

Putnoe Heights & St Mark's Church

The North Bedford Church Partnership

The Lord's Prayer



Lent Course 2001

**A Christian has prayed profusely
if he has prayed well the 'Our Father'**
Martin Luther

LEISURE

William Henry Davies 1871-1940

What is this life if, full of care
We have no time to stand and stare.

No time to stand beneath the boughs
And stare as long as sheep or cows.

No time to see, when woods we pass,
Where squirrels hide their nuts in grass.

No time to see, in broad daylight,
Streams full of stars, like skies at night.

No time to turn at Beauty's glance,
And watch her feet, how they can dance.

No time to wait till her mouth can
Enrich that smile her eyes began.

A poor life this if, full of care,
We have no time to stand and stare.

'To pray is to expand Gods presence in our lives'

Welcome

I was very impressed by a lovely advertisement on the television recently. It contained a beautiful poem (opposite) which when combined with superb pictures and clever photography had a powerful impact. It was advertising Center Parcs and used the fact that people everywhere feel very rushed, to make the point that we all need time to slow down and in an atmosphere of stillness. This is not a religious commercial, it simply taps into a common human need, to take time away from doing things and to reflect.

This poem and the commercial have become very popular, why? The poem of course is entitled 'Leisure' but I believe that it expresses concern about time, and more importantly how we spend it. I would suggest that it taps into a very common feeling in society that people are too rushed and are missing out on something which is more important than just working very hard to make money and buy things. There is a superficiality which denies the deeper part of our lives which Christians are so concerned about. We would call this our soul, because we believe that there is more to human life than skin and bones. Christians believe that there is a spiritual part of our being and a spiritual side to life and perhaps this poem points towards this reality.

So we come to my thinking behind these lines. We all need to think carefully how we spend our time. Life is not meant by God to be all about '**doing**'. From creation itself God commanded that there should be a time of rest, when we stop doing things and start '**being**'. There has to be a time when we stop and for Christians this is not just for leisure, some of this time should create room to pray, to reflect on our lives and allow God to speak to us.

When I have thought and spoken with people about topics for the Lent Course this year, the idea of studying the Lord's Prayer has been well received. I think that this is because we are all concerned about the 'spiritual' component of our lives. We do not want to be rushed through life at such a pace by our employers or anybody else, without time for considering who we are and our place in the world which God has created. So here is the Lord's Prayer for Lent 2001, as a moment to stop and think how Jesus tells us to speak with God. We can look at the words, think through the message and share our thoughts with others. Whether you are in a homegroup or attending the chapel talks, I hope and pray that Lent will be an occasion when you have a little extra space for the spiritual side of your life. *Charles Royden*

Week One - The Introduction

Ask ten people what they mean by ‘prayer’ and the chances are that the majority will indicate something which means persuading God to do something which he would otherwise not be inclined to do, or for some reason he needed to be reminded about. As we pray the Lord’s Prayer we hopefully see prayer differently. Prayer is rather a means by which we engage with God in the work of his kingdom, or as somebody once said ‘conspiring with God towards the healing of creation.’ Prayer is a readiness to rest in the presence of God trying to look at life through his eyes, bringing our activities under his sovereign will.

This course is about the Lord’s Prayer and I hope that it will help us all as we think about prayer in general, what it is and why we do it. The word ‘spirituality’ has become very important as people struggle with the issues raised by the poem by William Henry Davies. How can our lives become more meaningful and how can we develop the spiritual side of our being as we struggle with the demands of life?

Clearly Jesus thought prayer was important; he prayed often and he spoke with God as he struggled with important issues in his life to try to discover God’s will for him. Luke in particular shows how Jesus prayed often and especially prayer occurred at all the major points of his ministry. Think of the prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane. The Gethsemane prayer of Jesus is helpful, it demonstrates that, for Jesus, prayer was a means by which he was able to put his life on track, so that he was able to be obedient to God and follow his ways.

Whilst the Lord’s Prayer has been likened to the opening of the Kaddish prayer of the Synagogue and other Jewish prayers, it is unique in its finished form. Jesus uses the prayer to encourage his disciples to follow his example of spending time talking to God, seeking God’s will and following patterns of prayer. We would all say that Jesus was a spiritual person, but by that I would want to mean that he lived a life of obedience to God, following God’s ways. The word ‘spirituality’ has increasingly become used in a way which is unhelpful, to describe the techniques and hoops which some people enjoy jumping through to make themselves feel more fulfilled. This course has nothing to do with such concepts of spirituality for which I find no basis in the teaching of Jesus. Lord preserve us from earnest Christians.

We will see that in the Lord's Prayer Jesus recognises that true spirituality is not something ethereal and removed from daily life. Actually it is about committing ourselves to live by God's ways in our ordinary daily living.

For the record perhaps a glimpse of what Jesus considered to be good 'spirituality' can be seen in the Gospel of Luke Chapter 10:25 where we read of a man who comes to Jesus and asks what he must do to inherit eternal life. Jesus agrees that the man is correct when he says,

'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind' ; and, 'Love your neighbour as yourself.'"

Then of course Jesus goes on to speak of the parable of the Good Samaritan. The message is simple and yet remarkably hard, it is this: The spiritual path to eternal life is about how we show love to God and others. The truly spiritually enlightened are those who love God and who demonstrate this by putting the needs of others before their own.

Of course in spite of all the books which have been written on spirituality and all the courses on different ways of spiritual enlightenment, only one such person ever lived and we responded by putting him on a cross.

The Lord's Prayer

The musical rendition of The Lord's Prayer by Cliff Richard, the Millennium Prayer, was number one for three weeks, the largest selling single in 1999. Yet of course it provoked extreme reactions, George Michael made the tabloid headlines by calling the whole project 'vile'. It was quite strange for someone who wanted public tolerance of himself, to be so intolerant about the Prayer of Jesus on the 2000th anniversary of His birth!

Yet of course this is a powerful set of words and we should not be surprised that it evokes both hostility as well as loyalty. In so many ways The Lord's Prayer sums up the whole teaching of Jesus. It expresses his thinking about God (theology) and as we say and think about the words which it contains, it should serve to lead us into a greater depth of understanding about what it means to be a follower of the God whom Jesus reveals to us.

I have said that the Lord's prayer has a loyal following. Indeed after the sacrament of baptism, the Lord's Prayer is the best-known bond of unity among Christians of every tradition. It is a prayer which can always recited in ecumenical gatherings since it is a prayer which Christians treasure. The Lord's Prayer is a basic Christian prayer which every Christian learns by heart, it is also a model for all prayer. It appears everywhere in the church's life, in its liturgy and sacraments, in public and private prayer. During the Middle Ages the "Our Father" was always said in Latin, even by the uneducated. Hence it was then most commonly known as the *Pater noster*. Indeed the phrase "Lord's Prayer" does not seem to have been generally familiar in England before the Reformation.

The name Lord's Prayer was given because it was a prayer which Jesus taught his disciples when they asked him **'Teach us how to pray,'** (Luke 11:1) Why would they ask Jesus how to pray? These disciples had been praying all their lives, had long ago memorized the prayers of the synagogue which they recited every Sabbath in worship. Didn't they already know how to pray? Clearly there was something about the prayer of Jesus which made the disciples feel they were missing the mark, their prayers lacked the power and meaning Jesus' had.

Jesus answered by teaching them the Lord's Prayer. It is a prayer above and beyond all others, capturing in a few sentences the essence of all prayer. Christians should pray this prayer regularly as Jesus has commanded and we must try also to understand what the words mean. However, as we memorize the prayer, the very familiarity might cause us to repeat it mechanically or without thought. Therefore, the purpose of the prayer is also to awaken and stimulate our faith and prayer in general. This prayer should be a starting place from which we learn to approach God as Father and understand more of the gospel.

Important information

In Matthew Jesus gives the prayer as a **type of prayer** which complies with the instructions which he has given about prayer in general. Specifically he has told them not to pray like the hypocrites (v5) or to heap up empty phrases (v7). In Luke however the prayer is not only an example which complies with his teaching, it is also a **specific prayer** which must be prayed by his followers.

For Homegroup Discussion

There are two versions of the Lord's Prayer, one is found in Matthew and the other in Luke. Please read them both. Jesus would have spoken these words in Aramaic. By the time that Matthew and Luke wrote their Gospels the prayer would have been naturally used in Greek also. The texts which we have are in Greek. Please note that the words *'for thine is the kingdom the power and the glory for ever and ever Amen'* are not words found in the Bible. It is accepted by most scholars that it was not part of the original text and most authoritative manuscripts do not have this doxology. It has however been used by the church from the earliest times.

1. Compare the versions in Matthew and Luke, what are the differences? (See page 8)
2. Can you think of reasons why there may be two versions?
3. What does the fact that there are two versions teach us about the Lord's Prayer?
4. In Matthew 6.7-8, Jesus says that God knows our needs even before we pray them. Why then should we bother to pray at all?

For Discussion - about you and the Lord's Prayer

1. Can you say the Lord's Prayer off by heart?
2. When did you learn it?
3. Which version do you know and which do you prefer, why?
4. Do you find it helpful to sing the Lord's Prayer, which version?
5. Is it helpful that there are different versions of the Lord's prayer, should we just have one?
6. Do you think that children should be taught the Lord's Prayer? If so at what age should they be taught? Should we insist on teaching all children in our church pre-school?

Lord's Prayer in Matthew (Chapter 6:9) NIV

"This, then, is how you should pray:

"Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,

your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread.

Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.'

Lord's Prayer in Luke (Chapter 11:1) NIV

One of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples." He said to them, "When you pray, say:

"Father, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come.

Give us each day our daily bread.

Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us.

And lead us not into temptation."

Week Two

Our Father in heaven hallowed be your name

Our.....

We have all heard the phrase 'I am a Christian but I don't go to church.' The statement tries to make the point that it is possible to be a Christian in private. Well of course we know what it means when people are said to behave like a Christian, usually it means being nice to people etc., and at the same time believing anything we like. Many different faiths encourage their followers to lead good lives, but they are not Christian. So the first statement of the Lord's prayer challenges us to think through what it means to be a Christian. The word 'Our' is very poignant, it makes the Christian faith a shared experience, not an isolated one. You cannot pray the Lord's Prayer and mean it and then be a private Christian. The following is a simple poem but it does have a strong message about the shared nature of Christianity—

**You cannot say the Lord's prayer, and even once say "I".
You cannot pray the Lord's prayer, and even once say "my".
Nor can you pray the Lord's prayer and not pray for another.
For to ask for "our" daily bread, you include your sister and brother!
All God's children are included in each and every plea.
From the beginning to the end of it, it does not once say "me".**

Questions for discussion

1. What do people mean when they say 'You do not need to go to church to be a Christian' ?
2. How should we answer people who say this?

Father.....

As soon as he started to pray, Jesus must have amazed those around by addressing God as "Father". The word Jesus would have used for Father is 'Abba,' as used in the hymn 'Abba Father.' It is a term of affection and

THOUGHT!

**I cannot pray 'Our',
if my faith has no room for others and their needs.**

intimacy used by children of their fathers. The Pharisees never used such a title to address God. Jesus used this quite distinctively and possibly uniquely. We can be sure that not until Jesus does it become characteristic to speak to God as Father.

God was close to Jesus and this is shown clearly by his choice of this word. Moreover Jesus wants this level of intimacy to be shared by us all. Most probably the word 'Father' would have appeared presumptuous, and this is one reason why it would not have been used. But Jesus was showing us that this was the kind of relationship with us which God desires. A relationship so personal that we can call the Creator of the universe 'Father'. God is somebody we can approach as we go to a human parent and share the good times and the bad, the success as well as the failure, the joys and sorrows. As 'Father', God is concerned for the needs of his children.

The story is told ...

of a mother who feared for her son and his moral behaviour. She was afraid that if he continued he would end up cursed by God and denied forgiveness. She confided her fear to her priest. He asked her to imagine that she was with God in heaven when her son appeared. The priest asked how her son felt at that moment: She replied that he was frightened and upset. She was then asked what she would want to do to her son. The mother replied that she wanted to hug him and hold him close to her once again. The priest then asked how she imagined God felt towards her son. The mother said that she was sure God wanted to do the same because her son was his child also. Confronted by her own feelings of forgiveness for her own child, she began to discover how, as a loving parent, God might feel towards his children. Was it likely that the love of God towards his children would be less strong than her own?

Some people find the word 'Father' very important. Or perhaps I should say that they feel it is important to use the word Father so that we do not use the other word 'Mother!' In Jesus' time, a patriarchal society, the father was the authority figure who was assumed to have control and power over the family, and so we see the word father came to be used. The question we have to face is how we 'see' God: Specifically is it permissible for us to say 'mother?'

THOUGHT!

I cannot pray 'Father', if I do not demonstrate this relationship to God in my daily living.

Questions for discussion

1. Is it helpful to think of God as Father?
2. Is the story of the woman and her son simplistic, or a glimpse into the parenthood of God who welcomes all people as his children?
3. Does the parenthood of God extend towards other religions also?
4. Is God a male being who is physically our Father as conceived in human terms, or is the language metaphorical? Are there any the consequences of this?
5. Do you find the maternal images of God helpful?(Psalm 131.2; Isaiah 40.11; 66.13; Matthew 23.37.)
6. Should we call God 'Mother' in our worship more often?
7. Why did Jesus not use the word mother to address God?
8. What does the fact that Christians share the same Father say about racial and nationalistic divisions?

in heaven... Hallowed be your name αγιασθητω - Holy

These word of Jesus are a contrast to some of the very cosy images which we have of God. Just as God is a Father and intimate, he is also all powerful, quite unlike a human father. Truly God is like a human father, but he is also a heavenly creator. As surely as the word Father establishes God's personal relationship with us, so too the word heaven establishes God's transcendence.

This Greek 'holy' word means to treat as holy, to reverence, to be pure, sacred. There is an acknowledgement of the fact that God is 'worthy.' This is about the essential quality of God which is beyond our imagination. In calling God 'Holy' we acknowledge that God is 'other worldly' and that there is much about God which is above and beyond us: We cannot expect to place an infinite God into the container of our human finite minds. This is also a prayer for the mission of the church, we are seeking that all people would reverence God.

THOUGHT!
I cannot pray 'Who art in heaven',
if all of my interest and pursuits are in earthly things.

Hopefully an awareness of the holiness of God should make us humble and unwilling to try to place God into the container of our human minds. Only a Christian who has not grasped the holiness of God can pretend that they have all the answers. To say 'hallowed be thy name' is an act of humility and it helps us to see that we are not able to explain God or restrict God with our minds because they are simply not big enough.

With regard to how this affects us, it might be helpful to replace the word 'name' with 'reputation.' We could say that we should so respect God that our lives give reverence to his name. Being in fashion, or being considered highly by others should not be our objectives but rather that through our lives we bring glory to God. What we should aim for is:

'Hallowed be thy name in my life.'

To say 'hallowed be your name' is also to ask God to help us to place God in the rightful place in our lives. God is our Father and not an after thought.

Questions for discussion

1. Would you agree that perhaps we sometimes find it difficult to delight in the privilege of addressing the sovereign of the universe as Father, because we have lost the heritage that emphasises God's transcendence?
2. Can you think of any ways in which we can sometimes treat God indifferently and forget the picture of a holy God as found in passages such as Isaiah Chapter 6?
3. How can we manage to be aware of God's transcendence, his holiness and other worldliness, yet at the same time call him Father?
4. Does recognition of God's holiness makes us aware of our own inadequacy and failure, this is what happened to Isaiah (Chapter 6) when he responded to God's holiness by saying that he was a man of 'unclean lips?'

THOUGHT!
I cannot pray Hallowed be Thy Name,
if I am not striving, with God's help, to be holy.

Week 3

Your kingdom come your will be done on earth as it is in heaven

Your kingdom come

Jesus expresses our longing to have the kingdom fully now, not just a taste of it. Our deepest longing is to see the day when the triumphant, sovereign lordship of our loving God will no longer be a mere hope clung to desperately by faith, but a manifest reality in all human affairs. We all long to see the end of death and pain and suffering, this prayer seeks the time when all these things will come to an end. This prayer looks forward to the events spoken of in the glimpse of the Kingdom in Revelation 21. Which one of us would not respond 'Come quickly Lord Jesus!'

"And God will wipe away all tears from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There will be no more pain, for the former things have passed away. Then He who sat on the throne said, 'Behold, I make everything new.'" Revelation 21:4-5

The world is not as God intended it to be. In praying 'your will be done' we acknowledge that currently it is not being done and that we are all bad at doing it. The powerlessness of God in so many of the human tragedies around us can only be reversed by obedience to his will rather than our own. Without that obedience God's will cannot be done. The world is not becoming a much better place as humanity progresses towards a self educating perfection. Those who live without belief in God must be resigned to the fact that in the words reminiscent of Dad's Army, we are 'doomed', a people without hope. We cannot change ourselves and make ourselves well, we are a diseased race. In refusing to acknowledge the presence and power of evil we are denying a fundamental truth.

This prayer is an attempt to bring our wills into line with God's to allow God to lead us in the ways of his kingdom. As we pray this prayer we commit ourselves to the course of God's rule in our lives, in this world and the world to come.

THOUGHT!

**I cannot pray Thy Kingdom come,
if I am unwilling to accept God's rule in my life.**

We might ask ourselves ‘Why should we pray for this?’ Isn't this going to happen regardless of whether we pray for it or not? Well, prayer is God's way of including us in his plan for mankind. By praying we are helping God establish his kingdom. I am not saying that God needs us to help him, but surely he wants us to take part in his plan because he loves us and wants us to share in His joy.

Your will be done

If we pray ‘Your will be done’, we are praying that our lives will be surrendered to God. It’s the prayer of an obedient disciple. Surely we cannot pray this prayer unless we at the same time say, "God, you are the King and I am your subject. I will obey all that you call me to." So we must pray for his kingdom to come, for his will to be done, - on earth as it is in heaven. But how are our prayers answered, to what extent do our prayers change the course of events? Is prayer an attempt to change God’s mind? Here are some difficult questions.

Questions for discussion

1. If we seek that God’s will be done then we must try to discern what God’s will is. How can we do this?
2. When we pray for God’s kingdom to come, is there anything we are doing to make it come more quickly? Or are we simply praying that God should make it come?
3. How are God’s kingdom and God’s will different from earthly kingdoms and human wills?
4. Isn’t God’s will always done? What’s the point of praying that it should be done? If someone is sick, for example, is it right to pray for their healing or should you simply pray that God’s will be done?
5. If God answers prayer, then why does he not give a cure for Cancer?
6. How can you know what is God’s will for your life?
7. Have you ever been able to tell when your life has not been ordered according to God’s will? What did it take to get you back on track?
8. Have you ever done something which you are certain was according to God’s will?

THOUGHT!

**I cannot pray ‘Your will be done’,
if I am unwilling or resentful of having it in my life.**

On earth as it is in heaven

It will always remain in my mind that somebody once said to me that any kind of social action entered into by Christians was like 'polishing the brass on a sinking ship.' The point was that Christians are not of this earthly kingdom but rather of God's heavenly kingdom, hence our efforts should be directed towards mission and evangelism, turning the hearts of people to God. This is surely right in what it affirms. How much time do we spend in mission and communicating the truths of God? Is our mission a real and effective effort or are we more concerned about our own spiritual well being than that of others? Emil Brunner nicely sums up this simple truth in one inescapable sentence.

"The church exists by mission as a fire exists by burning."

It is clear that the disciples took this message to heart and travelled far and wide to make sure that as many people as possible were able to hear the good news. This is a part of establishing God's kingdom here on earth.

Yet this is not the whole story. The standards of the new kingdom, the behaviour of the new kingdom, these should be a part of the life of the church now. We should be living a different lifestyle and trying to make God's ways known upon earth. This means to me that Christians should be unashamed to speak out on issues such as racial abuse, equal opportunities, health care, environment, employment, crime, education and just about anything else that affects our daily lives and the lives of all God's children and his created world. There can be no bits of life which we can tuck away outside God's area of concern. This of course is a message despised by many politicians who think that the concern of God's church and its servants should be spoken in religious buildings, whilst earthly politics are dealt with in a different way.

Questions for discussion

1. How good are we at communicating the message of the kingdom to others and is there something better we could do?
2. Can you think of good and bad examples of how the church has responded with issues of earthly concern?
3. Is there anything about which the church should be doing or saying something now to establish God's will on earth

THOUGHT!

**I cannot pray 'on earth as it is in Heaven',
unless I am truly ready to give myself to God's service here.**

Week 4

Give us today our daily bread.

Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.

Give us this day our daily bread

We are half-way through the prayer before Jesus allows us to ask for anything for ourselves! The prayer first gives praise and we seek to make sure that we are doing the Father's will. This phrase reminds us of where our priorities must be. It reminds us of our daily dependence upon God and calls us to simplicity of life. As we pray these simple words we pray that we will live just one day at a time and we also acknowledge that all things come from God. (Deut 8:18, 1 Cor 4:7, James 1:17). True prayers are born of present trials and present needs. Bread, for today, is bread enough. As every day demands its bread, so every day demands its prayer. No amount of praying, done today, will suffice for tomorrow's praying.

This part of the prayer is about **NEEDS** not **GREEDS**. The resources of this world are sufficient for us all, provided that we are willing to share and are not greedy. The request "Give us each day our daily bread" has been understood as a plea for more than food, indeed all the necessities of life. God does give us what we need in order to enjoy the gift of life, but can we really agree that this is true? It would seem difficult to justify from Jesus words anything other than asking for the bare necessities of life so that we might labour and have strength to serve him. Jesus acknowledges that our physical needs must be met but it is not a prayer for luxuries. Is it not obvious that we must not pray for God to intervene in our lives to provide motorcars or microwaves, whilst people across the world die from lack of access to basic medical care, clean water or food?

To pray for 'our daily bread' is to remind ourselves that in a wealthy society we should not be asking for more than that, anything else is a bonus! Indeed for many people daily bread itself would be a real luxury. You may like to discuss this with your group!

We must also consider how important it is that we pray for 'our' daily bread. This is not a private call for our own daily bread at the expense of others. We must not consider our own needs whilst others go hungry and die. This opens our prayers up to having to be prepared to become involved in working for a more equal distribution of food and the world's resources. It is not sufficient to

send bread to the hungry if we do not also work to address the injustices which cause so many to go hungry. Corrupt regimes abuse their people, the first world can exploit poorer countries and enslave them in debt.

This part of the prayer also provides an insight into prayer itself. We ask God for our daily bread and yet we know that we will have to work for it by the toil of our own hands. Jesus earned his bread as a carpenter, Peter, James and John as fishermen, Paul as a tentmaker. I am reminded of the prayer of St Thomas More (1478-1535),

'The things, good Lord, that I pray for, give me the grace to labour for'

Questions for discussion

1. In the prayer, we tell God to "give" us daily bread. Does that mean we don't have to work for it? To put the question another way, how does God "give" daily bread?
2. What are some things you *need* for daily life? What are some things you *want* for daily life? What is the difference between wants and needs, and what would you feel comfortable asking God for?
3. In Exodus 16.1-35 we read of the manna in the wilderness? Does it offer any insight into our interpretation of this verse?
4. Think about how you have interpreted this petition. Now consider whether it makes any difference to your interpretation because it says "our" daily bread instead of "my" daily bread.
5. Does this petition encourage us to not worry about, or plan for, the future? (Is there a difference between worrying and planning?) For example, if God takes care of all our daily needs, should you be buying life insurance?
6. Would it be a good decision if we decided that we should not ask God for anything beyond bread, apart from the fact that we might know him and his will for lives?
7. Examine your life style and carefully consider how much really is enough for you?

**Give us today our daily bread.
'I depend on you for all my needs'**

THOUGHT!

I cannot pray 'Give us this day our daily bread,' without expending honest effort for it, or if I would withhold from my neighbour the bread that I receive.

And forgive us our trespasses

There was an understanding in Aramaic Rabbinic literature that sin is a debt owed to God. Debts means sins, not loans! The Authorised Version of the Bible uses the word 'debt' in Matthew 6:12 (τα οφειληματα) and 'sins in Luke 11:4 (τας αμαρτιας). The first thing about the prayer is that we admit that we are sinners! By sinning we have incurred a moral and a spiritual debt to God who has authority over our lives. So we ask for forgiveness as a gift, for we can never earn or merit God's forgiveness.

Some would say that we should be praying forgive me 'my' sins. There has been a tendency to become very excited about our individual sins: Of course the ones that we get really excited about are sexual sins and sins of morality. This is just too easy and a big let off for many who consider themselves to be morally upright. In a world in which so many live in poverty and die unnecessarily, I am increasingly convinced that God is not half as bothered about it all as we are. We need a sense of perspective and proportion when speaking about sin. Surely God is far more concerned about how we move on, what we learn from our failures and how we forgive ourselves and change?

In his prayer, Jesus is not so focused on individual but rather corporate sin. It is actually harder to say forgive us **our** sins, since when we take shared responsibility for corporate sins it challenges us in a new way. I am hardly responsible for the thousands of people murdered in ethnic cleansing in Bosnia, but I feel a corporate shame that I belong to a country which watches Schindlers List on one channel, claiming that it never knew about the concentration camps in Germany, whilst on the other channel our television sets show the same thing genocide being repeated around the world whilst we do nothing.

As we forgive those who trespass against us (Read Matt. 18:23-35)

The Bible says that all of us have sinned and have fallen short of the glory of God. And that sin (which makes us imperfect) separates us from God (who is perfect). But in his love God provided his own son, Jesus Christ, to die for our sins so that, if we accept Jesus as our Saviour, we could enter fellowship with God. The Bible says that all our sins are forgiven. Think about the things God has forgiven you for. Now with all that forgiven how can you not forgive someone who has sinned against you? Jesus does not suppose that God's

forgiveness is contingent on our forgiving. Rather, he simply assumes that those who seek to learn to pray from *him* will indeed forgive their enemies. Quite an assumption!

Once our eyes are opened to the enormity of our offence against God the injuries done to us appear by comparison to be trifling. If we exaggerate the offences of others then the chances are that we have a minimized our understanding of our own ! Forgiving others shows that we are living out the kingdom standards in our own lives now.

Of course in order to be free from sin we must also be free from hatred, revenge and bitterness. We seek the grace of God to be able to move on in our lives, to forgive others and leave the past behind us. (Jesus taught much about this (Mt 6:14-15, Mt 18:23-25, Mk 11:25)

Questions for discussion

1. Note that only Matthew 6.15 explicitly states that if you do not forgive, you will not be forgiven. Does our behaviour constrict God's behaviour?
2. Do you think it would be a good idea for a period of time to forget about 'my' sins and concentrate on 'ours' ?
3. How does one go about forgiving someone? Read Matthew 18.15-18 and Galatians 6.1.
4. How often are we to forgive people who sin against us? Read Matthew 15.21-22.
5. Why should we keep on forgiving? Read Matthew 15.23-35.
6. Read Matthew 5.23-24. What are the conditions for coming into the presence of God with an offering?
7. There is a saying, "Forgive and forget." Is it easier to forgive or to forget a wrong done to you? Is the saying true? Should we instead "Forgive and remember!"?
8. There are some evils done in this world which are so terrible that it seems almost impossible to forgive them. (the Holocaust, rape, murders, etc.) How do you deal with such situations?
9. How would you classify sins? Are some worse than others? In what ways do you sin against God? Against someone else? Against yourself?

One for theological debate!

If your group is running out of material, this could keep the theologians among you going for a whole year. Just in case you want to do some thinking of your own, try and answer the following question. It goes to the heart of our faith and it explores a question of deep division among Christians.

John the Baptist preached "a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins." (Mark 1.4) Jesus forgave sins during his ministry. (Mark 2.1-12) If such forgiveness was available before his death, why did Jesus have to die?

Week 5

**And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.'
for yours is the Kingdom, the power and the glory, for ever and
ever. Amen.**

And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from the evil one ...

Does God lead us into temptation? I would say that God does not, but we can all be sure from personal experience that he does allow us to be tempted, to go through difficult circumstances. We are told in scripture that God will not allow us to be tested beyond what we can endure and that he will help us through it (1 Cor 10:13).

Perhaps we could say that this prayer asks God to help us avoid sin, and that our sinful nature may not deceive us or mislead us into sin of any kind. If we continue to say this prayer each day, then we will find it hard to live knowingly with sin each day. It is interesting that when people do things which they know to be wrong they frequently find a reason to avoid confronting their sin. They will perhaps leave their church which challenges such behaviour, sometimes finding fault in the church itself as

THOUGHT!

**I cannot pray 'Forgive us our trespasses
as we forgive those who trespass against us,'
if I continue to harbour a grudge against anyone.**

an excuse. Our prayers will challenge us not to live a double life.

Questions for discussion ?

1. If someone admitted to you that they were struggling with some temptation (e.g., a chemical dependency, cheating on taxes, adultery), what would you do to help them resist the temptation?
2. Can you think of a time when God allowed you to be tested and gave you strength to endure?
3. Why does James 1:2 speak of welcoming trials?
4. If the disciples had 'watched and prayed' Mk14:38, perhaps they would not have fallen into temptation and betrayed Jesus?
5. Read Matthew 26.36-46. What connections do you observe between the Lord's Prayer and what happened in the Garden of Gethsemane?

**For yours is the Kingdom the power and the glory, for ever and ever.
Amen**

This closing doxology, "For yours is the kingdom the power and the glory," was added to the prayer in ancient times, although it does not appear in most authoritative manuscripts of the Bible and is only a footnote in the Revised Standard Version. It is accepted by most scholars that it was not part of the original text. However its incorporation into the Lord's Prayer as early as the 1st century is attested by the version of the prayer in the *Didache*, a brief manual of instruction for converts to Christianity. Many Protestants ordinarily recite the doxology as part of the Lord's Prayer; Roman Catholics incorporate it into the recitation of the prayer at Mass, but generally do not use it in private recitation.

THOUGHT!

I cannot pray 'Lead us not into temptation,' if I deliberately choose to remain in a situation where I am likely to be tempted.

I cannot pray 'Deliver us from evil, if I am not prepared to fight evil with my life and my prayer.'

The Lord's Prayer ends with this affirmation of the ultimate triumph of the Kingdom and its values over all that would corrupt us. All authority ultimately derives from God and it is to God that society should turn for its pattern for the future good of creation. We all wait for the return of Christ and the establishment of reign of justice.

Final Question

It would be helpful to know what you have found helpful in this course, please do make some notes and give your feedback, it is appreciated !

Meditation

The theologian Karl Barth wrote ..

'To clasp the hands in prayer is the beginning of an uprising against the disorder of the world.'

THOUGHT!

**I cannot pray 'Yours is the Kingdom the Power and the Glory',
if I am unwilling to obey the King or if I am seeking power for myself
and my own glory first. .**

Finally ...

I do hope that you have found this course helpful, perhaps just as a starting place from which to think through your own ideas. Prayer is not an easy subject to deal with, I remember that at theological college my study group became quite divided when we discussed prayer. People were coming from many different positions and it was clear that we all needed to accept ideas very different from our own.

On hearing the subject of prayer many people immediately begin to feel guilty because they sense that in some way they are not measuring up to a spiritual ideal. Truthfully there is no specific state of spiritual perfection and the goals which we set ourselves are most probably illusions. It is comforting that when he instructed his disciples Jesus choose something so very simple, albeit profound, as the Lord's Prayer. Even a child can pray following the way which Jesus taught.

Different religious traditions have stressed meditation, sacraments, pilgrimages, rosaries, intercessions through saints, alpha courses, to some each may be helpful, to others they are an anathema. We need to be ourselves and not think that we have to conform to the spiritual ideas of others. If you find prayer difficult, like those first disciples, then a great place to start in prayer is by following the advice of Jesus and simply saying the Lord's Prayer. As this prayer becomes part of our daily routine so we can include other prayers and then perhaps consider other things to help develop our own pattern of prayer. The important matter at hand is that we all make this small prayerful start.

As we pray the Lord's Prayer we acknowledge God for whom he is and for the claim which he rightly has over our lives. We also join our concern and commitment for people and the world with his. This is a spiritual journey which will take place over many years as we seek to obedient and grow in love of God. If you have not yet started this journey then there is no time to delay, for it is a pilgrimage in which Christ goes with us and there is no better path to follow.

*If you would like to discuss anything contained in this booklet
then please do not hesitate to contact any of the Ministers.*

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father, which 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 them
that trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil,
For thine is the kingdom,
the power and the glory,
For ever and ever. Amen

(Book of Common Prayer)

**I cannot pray Amen, unless I honestly say,
'Cost what it may, this is my prayer.'**