

youthESource Bible Study

The Lord's Prayer

By Nick Shults

Leader's Introduction & Background:

In Matthew's gospel, Jesus' teaching of the Lord's Prayer comes to us in the context of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7). The Sermon on the Mount opens with these words: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." In the verses that follow, those who listen to Jesus come to realize just what He means by "poor in spirit." On our own, we are unable to live holy and righteous lives and keep God's commands. In our relationship with our Heavenly Father we bring nothing to the table and are in desperate need of God's grace and mercy in our lives.

Thus, as children of God, poor in spirit and unable to bring anything to God, Jesus teaches us to pray. He teaches us to pray as disciples who must rely on our Father in heaven for everything, including our daily bread.

Furthermore, we do not pray to our Father who is uncaring or unaware of our needs or ignorant to our plight as humans. As the Sermon on the Mount continues, Jesus reveals that our Heavenly Father to whom we pray knows what we need (Matt. 7:32) and is eager to give us good gifts in accordance with His will (Matt. 7:7-11)

Structure:

The Lord's Prayer as found in Matthew 6 can be divided up into 2 parts. The first part includes the introduction/address and petitions 1-3. The second part includes petitions 4-6/7 petitions. The first part addresses God's rule and reign in this world. The second part addresses the present needs of God's people living in this world. The structure of the text points the reader first towards God's saving work in the world now (see Luther's explanation in the Small Catechism) and the culmination of that work on the Last Day. Only then does the disciple praying this prayer begin to address his/her immediate needs in life.

Goal:

Luther writes in his Large Catechism, "...nothing is so necessary as to call upon God incessantly and to drum into his ears our prayer that he may give, preserve, and increase in us faith and the fulfillment of the Ten Commandments and remove all that stands in our way and hinders us in this regard. That we may know what and how to pray, however, our Lord Christ himself has taught us both the way and the words..."¹

Thus, the goal of this study is simply to encourage students and leaders to pray as Jesus has taught His disciples to pray, acknowledging that not only are we "poor in spirit" but that we are also not worthy of any of the gifts our heavenly Father so graciously gives to us.

¹ Kolb & Weingert, 440-41

PART 1: INTRODUCTION

"Our Father in heaven..."

OPENING UP:

- **What is your favorite family tradition?**

Answers will vary.

- **If you could institute any new tradition in your family what would it be?**

Answers will vary.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION: Read Matthew 6:5-13. (*Read the passage at least two times, pausing briefly at the end of each line. Have different volunteers read the passage each time.*)

- **After reading through the Lord's Prayer, what jumps out to you right off the bat?**
Answers will vary but be sure to give students plenty of time to think and answer. Often times when we pray the Lord's Prayer, especially if we have known it by heart for many years, our tendency is to say it without thinking about it. By reading the passage slowly multiple times, the goal is to allow students time to notice something new about the Lord's Prayer they might not otherwise have noticed. Again, encourage students to take their time in this process.

- **In the Lord's Prayer, what kind of relationship does Jesus invite us to have with God?**

In the Lord's Prayer Jesus is inviting us to trust in and rely on God, our Heavenly Father, for all things. We pray to Him both for the things of salvation and for the things of our daily lives. When it comes to our prayers, there is nothing too big or too small.

- **Notice that Jesus invites us to pray, "Our Father...". What does this say about our relationship with one another?**

By His death and resurrection Christ has brought us into His family; we are sons and daughters of God—brothers and sisters in Christ.

As a leader you will know best how to apply this to your group. Perhaps there is division amongst your group? Do those who go to Lutheran schools stick together and exclude those who go to public school (or vice versa)? Are there new people in your group that need to be brought into the fold?

Whatever might be a dividing point between your students, the reality is that Christ has united us by His grace. We are members of one body and join together in prayer saying, "OUR Father..."

- **We can ask anything of our Father in Heaven knowing that He promises to hear us and answer us according to His will. Take a moment to silently write down two prayer requests you have right now in your life.**

As you lead this study, it is important to remind your students that God answers our prayers according to His will. That is to say, we don't get everything we want (i.e. if we pray to be rich and famous!), but we know that God is working out His will in the world and in our lives. Most importantly, we know that God's will is our salvation in Christ.

GOING DEEPER: Read Ephesians 1:3-10; Romans 8:10-16; Galatians 4:4-7.

- **According to these passages, what has God done to make us part of His family?**

According to Ephesians 1:5, God predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ; God has made us a part of His family. Thus, we can pray to God, addressing Him as "Our Father". This means that God is not a distant god who arbitrarily answers prayers or not. No, God is our Father who loves us, cares for us, and provides for us.

In Romans 8:10-16 Paul once again affirms our adoption into God's family. As Children of God and co-heirs with Christ we are recipients of a new, resurrected and eternal life! Through Jesus' resurrection God is bringing healing and restoration to our broken world. God, who has brought about our salvation and the restoration of His Creation, invites us to call Him "Abba, Father".

We did nothing to earn such grace and love—Christ did it out of His amazing love for us. Ephesians 1:10 also tells us that this was God's good and gracious will—that we might be His children forever.

TAKING AWAY:

- **As a group think about the life of your church and create a list of all the things you do together. How do these activities demonstrate that God has made you part of His family through Jesus?**

Answers will vary but will include worship, Communion, prayer, meals together, service projects, retreats, etc. No church is perfect and without its problems but when we worship together, confess our sins and receive absolution together, come to the Lord's Supper together, we do so as one body, brought together by Christ. When we pray "Our Father," we are reminded that we are part of a larger family that bears witness to God's grace given to us through Jesus.

PART 2: GOD'S SAVING WORK

"Hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as in heaven."

OPENING DISCUSSION:

- **How often do you think about the future? Where do you think you'll be in 10 years?**

Answers will vary.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION: Read Matthew 6:5-13. (*Read the passage at least two times, pausing briefly at the end of each line. Have different volunteers read the passage each time.*)

- **What new questions come to mind as we read through the Lord's Prayer again?**
Again, give students time to hear the Lord's Prayer with "fresh ears" and ask any questions they might have.
- **What does 'hallowed' mean?**
Hallowed or holy means "set apart for a special purpose." See also Luther's explanation of the First Petition in the Small Catechism of what it means for us to keep God's name holy.

God's holy name is also given to us in our Baptism. God's name is placed on us as we're baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This means that God has set us apart for a special purpose and has made us holy. We are not holy because of our works, but are made holy on account of Christ's sacrifice for us.

- **Is God's reign as King obvious to all people all the time?**
No, God's reign is certainly not obvious to all people. At times we might wonder where God is or if God is really in control. However, we are assured that God's kingdom comes among us through His Word.
- **How might humans try to take God's place as king over all of creation?**
Answer will vary but might include the many attempts throughout history to build an empire through force or violence. Answers might also include the desire and attempts to transcend our physical human limitations ([transhumanism – see http://blogs.cui.edu/core/2018/01/22/what-does-it-mean-to-be-transhuman/](http://blogs.cui.edu/core/2018/01/22/what-does-it-mean-to-be-transhuman/)).
- **When will God's reign fully come?**
God's reign comes among us through Christ's Word and Sacrament. (See Luther's explanation on page 20 of the Small Catechism). God's reign will come in its fullness when Christ returns as He has promised (John 14:1-3).

GOING DEEPER: Read **Ephesians 1:3-6**. Last time we read this passage we focused on our relationship with God. This time let's focus on God's will.

- **What does Paul say God's will for us is? How has God brought about His will for us 'on earth as in heaven'?**

Paul tells us that God's will for us is to make us holy and blameless before Him (Eph. 1:5). This was God's will before the creation of the world (Eph. 1:4)! This God accomplished through Jesus' death and resurrection.

TAKING AWAY:

- **When we think about our future it might seem uncertain. Read through petitions 2 & 3 of the Lord's Prayer in the Small Catechism.**

- **How does the Lord's Prayer bring us comfort even in the midst of an uncertain future?**

Answers may vary but you can emphasize that although there are many things happening in the world that might seem scary and life seems to be out of our control, our prayer for God's kingdom to come and God's will to be done is a constant reminder that God is present and active among us, overcoming evil and keeping us close to Him.

PART 3: GOD'S WORK IN OUR DAILY LIVES

"Give us today our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil"

OPENING DISCUSSION:

- **What are three things you can't go without?**

Answers will vary.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION: Read Matthew 6:5-13. (*Read the passage at least two times, pausing briefly at the end of each line. Have different volunteers read the passage each time.*)

- **Sometimes it feels like we can't get through the day without a phone, the internet, or a little quiet time alone. But what does Jesus mean by "daily bread"? What things do we really need to survive?**

See page 21 of Luther's Small Catechism.

- **From where does your "daily bread" come? Who does God use to provide for you and your needs?**

God provides for His creation using various means. For instance, God does not feed us as He did the Israelites with manna and quail. Rather, God uses people working in their various vocations in life to bring us our daily bread. God uses farmers, truck drivers, grocery store clerks, bakers, etc. to produce and deliver our food. God has also given us (or our parents or guardians) the ability to work and earn a living so that our families might have our daily bread. Ultimately, no matter where our daily bread comes from, it is a gift from God.

GOING DEEPER: Read Matthew 18:21-35

- **What does this parable teach us about our debt towards God? What has God done with that debt?**

In this parable Jesus teaches us that the debt which we owe God is greater than we could ever pay off. Indeed, we are utterly incapable of paying the debt our sin requires. Rather than holding this debt against us, God has paid for it Himself with the life of His Son, Jesus.

- **According to Jesus in the Lord's Prayer and in this parable, what should our response be to God's incredible forgiveness?**

Our response to God's gift of forgiveness is one of gratitude expressed in the second part of the 5th petition: "as we forgive those who trespass against us." Any debt owed to us by others pales in comparison to the debt which God has cancelled on our behalf!

TAKING AWAY:

- **God has given us, His children, so many good things! As a group make a list of the "daily bread" which God has given you. Close in a prayer of thanks for all these gifts and for the forgiveness we have in Jesus.**