



The Lord's Prayer

Learning to Follow

About the Story

Today's lesson is one you might know well—some of us may even quote it in our prayers every day. Jesus teaches his followers how to pray, giving them the words of what we call the Lord's Prayer. While we may know the words of the Lord's Prayer well, we may not remember the rest of Jesus' teachings on prayer from today's passage.

The Point:

Jesus teaches us how to pray. In this well-known passage, Jesus teaches his followers the Lord's Prayer. But what we sometimes forget is the rest of the passage: we must put our faith in God, for God listens to our prayers, even when we do not know what to say or how to put it into words.

Jesus spoke these words as part of the Sermon on the Mount, a three-chapter sermon given to his disciples and other followers on a hillside in Galilee (Matthew 5–7). In this part of the sermon, Jesus repeatedly compared the behaviors of his true followers with those outside the faith. Additionally, Jesus told his followers how to pray and how not to pray. Pride is a recurring theme in this section, as Jesus gave his believers several ways to set aside pride and focus on God.

Jesus then asks his followers to focus on the inner relationship each of us has with God instead of focusing on the outward portrayal of holiness or piety. Jesus contrasts inner sincerity in relationship with outward show and life in the kingdom with earthly pleasures and treasures.

The most well-known portion of today's passage is the Lord's Prayer. Jesus began his teaching on prayer by reminding us that God knows what we are asking for when we pray, and because of this, we do not need to try to impress God with our prayers. We do not need big words or theological concepts or flowery language; none of those move prayers to the top of God's to-do list. God does not grade our prayers; God loves us and already knows what we need before we ask.

When we pray, we do not have to worry about how other people think we sound. After all, we are not praying to other people. We are praying to God. Because of this, we can pray sincere, heartfelt, confident prayers without fretting over the right words or how impressive we sound.

Opening Prayer

God of all, you know the yearnings and needs of our hearts even deeper than we know ourselves. Help us to trust your promise that you listen to our prayers, especially when, from our perspective, our prayers seem unanswered. We know that you are always with us, and we ask that you guide us in all that we do. We pray this in the name of your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Last Week/Next Week

Last week, Jesus began the Sermon on the Mount with the Beatitudes. In today's lesson, Jesus continues his sermon by teaching his followers how to pray. In next week's lesson, Jesus concludes the Sermon on the Mount by encouraging his followers not to judge others, comparing his teachings to a solid rock upon which we can build a strong foundation.

Into the Story

Take a moment to reflect on the following two questions: Has God ever answered a prayer in an unexpected way and, if so, how? Have you ever had a prayer go unanswered, but it ended up being a good thing? If you are comfortable, go around the room and share your answers. Why do you think God answers some prayers and not others?

Learning the Story

Jesus teaches his followers how to pray, giving them the words for what will be known as the Lord's Prayer. He then discourages his followers from being hypocrites and discourages them from having faith in earthly things, instructing them to place their faith in God instead.

Read Matthew 6:7-8 – How to Pray

- ❓ Do you like to pray in front of other people? Why or why not?
- ❓ Verse 8 states that God knows what we need before we pray. If that is the case, then what is the point of prayer?

Read Matthew 6:9-15 – The Lord's Prayer

- ❓ The word “hallowed” (verse 9) means “honored as holy, separate, and special.” What is the significance of worshipping God before giving God our prayer requests?
- ❓ What do you think Jesus means when he talks about God's will and God's kingdom?
- ❓ What have you learned about the “kingdom of heaven” so far in Matthew?
- ❓ What does it mean for God's will to be done on earth? How do we participate in God's will? How does it feel to pray for God's will when God's will may be different than what you would like?

Read Matthew 6:16-18 – Jesus' Teaching about Fasting

- ❓ What is the point of fasting? Is fasting something we should do today? How would it help or not help our spiritual lives to fast?
- ❓ Why do you think Jesus wants us to pray and fast in secret? Would fasting and praying in public help us share our faith with others?

Read Matthew 6:19-21 –**Have Faith in God, not in Earthly Treasures**

- ❓ What does it mean to store treasures for yourself on earth?
- ❓ What does it mean to store treasure for yourself in heaven?
- ❓ When have you stored treasure on earth? How does it affect your life and relationship with God? How does it affect your relationship with others?

Bible Connections

- ✚ Jesus teaches his disciples how to pray (Mark 11:25).
- ✚ Luke's version of the Lord's Prayer (Luke 11:1-13).
- ✚ Rejoice in the Lord always and pray continually (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18).

Living the Story: Prayer

Break into seven pairs or trios, having each take one petition of the Lord's Prayer. If your group is too small to break into seven pairs, break into fewer groups, and give each multiple petitions. You will need to give more time if that is the case. Each group is then charged with the following task: rewrite the petition using contemporary language. To do this task, ask the following questions: What is at the heart of this petition? What words, phrases, or metaphors might help get the point across? When each group is finished, write the new petitions in a central place so that all can see.

Closing Prayer

Use the prayer your group wrote in Living the Story or the following to close in prayer.

Gracious God, we thank you for blessing our time together. May it be a continued blessing to others and us. Thank you for the things we found helpful (pause for examples), the things we found challenging (pause), and where we experienced your grace (pause). Empower us to show mercy and listen to your Son everyday of our lives. In the name of Jesus we pray. Amen.

Bible Nuts & Bolts: Images of God

The Bible has a wide variety of images to describe God and God's relationship to humanity. One of the reasons there is such a wealth of images and metaphors to describe God is because we recognize that all language we use to inadequate since our language is limited and God is infinite. By using a wide variety of images, it can help us to further our understanding of God.

Some of the many images used in the Bible to describe God include: God as a nursing mother (Isaiah 49:15) and a comforting mother (Isaiah 66:13). In Matthew 23:37 and Luke 13:34 has Jesus refer to himself as a mother hen. Additionally, God is compared to or depicted as a king (Psalm 47), father (Luke 12:32 and today's passage), dove (Matthew 3:16), fire (Hebrews 12:29), rock (Psalm 18:2); judge (75:7), creator (Genesis 1 and 2), shepherd (Psalm 80:1), still, small voice (1 Kings 19:11-13), warrior (Exodus 15:3), the prince of peace (Isaiah 9:6), servant (Isaiah 53), and many others.

At Home

- ✝ Pray the Lord's Prayer every day this week. Feel free to use whatever version you are most familiar with, or, feel free to use the version your group came up with in Living the Story.
- ✝ If you know another language other than English, use the Internet to search for the words of the Lord's Prayer in that language. Try praying it in that language, and reflect on how it feels to know that this same prayer is prayed throughout the world in many different languages.
- ✝ Using the daily readings—and going beyond them when necessary—commit to reading through the entire Gospel of Matthew during the rest of the year. Try to notice reoccurring themes, teachings, and concerns you see. Bring your observations to your small group as you go forward.

Daily Readings

Sunday – Read Matthew 6:7-21

Jesus teaches his followers how to pray. Reflect on what it means that God knows the needs of our heart before we pray for them.

Monday – Read Matthew 6:22-24

Jesus reminds us that we cannot serve two masters. What master do you serve? How can you make sure God is the master of your life?

Tuesday – Read Matthew 6:25-30

Jesus tells us not to worry because God provides for us. What is something you are worrying about? Pray about the situation and for the strength to give this issue over to God.

Wednesday – Read Matthew 6:31-34

Jesus continues his message that God will provide. Whenever you worry about the future, write it down in your journal or on a slip of paper. Then, at the end of the day, use those worries to form a prayer, sharing them with God.

Thursday – Read Luke 15:1-10

Jesus tells the Parables of the Lost Sheep and the Lost Coin. Pray for someone going through a difficult time.

Friday – Read Luke 15:11-24

Jesus shares the Parable of the Prodigal Son. Reflect on who the characters might represent: Who is the father? Who is the older son, and who is the younger son?

Saturday – Read Luke 15:25-32

Jesus continues the Parable of the Prodigal Son. When have you acted like the younger brother? When have you acted like the older brother? Journal your thoughts.