



The mother wept while her husband held her hand tightly, closed his eyes and sought not to weep himself. Five of us were gathered around the altar celebrating the Eucharist. Only later did I learn that the mother was a survivor of stage 4 lymphoma. The Lord's Prayer had formed the basis of her daily prayers during treatment. At the bride's request, this small group of us - mother, father, bride, groom and me - were celebrating Eucharist together before the wedding rehearsal. Afterwards, the father told me that he had not said the Lord's Prayer in English for many, many years – his native and everyday language is Afrikaans. But, once we started, the words came flowing back. He also said that the Lord's Prayer was a touchstone- he saw we were related in worship, though he lives in South Africa and I lived in the United States.

This is one of the beauties of the Anglican Communion – the language may be different, but the sense of worship, beauty and majesty in the prayers exist wherever you go. *Lex credendi, lex orandi* – this Latin phrase has been loosely translated as “what you believe is what you pray.” Our primary worship resource - The Book of Common Prayer – shows us the reverse is also true: what we pray is what we believe. Or, perhaps more accurately, what we strive to believe.

Reread the collect from a few minutes ago:

O God, the protector of all who trust in you, without whom nothing is strong, nothing is holy: Increase and multiply upon us your mercy; that, with you as our ruler and guide, we may so pass through things temporal, that we lose not the things eternal.

This short prayer reminds us what we believe about God. God is protector for those who trust. God is what makes something strong or holy. We ask for mercy so that we may understand this world for the temporary place it is while understanding God is eternal. A collect “collects” the themes from the readings of the day in a few short sentences of prayer. Prayer was central to Jesus and others in the Bible. The word “pray” or “prayer” is used *at least* 365 times in the Bible. Several times throughout the Gospels we read that Jesus prayed. Besides the Lord's Prayer, perhaps his prayer on the Mount of Olives the night he was betrayed is the other prayer most of us remember:

“Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me; yet not my will but yours be done”
(Luke 22:42).

Prayer is central to Jesus. It was when Jesus had finished praying that the disciples asked to be taught to pray. And so Jesus gives them the words we call The Lord's Prayer found in both the Gospel of Matthew and the Gospel of Luke, although the words vary a bit and do not include the ending doxology we say each week.

Jesus begins with praising God:

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Hallowed: to make something holy. To give reverence and respect. An acknowledgment that God is our Father – the source of our being.

Thy kingdom come, thy will be done. Jesus urges us to pray that God's realm will be known by all of us. It is paired with the understanding that God's will and not our own is primary. Our goal is to live so that God's will be known on earth.

Give us this day our daily bread. Let us not be greedy for more than we need to live. Bread was the staple of life- and in this phrase Jesus reminds the disciples and us of the time in the wilderness when manna was provided to those on the exodus. Bread enough for the day – no more, no less. If you took more than one day's bread, it was unfit to eat when morning came. Trust in God to provide what we need – not necessarily what we want.

And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. Jesus cautions us that our forgiveness of those who hurt or harm us is directly tied to God's willingness to forgive us. Whatever hurts we retain – whatever harms we find impossible to forgive – are those that will keep us from the relationship we seek with God. Remember the log in our eye before we focus on the splinter in our neighbor's eye.

And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. Temptation is something that looks good but has negative consequences. Think of Jesus immediately after his baptism when he was led into the wilderness and tempted by the devil. Jesus was hungry and was offered the chance to turn stones into bread. Bread – the staple of life. But Jesus reminded the devil that one does not live by bread alone (Luke 4:3-4). Jesus was offered power and dominion over all the world – but the cost of accepting the offer would have set Jesus apart from God. Jesus reminds that devil that we are called to worship God and to serve only Him (Luke 4:5-8).

There is no one way – no right way - to pray. How many of us at times of crisis offer the fleeting: "Oh God, help me."

Words and emotions when we are most out of control to connect with the God we believe loves us. It is an effort to be in relationship with the One who is Life itself. Prayer has been described as "finding the heart's true home."¹

Prayer takes many forms. Indeed, over and over in his letters to the early church, Paul tells us to pray without ceasing and give thanks in all circumstances (1 Thes.5:17-18). There is no one way – no right way – to pray. What matters is that you open your heart to God – to let God know your inmost thoughts and needs and also your gratitude and thanksgivings.

Prayer is about responding to God's unceasing love for us. Prayer can be silent or spoken aloud. Prayer can be long or short. One resource we have is the Book of Common Prayer which contains all kinds of prayers for all kinds of circumstances. When you're feeling "stuck" – when the words won't come – look up the prayers. You'll often find one that fits – one that unlocks the words in your heart.

¹ Richard J. Foster. Finding the Heart's True Home (San Francisco: HarperOne, 1992).

Sometimes just flipping through the BCP causes my eye to focus on something – some prayer about an issue I hadn't even realized was troubling me. Or something for which I need to stop and take a minute to give thanks and praise to the One who makes all possible.

Prayer is a gift. It is a way to structure your life. Pray each day – perhaps beginning with Morning Prayer and ending your day with Compline.

The New Zealand Prayer Book contains one of the most beautiful prayers for night. Even though right now is not yet night of this day, the words offer us a prayer you might wish to consider.

Lord,
It is night.
The night is for stillness.
Let us be still in the presence of God.

It is night after a long day.
What has been done has been done;
What has not been done has not been done;
Let it be.

The night is dark.
Let our fears of the darkness of the world and of our own lives
Rest in you.

The night is quiet.
Let the quietness of your peace enfold us,
All dear to us
And all who have no peace.

The night heralds the dawn.
Let us look expectantly to a new day,
New joys,
New possibilities.

In your name we pray,
Amen.

This Night Prayer reminds us to let what is done – and what is undone – go. That we can rest in God with confidence and peace. That dawn comes after the night. With the new dawn come new joys and new possibilities. Prayer is our heart's true home.

Do not be afraid to pray. Formal words such as those found in the BCP or informal words straight from the heart. God hears our prayers. God waits for our prayers. Prayer is our heart's true home. *Amen.*