

Lord's Prayer (Summary)

Given in Mt. 6:9-13 and Lk. 11:2-4 in slightly different forms.

- The text in Matthew is the one that has always been used in Christian worship and for teaching the faith to those who are going to be baptized (probably because Matthew's version begins with "Our" so is suited for corporate worship and adding people to the community).

Like Jewish prayers of the period, the Lord's Prayer could be used in two ways:

(1) It could be said while standing in a group (corporate worship).

(2) It could be used as the basis/outline for improvising one's own personal prayers (private prayer).

- When used in private prayer, one would say each petition more slowly, meditating on it, and
 - adding additional reverent words
 - For example, after mentioning God, one might add "who is in heaven" or "the King of the ages" to show respect for God and emphasize his greatness and transcendence.
 - personalizing the meaning of each petition
 - "Your kingdom come" is general but can be made more specific when one adds private petitions (e.g. "I want to see your rule extended by [fill in local, personal need here]").
 - Think of the petitions of the Lord's Prayer as bullet points, to which we add sub-bullet points specific to our own situation/needs.

The prayer opens with familiar reverence for God ("who is in heaven") together with a relatively unfamiliar intimate address to God ("Father").

- There are a few places in the Old Testament where God describes Israel as his Son (see e.g. Ex. 4:22-23) or God is described as the Father of Israel (see e.g. Is. 63:16; 64:8).
- What is striking is to see an individual (first Jesus, then the individual disciples) refer to God as "Father," which shows an especially intimate personal relationship.
 - This seems to have been a bit shocking to Jesus' contemporaries; see, e.g., Jn. 5:18: "This was why the Jews were seeking to kill him, because not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God."
 - By contrast, Jewish prayers of the time tended to refer to God in terms of distance and transcendence. See, for example, the following prayers taken from T. Carmi (ed./tr.), *The Penguin Book of Hebrew Verse* (New York: Penguin, 1981), 194, 198-199:
 - The Talmud includes a prayer to be said at home before going to bed, which begins, "Blessed are you, Lord our God, King of the universe...", which is a fairly common way of beginning prayers in the rabbinic period.

- In the Hekhalot literature of the second to fourth centuries A.D., there is a prayer addressed to God which begins, “King of miracles, King of Power, King of marvels...”

So, in conclusion, for the individual believer to begin a prayer with, “Father,” was an unexpected new thing.

In the Bible, fathers do two important things:

- Fathers *invite children into the family and welcome them.*
 - The believer’s new relationship to God is therefore described in terms of adoption, which is not a fictive legal arrangement, but a real adoption as a child of God, with all the love, promises and privileges that implies.
- Fathers *protect and care for their children,*
 - Interceding for them
 - Being present to them and caring for them in their sorrows
 - Showing them the way forward and helping them grow

In the world, it’s common for people to feel unwanted or rejected by their fathers.

- This often leads to
 - a restlessness about finding one’s place,
 - being active and trying to establish oneself by what one does,
 - competing with other people to gain a position.
- Often that feeling of rejection, of being an unwanted child, of needing to strive to find a place remains.
- The only lasting effect is to alienate other people, because one is always striving against them to gain a position or find a place. (
 - “I need to have it, but I can only have it if I get it and they can’t have it.”
 - One gains an outward position for a while and that position may look good from a distance, but in the end one always tends to end up alone.

For some of us here that was the script we grew up with, but in the Kingdom our situation is changed:

- Like anyone who has been adopted, *we are wanted children.*
- The word “Father” is a *promise to us of His love and good will* toward us
- God’s love is *not conditioned upon our performance* but is everlasting and powerful enough to overcome even our worst failures.
- God’s desire is *to show us what is good* and to help us receive it.
 - It’s not a guessing game with a distant God.

After we accept God’s promise by saying “Father,” there are three petitions which concern God.

- We ask for God’s *name to be hallowed* (=made holy/glorified) first in us, then in all the world.
- We ask for God’s *kingdom* (rule/sovereign authority to extend over every place.
- We ask for God’s will to be done increasingly in us and in all people.