

Pray the Lord's Prayer Afresh

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Famous Prayers in the Bible

King David prays for forgiveness: "Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions. . . Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit to sustain me." (Psalm 51:1; 10-13)

King Solomon prays for wisdom: "Now, Lord my God, you have made your servant king in place of my father David. But I am only a little child and do not know how to carry out my duties. . . . So, give your servant a discerning heart to govern your people and to distinguish between right and wrong. For who is able to govern this great people of yours?" (1Kings 3:7, 9)

Jesus prays for life: "Abba, Father, for you all things are possible; remove this cup from me; yet, not what I want, but what you want." (Mark 14:36)

1. Importance of the Lord's Prayer

What is prayer? Talking to people is conversation; talking to God is prayer.

How to pray to God properly? In the SM, Jesus taught his disciples how to pray to God (Matt 6:5-8) and gave them "the Lord's Prayer" as a model to follow (6:9-13).

For 2000 years Christians all over the world have used this beloved Prayer in common prayer, Holy Eucharist, personal crisis, and vigil before dying.

Why is the Lord's Prayer important?

1) It is a summary of Jesus' teaching on God as Abba, the KG coming, divine provision for all, forgiveness of sins, and triumph over the evil one (Joachim Jeremias, *Prayer of Jesus*).

2) It provides a compendium of Christian belief. "The honor of God in the 'Father,' the testimony of faith in the 'name,' the offering of obedience in 'will,' the commemoration of

hope in the 'kingdom,' the petition for life in the 'bread,' the full acknowledgement of debts in the prayer for their 'forgiveness,' the anxious dread of temptation in the request for 'protection.'" (Tertullian, *On Prayer*).

3) It is used in major practices of the church. [In history] the Lord's Prayer was used for baptism in the ancient church, for catechism in the medieval period, for worship in the Reformation, and for the care of soul in contemporary practical theology. (Manfred Seitz, *Vaterunter III, RZ 34*).

2. Back to Origins and Purposes

Jesus taught his disciples this prayer for two purposes, according to Luke and Matthew.

1) An Identity Prayer

Luke 11:1. "He was praying in a certain place, and after he had finished, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray, as John [the Baptist] taught his disciples."

➤ John the Baptist, Qumran Essenes, and synagogues have their own community prayers that reflect their emphasis on certain piety and visions as a group.

➤ Jewish "*Kaddish*" (the final/benediction prayer in Synagogue service)

"Exalted and hallowed be his great name
In the world which he created according to his will.
May he let his kingdom rule
In your lifetime and in your days and in the lifetime
Of the whole house of Israel, speedily and soon. And to this, say: Amen."
[Cf. the three divine petitions of the Lord's Prayer]

➤ *Shemoneh Esreh* (Eighteen Benedictions), called "Amidah," which is a community prayer used in Synagogue service on Sabbath and Holy Days, often said silently facing Jerusalem, with which the Jews praised God for God's mighty power and loving kindness and asked for specific blessings such as speedy redemption (Benediction 1), divine forgiveness (Benediction 6), and the rebuilding of Jerusalem (Benediction 14).

Prayer #6 for forgiveness

Forgive us, our Father [not Abba], for we have sinned; pardon us, our King, for we have transgressed; for You do pardon and forgive. Blessed art thou, O Lord, who is gracious, and does abundantly forgive.

Prayer # 7 for deliverance from affliction

Look upon our affliction and plead our cause and redeem us speedily for Your name's sake; for You are a mighty Redeemer. Blessed art thou, O Lord, the Redeemer of Israel.

2) A Model Prayer

Matt 6:9. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus chastised the hypocrites who liked to pray in public to show off their piety (6:5-6) and the Gentiles who used repeated words without faith (6:7-8), and instructed his disciples to “Pray then in this way.” (6:9).

➤ What does the Lord’s Prayer teach us to pray?

- We approach God as our Father who cares for us like children.
- We begin by minding God’s business: God’s name, God’s kingdom, and God’s will.
- We then plead for our own needs and others’: daily food, forgiveness of sins, protection from temptations that we may enjoy wellbeing in body, mind, and soul.
- We are a beloved community of faith, not alone: our Father, give us, forgive us, deliver us.

➤ The Church begins to use the Lord’s Prayer for catechism, baptism, prayer, Eucharist, and pastoral care. Consequently, this prayer shapes Christian beliefs and practices and serves as the best example of a proper prayer.

Therefore, in Morning Prayer (BOC), the Lord’s Prayer is said before Suffrage, Collect of the Day and Intercessions, to serve as the model for all other prayers.

Jesus practiced what he preached.

Jesus’ “high-priestly prayer” (John 17)

- Jesus looked “up to heaven” and said, “Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify you” (17:1).
- He also said, “I glorified you on earth by finishing the work that you gave me to do” (17:4) and “I am not asking you to take them out of the world, but I ask you to protect them from the evil one” (17:15).
- He ended the prayer saying: “I made your name known to them and I will make it known” (17:26).

Jesus’ prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane (Mark 14)

- “Abba, Father, for you all things are possible; remove this cup from me; yet, not what I want, but what you want.” (14:36).

3. Two Versions in the NT

	Matt 6:9-13	Luke 11:2-4
Address	Our Father who is in the heavens.	Father (Abba).
1 st divine petition	May your name be sanctified.	May your name be sanctified.
2 nd	May your kingdom come.	May your kingdom come.

3 rd	May your will be done; as in heaven, so on earth.	
1 st human petition	Give us this day our necessary bread.	Give us each day our necessary bread.
2 nd	And forgive us our debts, <u>as</u> we also have forgiven those indebted to us.	And forgive us our sins, <u>for</u> we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us.
3 rd /4 th	And lead us not into temptation, but rescue us from the evil one.	And lead us not into temptation.
Doxology	For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours for ever (and ever). Amen. [cf. 1 Chr 29:11-13; not in early mss, nor patristics before 5th century]	*Short version in Lk, older words in Mt. *Liturgical embellishment in Mt. *Liturgical addition in doxology.

Didache 8:2-3 [c. 100-125AD]

1. Let not your fasts be with the hypocrites, for they fast on Mondays and Thursdays, but do you fast on Wednesdays and Fridays.
2. And do not pray as the hypocrites, but as the Lord commanded in his Gospel, pray thus: "Our Father, who art in Heaven, hallowed be thy Name, thy Kingdom come, thy will be done, as in Heaven so also upon earth; give us today our daily bread, and forgive us our debt as we forgive our debtors, and lead us not into trial, but deliver us from the Evil One, for thine is the power and the glory for ever."
3. Pray thus three times a day.

Texts in Church Traditions (Matt 6:9-13)

English	Greek
6 ⁹ Our Father, who art in heaven. Hallowed by thy name. 10 Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.	6 ⁹ Πάτερ ἡμῶν ὁ ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς· ἁγιασθήτω τὸ ὄνομά σου, 10 ἐλθέτω ἡ βασιλεία σου, γενηθήτω τὸ θέλημά σου, ὡς ἐν οὐρανῷ καὶ ἐπὶ γῆς·
11 Give us this day our daily bread. 12 Forgive us our <u>traspases</u> (debts) <u>as</u> we forgive those who trasposses against us. 13 <u>Lead</u> us not into temptation, but deliver us from <u>evil</u> .	11 τὸν ἄρτον ἡμῶν τὸν ἐπιούσιον δὸς ἡμῖν σήμερον· 12 καὶ ἄφες ἡμῖν τὰ ὀφειλήματα ἡμῶν, ὡς καὶ ἡμεῖς ἀφήκαμεν τοῖς ὀφειλέταις ἡμῶν· 13 καὶ μὴ εἰσενέγκης ἡμᾶς εἰς πειρασμόν, ἀλλὰ ῥῦσαι ἡμᾶς ἀπὸ τοῦ πονηροῦ.

[For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory for ever and ever. Amen]	Not found in manuscripts before 4th and 5th centuries.
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Lord's Prayer in *Peshitta* (Ancient Syriac)

English	Peshitta text	Transcription
Our Father in heaven,	ܐܒܘܢ ܕܒܫܡܝܐ	<i>Abun d-bashmayo</i>
hallowed be your name.	ܩܕܫܐ ܩܕܫܐ ܩܕܫܐ	<i>Nethqadash šmokh</i>
Your kingdom come.	ܕܐܘܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܠܟܘܬܐ	<i>Tithe malkuthokh</i>
Your will be done	ܩܘܪܝܬܐ ܕܩܕܝܫܐ	<i>Nehwe šebyonokh</i>
as in heaven	ܐܝܟܢܐ ܕܒܫܡܝܐ	<i>aykano d-bashmayo</i>
so on earth.	ܐܦ ܒܐܪܥܐ	<i>oph bar`o</i>
Give us the bread we	ܗܒ ܠܢ ܠܗܡܐ	<i>Hab lan laħmo</i>
need today.	ܕܫܘܢܘܢܐ ܝܘܡܢܐ	<i>d-sunqonan yowmono</i>
And forgive us our sins	ܘܫܒܗܘܩ ܠܢ ܗܘܒܝܢ	<i>Wa-šbuq lan ħawbayn</i>
[and our debts]	ܘܫܒܗܘܩ	<i>[wa-ħtohayn]</i>
as we too forgive those	ܐܝܟܢܐ ܕܐܦ ܥܝܢ	<i>Aykano dof ħnan</i>
who sin against us.	ܥܒܪܝܢ ܠܫܒܗܘܩ	<i>šbaqan l-ħayobayn</i>
Do not bring us to trial	ܠܐ ܕܠܥܠ ܠܢܝܘܢܐ	<i>Lo ta`alan l-nesyuno</i>
but deliver us from evil.	ܐܠܐ ܦܝܐ ܠܢ ܒܝܫܐ	<i>elo fašo lan men bišo</i>
For yours	ܡܝܬܘܠ ܕܕܝܠܘܚܐ ܗܝ	<i>Meṭul d'dilokh hi</i>
the kingdom, the power,	ܡܠܟܘܬܐ ܘܗܝܠܐ	<i>malkutho w-ħaylo</i>
and the glory,	ܘܗܝܫܒܘܬܐ	<i>w-theš'buħto</i>
to the age of ages. Amen.	ܠܥܠܡ ܥܠܡܝܢ ܐܡܝܢ	<i>L'olam 'olmin amin.</i>

Retro-translation to Galilean Aramaic (based on Luke's version)

J. Jeremias	B. Chilton
<i>Abba,</i>	<i>Abba,</i>
<i>yithqaddash shmakh,</i> <i>tethe malkuthakh,</i>	<i>yitqadash shemakh,</i> <i>tetey malkhuthakh,</i>
<i>lahman delimhar, habh lan yoma dhen,</i> <i>Ushbhoq lan hobhain,</i> <i>kedhisch bhaqnan lhyyabhain</i> <i>we la tha-elinnan le nisyon.</i>	<i>Hav li yoma lakhma dateh,</i> <i>Ushebaq li yat chobati,</i> <i>veal taeleyni lenisyona.</i>

4. Structure and Themes

Structure	Text	Themes
Address	Our Father, who art in heaven.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • God as Abba (Papa). • transcendent and immanent.
3 divine petitions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hallowed by thy name. • Thy kingdom come. • Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Honor God’s name, God’s kingdom, and God’s will. • Already in heaven, may they work on earth as well.
3 human petitions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Give us this day our daily (τὸν ἐπιούσιον) bread. • Forgive us our trespasses (τὰ ὀφειλήματα, debts/sins) as (ὡς καὶ) we forgive those who trespass against us. • Lead (εἰσενέγκης) us not into temptation but deliver us from evil (τοῦ πονηροῦ). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bread daily or Eucharistic? • Forgive trespasses or “debts”? • “As”: same way or because? • God “leads” us into temptation? • Evil or “the evil one”?
Doxology	For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory for ever (and ever). Amen.	

5. A Few Noteworthy Issues

5.1 God as Abba

What does it mean to pray to God as “Abba”? An intimate and trustworthy relationship.

Out of piety, Jews normally address God with exalted titles such as “the Almighty and Eternal One,” “King of Kings and Lord of Lords,” and “Holy of Holies.” A uncrossable chasm between God the holy creator and we the humble sinners.

But Jesus prayed to God as “Father” (Matt 11:25-27; John 12:28; 17:1, 5, 11). He was condemned as blasphemous for his audacious claim to be the Son of God by the high priest (Matt 26:65) and was sent to Pilate for an official death sentence.

Moreover, Jesus authorized his disciples and followers to pray to God as their Father in Heaven and call God as “Abba” (Papa), which is a revolutionary and shocking idea.

Thus, it is a privilege and assurance to pray the Lord's Prayer, because we are accepted as God's beloved children who can approach the gracious God without fear. The Spirit of God has enabled us to call God "Abba, Father" (Rom 8:15; Gal 4:6).

Bruce Chilton: By praying to God as "Abba," five dimensions of the kingdom of God are evoked: sanctity, ultimacy, radiate provision (the power of the Kingdom, which radiates from Israel outward to the nations), transcendent power, and judgment ("The Aramaic Lord's Prayer" 2010, pp. 78-79).

5.2 Our daily bread

What does the "daily bread" mean?

The Greek word translated as "daily" (τὸν ἐπιούσιον) is a *hapax legomenon*, which is to say, it occurs only once in the Greek NT. It is a uniquely constructed word that combines two ideas (*epi* and *ousion*) literally meaning "on + substance," so it can mean the basic provision to sustain our physical life (daily bread) and/or the special substance that nurtures our spiritual life, i.e., the body of Christ; hence the Eucharistic bread.

Why is the Lord's Prayer said before the Breaking of the Bread in the Holy Eucharist? The idea of the "daily bread" understood as the "spiritual bread" – referring to Jesus' body that nurtures our spiritual life – might be evoked.

5.3 Forgive us our debts, ...

Why is "debt" (τὰ ὀφειλήματα), not "sins" (ἁμαρτίας), to be forgiven, though "debt" in Aramaic is often used metaphorically for "sin"?

The idea of "debt" (*hobha*) as a metaphor for sin to be forgiven is vividly shown in the "Parable of the Unforgiving Servant" (Matt 18:23-35; ten thousand talents vs. a hundred denarii).

The idea of "forgive" in Aramaic (*shbhoq*) also means to release (debt) and forgive (sin).

Jesus' point is we need to ask God for the forgiveness of sins and the release of debts. We owe our lives and everything to God! Just as God has freely forgiven us, we should also forgive those who have hurt us and feel indebted to others for the good we have not done to them.

(5.3) ..., as we also have forgiven our debtors

What does the "as" (ὡς καὶ) mean between divine forgiveness and human forgiveness?

Do we ask God to forgive us "in the same way" we "have done" for our debtors (Greek verb is ἀφήκαμεν in perfect tense)? Or do we ask God to forgive us "because, since" we have forgiven our debtors (see καὶ γάρ (because ... also) in Luke 11:4)?

Problems! we cannot be the reason or model for God to forgive us; we cannot earn divine forgiveness by our merits (which challenges the idea of justification by grace) and our forgiveness will not be perfect (which means we will not be totally forgiven by God).

Retro-translate the Greek *ὡς και* and *και γαρ* to Aramaic, it would be ܘܟܝܢ (ve-kein) meaning “and thus, and likewise.” ܝܢ (and) is used in the so-called “vav consecutive” construction in Semitic syntax that turns a perfect verb (“have forgiven” into an imperfect idea to indicate a petition or prayer (“that we may forgive” our debtors). ܘܟܝܢ is used as an adverb (“thus, likewise”) in reference to God’s forgiveness in the preceding clause, not conjunction (“as” or “for”) in reference to human forgiveness in the subsequent clause.

Hence, Jesus teaches us to ask God for forgiveness of debts and sins relying on God’s grace alone, but simultaneously we also ask God to help us forgive our human debtors because and in the same way God has forgiven us.

5.4 Do not lead us into temptation

If God “leads” us into temptation, why are we to blame when we fail?

Pope Francis approved the change of this petition in *Messale Romano* to read: “Do not let us fall into temptation.” It was approved by the general assembly of the Episcopal Conference of Italy in May 2019 and will be used in the RC Church in Italy.

But the Catholic Church in France, England and Wales have no plan to change it. And all other churches disagree with it.

Can God lead us into temptation?

Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the Devil (Matt 4:1).

Temptation (*πειρασμόν*) means temptation, trial and test.

To ask God “not to lead us into temptation” is to acknowledge that God can lead us into temptation and to uphold God’s sovereignty over everything. It does not necessarily make God a Tempter with minacious intention or remove our own responsibilities.

It is the Devil that is the Tempter who wishes harm on us.

God sometimes gives the Devil permission to tempt us as in the case of Job the righteous man in the OT. God’s permission allows the Devil’s temptation to become a trial for us and turns it into a test in order to train us to become strong in spiritual life.

James and Paul on Temptation (1:12-16)

James 1¹² Blessed is anyone who endures temptation. Such a one has stood the test and will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him.

¹³ No one, when tempted, should say, “I am being tempted by God”; for God cannot be tempted by evil and he himself tempts no one.

¹⁴ But one is tempted by one’s own desire, being lured and enticed by it;

¹⁵ then, when that desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin, and

¹⁶ that sin, when it is fully grown, gives birth to death. Do not be deceived, my beloved.

1Cor 10¹³ No testing has overtaken you that is not common to everyone. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tested beyond your strength, but with the testing he will also provide the way out so that you may be able to endure it.

Pray the Lord’s Prayer Afresh

In conclusion, when we say the Lord’s Prayer, let us be reminded that:

1. We can approach the almighty God as beloved children to the adoring Father who cares for us. God has counted the number of our hairs!

2. We should recommit ourselves to do God’s business – glorifying God’s name, serving God’s kingdom, and fulfilling God’s will. Be Thou my vision!

3. We may trust God’s provision, clemency, and protection in every way to keep our body, mind and soul sound and joyful. Do not worry about anything!

Suggested Reading

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