



Learning to pray: The Lord's Prayer

Jesus taught his disciples to pray simply. He warned them against using too many words, or heaping up lofty phrases. In the Gospels we read a prayer which Jesus taught his followers and encouraged them to use (Matt 6:9-13; Luke 11:2-4). We call this "The Lord's Prayer", and it is the best known and most frequently used form of Christian prayer.

Many people who would not call themselves Christians or who rarely go to church still know some or all of the words of the Lord's Prayer. Perhaps they said it at school, or remember it from christenings or carol services or funerals. The fact that it is familiar makes it a good place to start when we are learning to pray.

*Our Father who art in heaven,
Hallowed be thy name.
Thy kingdom come.
Thy will be done in earth,
as it is in heaven.
Give us this day 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:
For thine is the kingdom,
and the power, and the glory,
forever and ever.
Amen.*

Notice that Jesus' prayer begins not with us, but with God, our Father in heaven. Acknowledging God's majesty is also a reminder that we depend upon him. But God is not called King or Ruler in the Lord's Prayer, he is called "Father". God's love for us is as deep and intimate as that of a parent for a child.

The words express many of the things we need in order to be drawn closer to God: to line our wants and desires up with his, to rely on him for the sustenance which keeps us alive, and to acknowledge our faults and failures in the face of his love, knowing that his mercy and protection are infinite.

Using the Lord's Prayer is simple: we should just say it. We can pray it out loud with others (perhaps in a church service), we can say it to ourselves at home, we can pray it silently when we are alone or with others, at work or travelling or simply as we walk along the street. Once we have said the prayer a few times the words will become more familiar and we will be able to use them whenever we feel the need to pray.

If you are familiar with the Lord's Prayer you might want to try saying it very slowly to yourself, stopping to meditate on individual words. What does it mean for God to be "father"? What does it mean for God to be "Our Father"? And so on. Chewing over the words of Jesus in prayer can be a very effective way of listening to God.

The most important thing, however, is just to say the prayer. It is God's gift to help us learn to pray.