

A Simple Way To Pray – Martin Luther – Lord’s Prayer Excerpt

O Heavenly Father, dear God, I am a poor unworthy sinner. I do not deserve to raise my eyes or hands toward thee or to pray. But because thou hast commanded us all to pray and hast promised to hear us and through thy dear Son Jesus Christ hast taught us both how and what to pray, I come to thee in obedience to thy word, trusting in thy gracious promise. I pray in the name of my Lord Jesus Christ together with all thy saints and Christians on earth as he has taught us: Our Father who art, etc., through the whole prayer, word for word.

Then repeat one part or as much as you wish, perhaps the first petition: "**Hallowed be thy name,**" and say: "Yes, Lord God, dear Father, hallowed be thy name, both in us and throughout the whole world. Destroy and root out the abominations, idolatry, and heresy of the Turk, the pope, and all false teachers and fanatics who wrongly use thy name and in scandalous ways take it in vain and horribly blaspheme it. They insistently boast that they teach thy word and the laws of the church, though they really use the devil's deceit and trickery in thy name to wretchedly seduce many poor souls throughout the world, even killing and shedding much innocent blood, and in such persecution they believe that they render thee a divine service. Dear Lord God, convert and restrain. Convert those who are still to be converted that they with us and we with them may hallow and praise thy name, both with true and pure doctrine and with a good and holy life. Restrain those who are unwilling to be converted so that they be forced to cease from misusing, defiling, and dishonoring thy holy name and from misleading the poor people. Amen."

The second petition: "**Thy kingdom come.**" Say: "O dear Lord, God and Father, thou seest how worldly wisdom and reason not only profane thy name and ascribe the honor due to thee to lies and to the devil, but how they also take the power, might, wealth and glory which thou hast given them on earth for ruling the world and thus serving thee, and use it in their own ambition to oppose thy kingdom. They are many and mighty; they plague and hinder the tiny flock of thy kingdom who are weak, despised, and few. They will not tolerate thy flock on earth and think that by plaguing them they render a great and godly service to thee. Dear Lord, God and Father, convert them and defend us. Convert those who are still to become children and members of thy kingdom so that they with us and we with them may serve thee in thy kingdom in true faith and unfeigned love and that from thy kingdom which has begun, we may enter into thy eternal kingdom. Defend us against those who will not turn away their might and power from the destruction of thy kingdom so that when they are east down from their thrones and humbled, they will have to cease from their efforts. Amen."

The third petition. "**Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.**" Say: "O dear Lord, God and Father, thou knowest that the world, if it cannot destroy thy name or root out thy kingdom, is busy day and night with wicked tricks and schemes, strange conspiracies and intrigue, huddling together in secret counsel, giving mutual encouragement and support, raging and threatening and going about with every evil intention to destroy thy name, word, kingdom, and children. Therefore, dear Lord, God and Father, convert them and defend us. Convert those who have yet to acknowledge

thy good will that they with us and we with them may obey thy will and for thy sake gladly, patiently, and joyously bear every evil, cross, and adversity, and thereby acknowledge, test, and experience thy benign, gracious, and perfect will. But defend us against those who in their rage, fury, hate, threats, and evil desires do not cease to do us harm. Make their wicked schemes, tricks, and devices to come to nothing so that these may be turned against them, as we sing in Psalm 7."

The fourth petition. **"Give us this day our daily bread."** Say: "Dear Lord, God and Father, grant us thy blessing also in this temporal and physical life. Graciously grant us blessed peace. Protect us against war and disorder. Grant to our dear emperor fortune and success against his enemies. Grant him wisdom and understanding to rule over his earthly kingdom in peace and prosperity. Grant to all kings, princes, and rulers good counsel and the will to preserve their domains and their subjects in tranquility and justice. Especially aid and guide our dear prince N., under whose protection and shelter thou dost maintain us, so that he may be protected against all harm and reign blessedly, secure from evil tongues and disloyal people. Grant to all his subjects grace to serve him loyally and obediently. Grant to every estate-townsman or farmer-to be diligent and to display charity and loyalty toward each other. Give us favorable weather and good harvest. I commend to thee my house and property, wife and child. Grant that I may manage them well, supporting and educating them as a Christian should. Defend us against the Destroyer and all his wicked angels who would do us harm and mischief in this life. Amen."

The fifth petition. **"Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us."** Say: "O dear Lord, God and Father, enter not into judgment against us because no man living is justified before thee. Do not count it against us as a sin that we are so unthankful for thine ineffable goodness, spiritual and physical, or that we stray into sin many times every day, more often than we can know or recognize, Psalm 19. Do not look upon how good or how wicked we have been but only upon the infinite compassion which thou hast bestowed upon us in Christ, thy dear Son. Grant forgiveness also to those who have harmed or wronged us, as we forgive them from our hearts. They inflict the greatest injury upon themselves by arousing thy anger in their actions toward us. We are not helped by their ruin; we would much rather that they be saved with us. Amen." (Anyone who feels unable to forgive, let him ask for grace so that he can forgive; but that belongs in a sermon.)

The sixth petition. **"And lead us not into temptation."** Say: "O dear Lord, Father and God, keep us fit and alert, eager and diligent in thy word and service, so that we do not become complacent, lazy, and slothful as though we had already achieved everything. In that way the fearful devil cannot fall upon us, surprise us, and deprive us of thy precious word or stir up strife and factions among us and lead us into other sin and disgrace, both spiritually and physically. Rather grant us wisdom and strength through thy spirit that we may valiantly resist him and gain the victory. Amen."

The seventh petition. **"But deliver us from evil."** Say: "O dear Lord, God and Father, this wretched life is so full of misery and calamity, of danger and uncertainty, so full of malice and faithlessness (as St. Paul says, "The days are evil") that we might rightfully

grow weary of life and long for death. But thou, dear Father, knowest our frailty; therefore help us to pass in safety through so much wickedness and villainy; and, when our last hour comes, in thy mercy grant us a blessed departure from this vale of sorrows so that in the face of death we do not become fearful or despondent but in firm faith commit our souls into thy hands. Amen.”

Finally, mark this, that you must always speak the Amen firmly. Never doubt that God in his mercy will surely hear you and say "yes" to your prayers. Never think that you are kneeling or standing alone, rather think that the whole of Christendom, all devout Christians, are standing there beside you and you are standing among them in a common, united petition which God cannot disdain. Do not leave your prayer without having said or thought, "Very well, God has heard my prayer; this I know as a certainty and a truth." That is what Amen means.

You should also know that I do not want you to recite all these words in your prayer. That would make it nothing but idle chatter and prattle, read word for word out of a book as were the rosaries by the laity and the prayers of the priests and monks. Rather do I want your heart to be stirred and guided concerning the thoughts which ought to be comprehended in the Lord's Prayer. These thoughts may be expressed, if your heart is rightly warmed and inclined toward prayer, in many different ways and with more words or fewer. I do not bind myself to such words or syllables, but say my prayers in one fashion today, in another tomorrow, depending upon my mood and feeling. I stay however, as nearly as I can, with the same general thoughts and ideas. It may happen occasionally that I may get lost among so many ideas in one petition that I forego the other six. If such an abundance of good thoughts comes to us we ought to disregard the other petitions, make room for such thoughts, listen in silence, and under no circumstances obstruct them. The Holy Spirit himself preaches here, and one word of his sermon is far better than a thousand of our prayers. Many times I have learned more from one prayer than I might have learned from much reading and speculation.

It is of great importance that the heart be made ready and eager for prayer. As the Preacher says, "Prepare your heart for prayer, and do not tempt God". What else is it but tempting God when your mouth babbles and the mind wanders to other thoughts? Like the priest who prayed, "Deus in adiutorium meum intende. Farmhand, did you unhitch the horses? Domine ad adjuvandum me festina. Maid, go out and milk the cow. Gloria patri et filio et spiritui sancto. Hurry up, boy, I wish the ague would take you!" I have heard many such prayers in my experience under the papacy; most of their prayers are of this sort. This is blasphemy and it would be better if they played at it if they cannot or do not care to do better. In my day I have prayed many such canonical hours myself, regrettably, and in such a manner that the psalm or the allotted time came to an end before I even realized whether I was at the beginning or in the middle.

Though not all of them blurt out the words as did the above-mentioned cleric and mix business and prayer, they do it by the thoughts in their hearts. They jump from one thing to another in their thoughts and when it is all over they do not know what they have done or what they talked about. They start with Laudate and right away they are

in a fool's paradise. It seems to me that if someone could see what arises as prayer from a cold and unattentive heart he would conclude that he had never seen a more ridiculous kind of buffoonery. But, praise God, it is now clear to me that a person who forgets what he has said has not prayed well. In a good prayer one fully remembers every word and thought from the beginning to the end of the prayer.

So, a good and attentive barber keeps his thoughts, attention, and eyes on the razor and hair and does not forget how far he has gotten with his shaving or cutting. If he wants to engage in too much conversation or let his mind wander or look somewhere else he is likely to cut his customer's mouth, nose, or even his throat. Thus if anything is to be done well, it requires the full attention of all one's senses and members, as the proverb says, "Pluribus intentus, minor est ad singula sensus"- "He who thinks of many things, thinks of nothing and does nothing right." How much more does prayer call for concentration and singleness of heart if it is to be a good prayer!

This in short is the way I use the Lord's Prayer when I pray it. To this day I suckle at the Lord's Prayer like a child, and as an old man eat and drink from it and never get my fill. It is the very best prayer, even better than the psalter, which is so very dear to me. It is surely evident that a real master composed and taught it. What a great pity that the prayer of such a master is prattled and chattered so irreverently all over the world! How many pray the Lord's Prayer several thousand times in the course of a year, and if they were to keep on doing so for a thousand years they would not have tasted nor prayed one iota, one dot, of it! In a word, the Lord's Prayer is the greatest martyr on earth (as are the name and word of God). Everybody tortures and abuses it; few take comfort and joy in its proper use.

*Excerpted from [A Simple Way to Pray](#) ~ Martin Luther, format edited for easier reading.