Christian prayer for nearly 2,000 years.

But how can we pray this prayer without it becoming rote repetition that leaves our hearts untouched? Jesus warned about such vain repetition (Mt. 6: 7). One way is to pray it phrase by phrase with 5-10 seconds or more of silence between each phrase. This gives the Holy Spirit space to fill our hearts and minds with awareness of God’s presence and power and what He may be saying to us through the prayer’s words. After praying it for yourself, you may wish to pray it for another person(s). Some like to journal reflections after praying the Lord’s Prayer in this fashion.

Matthew’s version (Mt. 6:9-13) of the Lord’s Prayer is:

Our Father, who is in heaven ... [5-10 seconds of silence or more]

Hallowed be your name ... [the dots represent silence]

Your kingdom come, your will be done ...

On earth as it is in heaven ...

Give us this day our daily bread ...

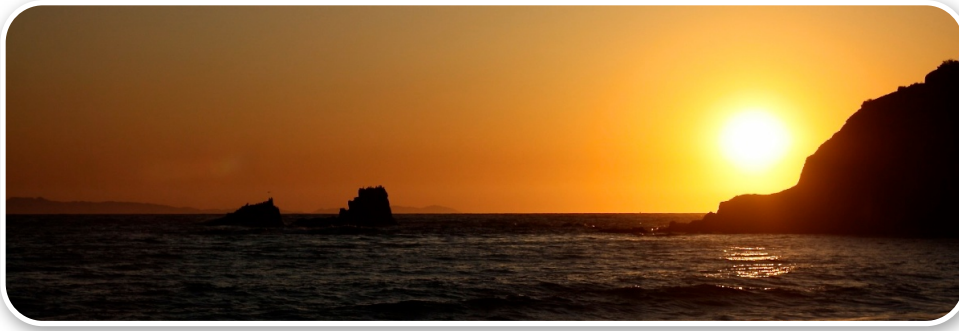
Forgive us our sins ...

As we forgive those who sin against us ...

Lead us not into temptation ...

But deliver us from evil ...

For yours is the kingdom ... the power ... and the glory ... Amen.



The Lord's Prayer

History

Jesus prayed intimately from his heart addressing God as His Father using the Aramaic term “Abba,” a term of endearment that children used to address their human fathers and older men. So the church came to address God with the same endearing term (Ro. 8:15, Gal. 4:6). But “Abba” connotes more awe than just the English term “daddy,” which is a close English equivalent.

Such awe was captured in another prayer that Israel prayed three times daily ever since Moses gave the *Shema*: “Hear oh Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and all your strength” (Deut. 6:4-5). Like all young devout Jewish boys, from the age of twelve onward, Jesus prayed the words of the *Shema* upon rising in the morning and retiring at night. He learned habitual obedience to this command to hear the one true and living God and to worship and hallow only Him. Listening attentively with his heart, mind, soul and strength in the practice of silence must have become a habitual part of His praying and worship of God, His Father.

Luke’s version of the Lord’s Prayer begins simply, “Father,” while Matthew’s version begins “Our Father,” implying the communal dimension of the prayer. After the first century it became the most prevalent liturgical form of Christian prayer along with the psalms when the church gathered for worship. It also became a paradigm for solitary prayer. Some Christian traditions eventually came to refer to the prayer as the “Our Father.”

Early church leaders such as Tertullian, Origen, Cyprian, Gregory or Nyssa, and Augustine wrote treatises on the Lord’s Prayer as have many since. A diverse group of twentieth-century scholars who have done likewise include William Barclay, Leonardo Boff, Karl Barth, Roberta Bondi, Dorothy Day, Thomas Merton, Helmut Thieliche, St. Nikolai Velimirovich, and N.T. Wright.