

# Lord's Prayer Notes

March 2022

Robert M. Fowler

[robert.fowler@bw.edu](mailto:robert.fowler@bw.edu)

## The Lord's Prayer that Nobody Knows

There are two versions of the Lord's Prayer in the New Testament. The one that 'everybody knows' is Matthew's version, which is recited in church every Sunday. The version that 'nobody knows' is in Luke's gospel. This class will consider the strong possibility that Luke's version is more original and therefore authentic than Matthew's. Once we set aside Matthew's editorial embellishments to the prayer, we will be in a position to understand better its language, including key terms such as father, kingdom, daily bread, debt forgiveness, and escaping trial.

**These Zoom sessions for Trinity Cathedral are being recorded for posterity, so if you are choosing to participate in a session, you are implicitly giving approval to being recorded. If you don't want the sight or sound of your participation to be recorded, you may always turn off either video or microphone or both.**

**•Look at the two New Testament versions of the prayer, in Matthew 6:9-13 and Luke 11:2-4. (See the separate handout, "A Comparison of the Lord's Prayer/Our Father in Matthew and Luke.")**

•The introduction to the prayer is quite different in Matthew and Luke, which suggests that they both made up their own narrative introduction to the prayer, because apparently the prayer did not circulate with such an introduction. (In general, both the words and deeds of Jesus were remembered as free floating, independent bits of tradition. It fell to the gospel writers to stitch the independent bits together into a larger narrative framework. This is why the gospel writers put the same anecdote or bit of teaching at different locations in their respective narratives. E.g., the timing of the cleansing of the Temple, the timing of the Last Supper, etc.)

•Note that all of Luke's prayer is echoed fairly closely in Matthew, but that Matthew has embellished the prayer significantly at several points. In some cases Matthew's embellishments are insightful and illuminating, but in other cases Matthew may narrow our interpretive options in an unfortunate manner.

• **"Father"—αββα ὁ πατήρ— Abba ho Patēr—"Abba! THE Father!"**

• Let's be clear, first, that we are dealing with poetic metaphor here, not objective scientific language about mammalian procreation! (See Psalm 18: for other wonderful poetic metaphors: God is rock, fortress, deliverer, shield, horn of salvation, stronghold. If you'd like more biblical metaphor, try the metaphors for Jesus in John's Gospel: word, light, gate, good shepherd, grapevine.)

• **OUR Father?** If Matthew's embellishment here is insightful (I think it is), then Matthew is claiming that Jesus was inviting his disciples to join him in the same kind of close, intimate, familial relationship with "God the Father" that he had. That is—and this is crucial—WE are "children of God" just as Jesus was a "child of God."

• I find it believable that Jesus understood himself to be a "son of God," not merely because the creeds and multiple New Testament texts tell me so, but also because we know of other first-century Galilean Jewish wonder-working holy men who understood themselves to be "sons" of "Abba Father" God. (Hanina ben Dosa and Honi the Rainmaker or Circle Drawer)

• There is a super-abundance of NT texts saying that humans can and should also be regarded as "children of God." I fear that the Christian tradition through the centuries has placed so much emphasis on the sonship of Jesus that it has obscured Jesus' own urging that any and all should discover and live out their own identity as a "child of God." (Sunday after Sunday, I am invited to say the Nicene Creed, saying these words: "We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God..." "Only"? **ONLY**? As in "One and Only, No Others Qualify"? FYI, Jesus is indeed called the "only son" five times in the NT, but only in the Johannine literature. Never in the Synoptics, nor in Paul.)

• New Testament texts testifying to the reality that any and all humans may be "children of God"

"Abba! Father!"—Mark 14:35; Rom 8:15; Gal 4:6

"God our Father" in Paul—Rom 1:7; 1 Cor 1:3; 2 Cor 1:2; Gal 1:3; Phil 1:2; Phlm 1:3

"God the Father" in Paul—1 Cor 8:6; 15:24; Gal 1:1; Phil 2:11; 1 Thess 1:11

"God and Father"—Rom 15:6; 2 Cor 1:3; 11:31; Gal 1:4; Phil 4:20; 1 Thess 1:3; 3:11, 13

"Father" (referring to God)—Rom 6:4; 2 Cor 6:18

**There are three "Abba! Father!" passages in the New Testament. Especially the two in Paul's letters could be summary evocations of the entire prayer.**

Mark 14:35 And going a little farther, he threw himself on the ground and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him. 36 He said, "Abba, Father, for you all things are possible; remove this cup from me; yet, not what I want, but what you want." [in all three of these NT Abba passages, the Greek is literally, ἀββα ὁ πατήρ —"Abba! THE Father!"]

Romans 8:14 For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. 15 For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, "Abba! Father!" 16 it is that very Spirit bearing witness<sup>a</sup> with our spirit that we are children of God, 17 and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ—if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.

Galatians 4:5 in order to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children. 6 And because you are children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our<sup>a</sup> hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" 7 So you are no longer a slave but a child, and if a child then also an heir, through God.

Rom 8:28 We know that all things work together for good<sup>a</sup> for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose. 29 For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, *in order that he might be the firstborn within a large family.* (εἰς τὸ εἶναι αὐτὸν πρωτότοκον ἐν πολλοῖς ἀδελφοῖς)

Or Galatians 3:23-4:7: 3:26 ....for in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith.... 3:28 There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. 29 **And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring,<sup>a</sup> heirs according to the promise.** 4:4 ...God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, 5 in order to redeem those who were under the law, **so that we might receive adoption as children.** 6 And because you are children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our<sup>a</sup> hearts, crying, "Abba!<sup>b</sup> Father!" 7 So you are no longer a slave but a child, and if a child then also an heir, through God.<sup>a</sup>

• **Is an ancient, traditional, patriarchal understanding presupposed?** Good question! **John Dominic Crossan** (see bibliography below) finds many passages in the Hebrew Bible in which "father" is used inclusively as shorthand for "father and mother," or in our inclusive language, "parent," for short. But he goes still further to argue that even that is too restrictive. **What we should be thinking of is God as Householder.** And what are the characteristics of God as Divine Householder? •Divine Householder as Creator •Divine Householder as Protector •Divine Householder as Provider •Divine Householder as Model

•"your kingdom"—ἡ βασιλεία σου—hē basileia sou

• When, where, and what is "the kingdom of God"? What would it mean for it "to come"? I suggest that the Lord's Prayer itself gives evidence: The Kingdom of God is: daily bread, forgiveness of debt, and escaping trial. For Jesus and those he had recruited to join him in his mission, the Kingdom was here and now. The Lord's Prayer itself aims to be a fulfillment of the Kingdom!

• Mark 1:14 Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news<sup>a</sup> of God, 15 and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near;"<sup>a</sup> repent, and believe in the good news."

• Matt 10:7 "As you go, proclaim the good news, 'The kingdom of heaven has come near.'"

• Luke 10:9-11 , "...and say to them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you.' 10 But whenever you enter a town and they do not welcome you, go out into its streets and say, 11 'Even the dust of your town that clings to our feet, we wipe off in protest against you. Yet know this: the kingdom of God has come near.'"

[•NOTE: In our gospels, five times total (Matthew and Mark once each, Luke twice, Gospel of Thomas once) Jesus sends forth his disciples to preach the Kingdom of God and to share the experience of the Kingdom with those whom they encounter. How do they do that? They heal the sick, cast out demons, accept the hospitality of householders, and share bread at their table.]

• Luke 11:20 "But if it is by the finger of God that I cast out the demons, then *the kingdom of God has come to you.*"

• Matt 12:28 "But if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then *the kingdom of God has come to you.*" (φθάνω—phthanō—to come before, to overtake, to reach)

• Luke 17:20 Once Jesus was asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God was coming, and he answered, "The kingdom of God is not coming with things that can be observed; 21 nor will they say, 'Look, here it is!' or 'There it is!' For, in fact, the kingdom of God is among you." [Or "within"!—ἐντός—entos]

• Thomas 3 "Jesus said, 'If your leaders say to you, 'Look, the (Father's) kingdom is in the sky,' then the birds of the sky will precede you. If they say to you, 'It is in the sea,' then the fish will precede you. Rather, the kingdom is within you and it is outside you.'" (Patterson & Meyer)

- Thomas 82 "Jesus said, "Whoever is near me is near the fire, and whoever is far from me is far from the kingdom."" (Patterson & Meyer)
- Thomas 113 "His disciples said to him, "When will the kingdom come?" "It will not come by watching for it. It will not be said, 'Look, here!' or 'Look, there!' Rather, the Father's kingdom is spread out upon the earth, and people don't see it."" (Patterson & Meyer)

• **"daily bread" — ἐπιούσιος — epiousios — a word that only occurs in the Lord's Prayer in both Matthew and Luke, and the precise meaning is up for grabs—either "[bread for] today" or "[bread for] tomorrow." The Jesus Seminar handles this nicely when they suggest "the bread we need for the day" in Matthew and "the bread we need day by day" in Luke.**

• **Strong allusion to the manna story in Exodus 16**

- Manna 'came from heaven' and could be gathered only day by day.
- Each person got exactly as much as she/he needed. Those who gathered more than their share found that what they had gathered had been reduced. Those who had not managed to gather enough found, to their surprise, that what they had gathered had been increased.
- If they tried to keep any overnight, it would spoil.
- On Friday they were to collect a double helping, to provide enough for Shabbat.
- If they went out looking for manna on Shabbat, surprise! There was none.
- Thus, "daily bread": day by day by day.....
- Clear message: God wanted everyone to have enough! And hoarding greedily was not allowed!

• **Wonderful appeal to Exodus 16:18 by Paul in 2 Corinthians 8:13-15**

2 Cor 8:13 "Our desire is not that others might be relieved while you are hard pressed, but that there might be *equality*. 14 At the present time your plenty will supply what they need, so that in turn their plenty will supply what you need. The goal is *equality*, 15 as it is written: "The one who gathered much did not have too much, and the one who gathered little did not have too little."" [NIV translation, which uses "equality" instead of the NRSV's "fair balance."]

• **The manna story is clearly echoed in the six stories of a feeding of a multitude in the gospels.** Crossan says about the stories of the feeding of the multitude in the gospels: when the bounty of God's creation is passed through the hands of distributive justice, there is enough for everyone.

• I wonder: John 6:9 is unique in these stories, when it credits a boy for handing over his five loaves and two fishes. Was he the first in the crowd to get the message? That whatever you have, you share? If everyone did this, there would be enough for everyone, with leftovers!

Luke 11:5 And he said to them, "Suppose one of you has a friend, and you go to him at midnight and say to him, 'Friend, lend me three loaves of bread; 6 for a friend of mine has arrived, and I have nothing to set before him.' 7 And he answers from within, 'Do not bother me; the door has already been locked, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot get up and give you anything.' 8 I tell you, even though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, at least because of his persistence he will get up and give him whatever he needs.

[Note: This follows immediately Luke's version of the prayer. Could this be an example of how 'daily bread' might be provided, willingly or not, from one person to another?]

Luke 3:10 And the crowds asked him, "What then should we do?" 11 In reply he said to them, "Whoever has two coats must share with anyone who has none; and **whoever has food must do likewise.**" [Note: Attributed to John the Baptist by Luke, but I suspect it better reflects the ethics and practice of Jesus.]

• **debt OR trespass OR sin? "debt" in Matthew 6:12—ὀφείλημα—opheilēma, or ὀφείλω—opheilō—"to be indebted" in both Matthew 6:12 and Luke 11:4.**

• **Whence cometh "trespass"? Thank you, William Tyndale (1526) and Bishop Cranmer, Book of Common Prayer (1549), but with some encouragement no doubt from the appearance of "trespasses" (παράπτωμα—paraptōma) in Matthew 6:14-15, which immediately follows the prayer in Matthew 6:9-13**

• **Only in Luke 11:4 do we find "sin"—ἁμαρτία—hamartia. But Luke slips back to "debt" in 11:5. I vote for "debt" being original all the way around, and I bet it was meant literally, that is, as financial obligation.**

• **An actual story about debt, debtors' prison and enslavement, and forgiveness of debt—or not! Matthew 18:23-35—A slave owes his master a gazillion dollars. When the time comes for him to pay up, he can't, so the master orders him, his wife, his children, and all his property to be sold. He begs his master for more time. The master says, "Never mind. Your debt is forgiven." He had owed a gazillion dollars, but now he owes nothing. Mercy! Grace! The debt-forgiven slave leaves and runs into a fellow slave who owes him a hundred dollars. The fellow slave also cannot repay his debt, but the debt-forgiven slave throws him**

into debtor's prison anyway. No forgiveness! No mercy! No grace! (The story does not end well for the debt-forgiven slave who would not forgive his fellow slave's debt.)

• **Luke 6:27** “But I say to you that listen, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, **28** bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. **29** If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also; and from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt. **30 Give to everyone who begs from you; and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again.** **31** Do to others as you would have them do to you. **32** “If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. **33** If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. **34 If you lend to those from whom you hope to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to receive as much again.** **35 But love your enemies, do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return.** Your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High; for he is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. **36** Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

**Matthew 6:14-15 For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you; 15 but if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.** [Note: forgiveness here is between human and God. And, although the King James version of the prayer uses "debt" instead of "trespass," this passage, which speaks of "trespasses," immediately follows Matthew's Lord's Prayer, and I speculate that its trespass language slipped over into conventional recitation of Matthew's prayer.]

• Some of the "trial," "test," "court," or "judge" passages listed below could possibly involve legal proceedings concerning unpaid "debts."

• **Trial? Test? Temptation?—πειρασμός—peirasmos; "to try, put to trial, test, tempt"—πειράζω—perazō**

• Here's a curiosity for you. Every Sunday I say, "lead us not into temptation," which is King James language. The NRSV changed that wording to this: "do not bring us to the time of trial." It is interesting to note that the KJV uses the word "temptation" a total of 14 times in the entire New Testament, whereas the NRSV only uses it twice. Apparently contemporary translators feel that our contemporary understanding of "temptation" seldom renders faithfully what the biblical authors were trying to say. "Test" or "trial" is typically more appropriate. (FYI, various forms of "tempt" language in NT occur 48 times in the KJV, but only 11 times in the NRSV.)

• **Here's a thought: if bread and debt can be taken as pointers to economic distress, why not take "trial" also in an economic sense? How about a lawcourt proceeding before a judge in which one's property is to be confiscated for failure to pay one's debt?**

• **"To judge, put on trial, take to court, to condemn"—κρίνω—krinō**

• **Another debtors' prison passage, featuring the courtroom proceedings that might land you there: Matt 5:25-26 "Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are on the way to court with him, or your accuser may hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you will be thrown into prison. 26 Truly I tell you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny." // Luke 12:57-59**

Matt 7:1 "Do not **judge**, so that you may not be judged. 2 For with the judgment you make you will be judged, and the measure you give will be the measure you get.

**Luke 6:37 "Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. [Note: forgiveness here is between human and human.]**

Luke 18: 1-8—(an extended passage about a widow who pesters an "unjust **judge**" for legal relief until he finally relents and gives it to her.)

John 18:31 "Pilate said to them, "Take him yourselves and **judge** him according to your law."

Acts 23:6 "When Paul noticed that some were Sadducees and others were Pharisees, he called out in the council, "Brothers, I am a Pharisee, a son of Pharisees. I am **on trial** concerning the hope of the resurrection of the dead.""

Acts 26:6 "And now I stand here **on trial** on account of my hope in the promise made by God to our ancestors."

1 Cor 4:3 "But with me it is a very small thing that I should be **judged** by you or by any **human court**. I do not even **judge** myself. 4 I am not aware of anything against myself, but I am not thereby acquitted. It is the Lord who judges me."

**James 2:5-6 "Listen, my beloved brothers and sisters. Has not God chosen the poor in the world to be rich in faith and to be heirs of the kingdom that he has promised to those who love him? 6 But you have dishonored the poor. Is it not the rich who oppress you? Is it not they who drag you into court?"**



• Of course, "test" or "trial" may also be taken in any number of other, metaphorical ways. Whether our trials are literally economic or metaphorical tests and trials of everyday life, we could do without them!

John Dominic Crossan, for whom I have immense respect, continues to use the word "temptation," and he argues that the "temptation" that Jesus warns us against is the temptation to try to use violence to establish the Kingdom of God. I don't think that is clearly expressed in the Lord's Prayer, but I do warmly accept Crossan's argument in general that too often in the Bible (and in subsequent Christian tradition), God is portrayed wielding violence to mete out punitive, retributive justice, whereas the loftier vision of Jesus (and the whole Bible) sees God as a non-violent force for distributive justice. You might say, God as Love, instead of God as Warrior. (Both are in the Bible!) As Crossan likes to say, the generous bounty of God's creation, when passed through the hands of justice, leads to everyone "having enough," and that would be the Kingdom of God "on earth as it is in heaven."

• **Additional instances of trial/test/lawcourt language in the New Testament**

Rev 3:10 "Because you have kept my word of patient endurance, I will keep you from the hour of **trial** that is coming on the whole world to test the inhabitants of the earth."

Matt 19:3 Some Pharisees came to him, and to **test** him they asked, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any cause?"

Matt 22:18 But Jesus, aware of their malice, said, "Why are you putting me to the **test**, you hypocrites?"

Matt 22:35 and one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to **test** him.

**Matt 26:41 "Stay awake and pray that you may not come into the time of trial; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." // Mark 14:38 // Luke 22:40,46**

Hebrews 2:18—"Because he himself was **tested** by what he suffered, he is able to help those who are being **tested**." ἐν ᾧ γὰρ πέπονθεν αὐτὸς πειρασθεῖς, δύναται τοῖς πειραζομένοις βοηθῆσαι

• Still other passages about tests, trials, courts, judges: Mark 13:11; Luke 12:13-14; John 7:51; Jn 8:15-16; Jn 12:47-48

## Selected Bibliography

John Dominic Crossan, *The Greatest Prayer: Rediscovering the Revolutionary Message of the Lord's Prayer* (New York: HarperOne, 2011)

Adam Hamilton, *The Lord's Prayer: The Meaning and Power of the Prayer Jesus Taught* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2021)

Charles Manto, "Whose Father in heaven? In Matthew, the Lord's Prayer is a prayer for enemies," <https://www.christiancentury.org/article/critical-essay/whose-father-heaven>, January 20, 2022 [anything from the Christian Century is likely to be worthy of attention]

Stephen Patterson and Marvin Meyer translation of the Gospel of Thomas, <http://www.webpages.uidaho.edu/~rfrey/PDF/166/Judaism%20Christianity/166Thomas.pdf>

Debie Thomas, "'Why didn't Jesus come as a woman?' asked my daughter," <https://www.christiancentury.org/article/faith-matters/why-didn-t-jesus-come-woman-asked-my-daughter>, January 13, 2021

Tommy Wasserman, "Manuscripts of the Lord's Prayer", n.p. [cited 28 Jan 2022]. Online: <https://www.bibleodyssey.org:443/passages/related-articles/manuscripts-of-the-lords-prayer> [[www.bibleodyssey.com](http://www.bibleodyssey.com) is a website sponsored by the Society of Biblical Literature, the largest professional guild of biblical scholars in North America]

C. Clifton Black, "Lord's Prayer (Matt 6:9-13/Luke 11:2-4)", n.p. [cited 28 Jan 2022]. Online: <https://www.bibleodyssey.org:443/passages/main-articles/lords-prayer>