

Voices: The Lord's Prayer in the age of coronavirus

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It is easy and difficult to pray right now. It is easy because I now am keenly aware of just how dependent I am upon God and how little power I have. It is difficult, however, because there is so much needing prayer.

Sickness. Death. Rising unemployment. Tanking economies. The list goes on and on.

As I have found myself overwhelmed by the number of issues needing intercession, I also have found myself heavily leaning on the Lord's Prayer—the most widely known and used prayer among Christians throughout history—which primarily is based on Matthew 6:9-13.

First things first

When Jesus teaches his disciples how to pray, he begins with the glory, kingdom and purposes of our Father in heaven (6:9-10). By fronting these elements, Jesus emphasizes the focus of the prayer is not us, our wants or even our legitimate needs. The focus is God.

Of the prayer's 57 words in Greek—not counting the doxology at the end—24 are committed to this section. That's nearly half the prayer.

And while the doxology—"For yours is the kingdom..."—is a [later scribal addition](#), it nevertheless is a true and worthy statement underscoring the centrality Jesus places on God's glory, kingdom and purposes.

Right now, this dimension of the Lord's Prayer may be the most challenging and the most important. Understandably, many of us are turning our focus

to our immediate needs: health, food, housing, job security, etc. These all are legitimate needs for prayer, yet we should not grant them primacy.

Even in this time of great need and uncertainty, our focus as Christians always should be upon God. We ought to give our attention to the work of God's kingdom. We ought to direct others' focus to the glory of God revealed in Jesus Christ.

This will be challenging, no doubt. I myself frequently catch my mind occupied by my own concerns. But regularly praying the Lord's Prayer, and doing so with conviction and sincerity rather than by rote, helps reframe my thoughts and push them back towards God. It should do so for all of us.

Our daily bread

It would be a significant mistake, however, to see God's glory and purposes as necessarily at odds with our needs in this world.

In 6:11, Jesus instructs us to pray, "Give us this day our daily bread" (NASB). While Jesus explicitly addresses only "bread," I think it is reasonable to see the bread as a representative for our basic needs as a whole.

We need food. We need housing. We need medicine. We need employment. We need many things in order to survive day-to-day. God cares and involves himself in such concerns. His gracious provision for our needs is part of his kingdom purposes and brings him glory.

However, we should not assume God's answer to this petition necessarily will be a miraculous raining of bread from the sky. In fact, God's answer most often will take the form of his providence acting in and through human agents. For example, by buying and delivering groceries for others, we can live out the Lord's Prayer, being part of the answer God provides.

Moreover, this section of the prayer confronts us with an uncomfortable truth: What we need most certainly is not always what we want. Many Americans—myself included—are accustomed to living in relative luxury. But the COVID-19 pandemic has revealed what we truly need is far less than what we want and are used to.

Our greatest need

Jesus concludes by highlighting another need of ours, one even greater than our need for “daily bread.” Jesus finishes this prayer by addressing sin, temptation, forgiveness and deliverance from evil (6:12-13).

Current pandemic conditions may cause us to forget our relationship with God is not automatically peachy-keen. We are trapped under bondage to sin and death, as is creation itself. The fundamental problem is our willful, obstinate rebellion against a good and holy God (Genesis 3; Romans 8:20-23; Ephesians 2:1-3). This pandemic [itself is](#) one of the Fall’s poisonous fruits.

Moreover, there are conscious, active and personal powers of evil at work in this world (Ephesians 2:2; 6:12; 1 Peter 5:8). “From evil” could also be translated “from the evil one,” referring to the devil (Matthew 6:13).

Western modernity and postmodernity have tended to downplay or outright reject the realities of sin and “supernatural” evil. Our cultural default is to regard such things as primitive superstitions, holdovers from a pre-enlightened age, fictions dreamt up to legitimate power and oppression. But sin, the devil and his angels are very real and very dangerous.

Only God can save us from wickedness. Jesus died on the cross for our sins and in our place. He has paid our debt (Romans 3:21-26; 1 Corinthians 15:3; 2 Corinthians 5:14-15, 21). In his death and resurrection, Christ has not only paid our debt, he has defeated the hostile spiritual powers of this

age (Colossians 2:13-15). And Christ has poured out the Holy Spirit to sanctify his people (2 Thessalonians 2:13; Galatians 5:22-23; 1 Peter 1:2).

‘Pray, then, in this way ... ’

The Lord’s Prayer is not just a quaint tradition. It is a biblical truth and a powerful antidote to the malaise that threatens our prayer life both during a pandemic and during everyday existence.

Are you overwhelmed? Are you unsure of how to pray in this crazy season of world history? Then I encourage you to pray the Lord’s Prayer and to do so with sincerity and conviction.

Is your prayer life doing perfectly fine? I still would encourage you to pray the Lord’s Prayer on a regular basis.

Let the truths of this prayer suffuse your soul. Turn your eyes to behold the glory of God. Commit to his kingdom work. Trust the Lord to provide for your needs. Praise him for delivering you from sin and death.

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