

Exploring the Lord's Prayer



Christopher News Notes

IMAGINE A CROWD following Jesus up a dusty hill. They had heard of His miracles, His care for the poor, and His insightful approach to the Torah. But most of all, they heard of His peace, love, and gentle power. Not a power to dominate with the sword, like their Roman oppressors, but a power like a sunrise, bringing everything into His warm light. Jesus then taught the crowd a new way to relate to God through "the Lord's Prayer."

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name

Jesus' words on the Mount of Beatitudes are at the core of Christian life, especially the "Our Father" prayer, which He taught His followers. In the documentary *The Lord's Prayer*, scholars and historians explore the revolutionary idea that our Creator is not a disinterested lawmaker, like the kings and emperors of the time, but someone much closer to us.

The film's host, Brad Gray, notes, "God, the creator of all things, could have chosen to present Himself in any number of ways, and He chooses to present Himself as a father. You have redeemer, rescuer, father, all wrapped up into one." Oxford theologian N.T. Wright added, "For some people, God is a faceless bureaucrat far away. [But] He's not a faceless bureaucrat! He's the Father who takes delight in every single one of His sons and daughters and wants us to take delight in Him."

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

Knowing and doing God's will can be extremely difficult. How do you know what your calling is? How do you know you're not just following your own inclinations?

Thomas Merton was one of the most famous Catholic converts of the 20th century. His best-selling memoir, *The Seven Storey Mountain*, detailed his spiritual development and embrace of the Trappist monastic order. Interestingly, he first applied to join the Franciscans in New York City and was turned away after a short time with them. Merton was heartbroken because he believed this to be God's will for him. A priest told him he had no such vocation so, bereft, Merton moved upstate to teach at St. Bonaventure University.

Merton's winding path to the Trappist monastery resonated with author Gregory Hillis, who also endured a period of extreme uncertainty, when doing what he thought was God's will was suddenly closed off to him. Hillis reflected in *America* that he found comfort in learning the same thing had happened to one of his spiritual heroes.

Patheos.com blogger Billy Kangas spent one summer several years ago working as a hospital chaplain. He called it one of the most challenging jobs of his life because "chaplains are asked to escort people through death, and failure, and sorrow beyond words."

Kangas noted that the two things he did most frequently were hold people's hands and recite the Lord's Prayer. Why did those two actions bring comfort? He explained, "Holding someone's hand is like a little sacrament. It is an act of incarnational communion, filled with the mystery that each person is an icon of God. The Lord's Prayer is the liturgy of the word in miniature...It is the invitation and the commission into the Kingdom of God. It joins our words with Christ and His body. It is powerful."

By continuing to discern God's will, Merton was led towards a contemplative, monastic life, instead of the active life of service with the Franciscans he originally envisioned. Through the Trappists, Merton was encouraged to write. His books brought his inspiring story of faith into the hands of millions in the post-WWII generation who were searching for meaning.

Give us this day our daily bread

The line in the Lord's Prayer about our "daily bread" is deeper than it seems. Yes, it's about turning to God for all of our worldly needs. But it also marks a shift in which we, God's people, become more central to the action. It presents how we should ask for, receive, and share God's bounty. The daily bread we are to receive is not just for us alone. Implied in the prayer is our call to share what we're given so that all might receive their daily needs.

Chef Bruno Serato's Anaheim, California restaurant, White House, suffered a devastating fire in 2017. The beloved Italian eatery was burned to the ground and, with the rising smoke, went some of Chef Serato's dreams to continue to feed the poor with each meal sold there.

Serato arrived in the U.S. as an Italian immigrant, with no English skills and only \$200 in his pocket. He went on to build a successful career as a chef and restaurant owner, but never forgot his humble beginnings. He expressed gratitude for his success through his charity, Caterina's Club, which served 5,000 meals each day throughout southern California to underprivileged kids. It was funded by

proceeds from his restaurant businesses.

When his White House burned, Chef Serato wondered if he could begin again. Then, a firefighter came up to him with a surprise: a simple silver crucifix had been found in the ashes. Serato was stopped in his tracks because this was no ordinary crucifix; it had been a gift from Pope Francis. During one of their four meetings, Pope Francis looked at a small book detailing Serato's work and told him, "Bravo, bravo, continua cosi," which means, "Continue like this."

Serato told *CBS News*' Steve Hartman that finding that crucifix was "a sign of God for sure." Chef Serato rebuilt his restaurant. Today, he continues to share his daily bread with poor and underserved children, celebrating more than 20 years of Caterina's Club.

And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us

Forgiveness is a bedrock principle of the Christian life, and one that Jesus teaches about time and again. It must have sounded out of place to His audience. After all, in the ancient world, "an eye for an eye" was the standard. Return good for good, and bad for bad. But Jesus asks us to go beyond that and forgive those who have wronged us. Yes, it comes at great cost to our pride and maybe even our sense of fairness. But forgiveness is transformative love.

Bill Courtney is a football coach, a small business entrepreneur, and the subject of the Christopher-award winning documentary *Undeclared*. Bill is

also a father—and a son. For years, he didn't talk about the emotional wounds that stemmed from his childhood, when a difficult relationship with his estranged father led to many years of low self-esteem. Writing in *Guideposts*, Bill explained, "Dad remarried a woman with a son named Chip, and after that I almost never saw him...When I realized Chip had basically replaced me in Dad's heart, I felt so rejected."

Bill dove into overachievement to make up for the lack of his father's love. And as an adult, he became a father himself and a coach. He mentored young people, holding a special place in his heart for boys without fathers. He pushed down the anger he felt at his own father for missing so much of his life and prayed that God would help him heal this deep hurt. That healing came, but not in the way Bill expected.

An opportunity arose for Bill to meet with his father. He knew Jesus' message of forgiveness, but wasn't sure he could go through with it. "If I wanted to free myself from anger and hurt, I had to meet my dad and tell him to his face I forgave him," he wrote. "But did I forgive him? There was only one way to find out."

The meeting started awkwardly, with his father offering small talk and half-hearted excuses for his past behavior. But then, with an anguished look, his father declared, "Oh, Bill, I'm so sorry. I'm so very sorry. I've missed out on so much."

Bill recalled, "My reply seemed to come from

someplace deep inside, someplace I hadn't even known existed. 'Dad,' I said, 'that's all I wanted to hear. I completely forgive you. I don't want you in your twilight years to suffer guilt. I'm married with four kids and a business, and I'm in such good shape. You didn't injure me permanently. We all make mistakes. I forgive you.'

Bill felt a sense of relief and learned the important lesson that forgiveness can heal the victim of a wrong. "God showed me a better way," Bill concluded. "I'm so glad I followed His lead."

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil

One of the strangest parts of the prayer to our modern ears is the "lead us not into temptation" request. Why would God, who is all-good and all-loving, lead us into a compromising situation? The *Busted Halo* radio show had a caller ask this very question. Father Dave Dwyer gave a thoughtful response.

Regarding the wording of the prayer, Father Dave said, "I'd have to attribute it partially to translation and cultural use of language and rhetorical styles, some of which we still use today, that were present in Jesus' time... 'Lead us not' is a poetic style of saying something in reverse. We're asking God to even help a little bit more. Like if I'm going down that temptation route, or if the evil one—who is actually leading us into temptation—is tempting us, we say, 'Lord, I'm trusting that You can help steer me away.' We're saying that in a slightly more poetic way."

The "Our Father" is grounded in our relationship with God: child to parent, disciple to teacher. The prayer perfectly encapsulates our desire to better align our actions with God's will—and is a formula for bringing about His kingdom, even in small ways, in our own lives.



"It's better to light one candle than to curse the darkness."

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"All the prayers of the Holy Scriptures are
summed up in the Lord's Prayer and are taken
up into its immeasurable breadth."

—Dietrich Bonhoeffer