



One further theme comes in Matthew's version of the prayer. **And do not bring us to the time of trial and rescue us from the evil one.** The NRSV Bible translation turns 'temptation' into 'time of trial'. It has always seemed odd to me that God would deliberately 'lead us into temptation', although temptation is an inevitable human experience as it was the experience of Jesus in his life on earth. But surely God does not tempt; that is the work of the evil one. But it turns out that the Greek word translated 'temptation' rather means 'trial' or 'tribulation' and refers to the catastrophic trial preceding the coming of the Final Age, luridly displayed for us in the pages of the Book of Revelation. We will pray to be delivered from that.

Both temptation and tribulation may by God's grace be enduring in the growth of holiness and in the doing of God's will, but not if the evil one snatches us for his own evil purposes. It is from that that we pray to be saved.

If these words 'do not bring us to the time of trial' are indeed related to the trials preceding the Final or Messianic age, does this make them remote from our own needs and our own day? I don't think so, if we remember that every coming of the power of God happens through pain and cost, and every growth in our own holiness and Christ-likeness happens through pain and cost. The grace of God can turn the pain and cost to wonderful account, and we pray that the evil one may not be able to use them for his evil ends.

Pray in this way. So, the 'Our Father' takes the needs and the agonising conflicts of humankind and lifts them into the realm of the Kingdom and the Father. So close is the prayer to Jesus himself that we may fairly say that Christian prayer means not only the "Lord's Prayer", but the Lord and his Prayer. Pray in this way.... **MW**

Reading: Be still and know by Michael Ramsey - Fount Paperbacks 1982.



## Some thoughts on the Lord's Prayer by Revd M Walkey



## Some thoughts on the Lord's Prayer

There are two accounts of Jesus giving the Lord's Prayer to his disciples. In Matthew, the occasion is the Sermon on the mount. Jesus has been deploring the long-winded and verbose prayers of some who think that the repetition of many words will impress God. So, he gives his followers a pattern prayer which has few words but great themes. In Luke, the occasion comes when Jesus has been praying alone. As he finishes, the disciples ask him to teach them to pray. It is possible Luke's version is older than Matthew's, since it begins with the single address, 'Father'; Jesus own familiar way of speaking to God.

It is, however, the fuller version in Matthew that became adopted for use by the Church down the centuries. In the NRSV Bible (the one we use with Common Worship) the words are translated:

**Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed be your name.  
Your kingdom come,  
your will be done,  
on earth as it does in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread.  
And forgive us our debts,  
as we also have forgiven  
our debtors.  
And do not bring us to the time of trial,  
but rescue us from the evil one.**

We notice first that neither Matthew nor Luke include the familiar words: 'Thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.' These words are omitted in some of the most important Greek manuscripts, and it is fairly certain they were not part of the original prayer, being added by the Church at an early date. It was customary for Jews to conclude their prayers with a thanksgiving, and more than likely the early Christians did the same. Indeed, the themes of the Lord's prayer themselves seem to burst with thanksgiving.

Is it, however, disappointing for us that we cannot be sure of the exact words of the prayer? Not if we realise that while the hearers of Jesus would have cherished the exact words, the value to ourselves is not in a set of words so much as a set of themes. 'Pray like this', says Jesus in Matthew's account; and this we can do with heart and mind and imagination focused upon the Father, the Kingdom, the Will, the Daily Bread, the Forgiveness of Sins and the Deliverance from Evil. So, our bodily and spiritual needs and those of all humanity are lifted into the sphere of God's purpose with the conviction that the Kingdom and the glory are his. We should 'Pray like this'.

Let's examine the prayer more closely.

**Father.** In Matthew 'Our Father' reminds us of the community of disciples who began praying together, and of the growing intimacy with God that they have learned from Jesus. The words 'in heaven' emphasise God's transcendence; his greatness, his creativity, his nature as Lover of all that he has made. So, the prayer begins in a meditative way. Those who pray will let heart and mind and imagination dwell upon God's supremacy, compassion and care for his own. We begin by listening to God's word to us before we bring our requests to him.

**Hallowed be your name.** Let the lives of those who pray, and the lives of all humankind and the created world, give honour to the name of the Father who created them. Let the Father make holy his own name through his followers' response.

**Your kingdom come. Your will be done.** At this point, we who pray, dwell on God's sovereignty; his rule over the whole of creation, and ask that that rule may be realized in the hearts of all humankind. It is, meanwhile, the mission of the Church to continue to proclaim God's rule in each generation and draw humanity into God's kingdom. That is the work of doing God's will. For God longs for all humanity to be saved and brought home to him. Jesus spoke much about the Kingdom of God, especially in the first three gospels. It was at the centre of his earthly mission and fulfilled in his sacrificial offering of himself on Calvary and his glorious resurrection and ascension.

**Our Daily Bread.** The Greek word translated 'daily', probably means 'for tomorrow'; and it is thought by some scholars that behind the Greek is an older Aramaic phrase meaning 'for today and tomorrow'. So, we ask that God will so order things that we shall not be in want and shall be free from worry about the coming day. But we must remember we pray against the background of God's kingdom and his righteousness; and the word 'our' will remind us of our fellow human beings near and far, and it will be a prayer in unselfishness, human solidarity and compassion.

Some scholars have suggested that the 'tomorrow' and the 'bread' in the prayer refer to the age to come and the heavenly food which is the Bread of Life. But it has been pointed out that the daily bread could apply both to immediate daily needs as well as to the age to come. The prayer will then become that the new age and its heavenly food may here and now be present helping us in the tasks of today and tomorrow.

**Forgive us.** We ask God to forgive us, knowing that he will do so only if we ourselves are forgiving. If we are unforgiving we may not expect God's forgiveness. What if our unforgiveness is what most needs God's forgiveness? To acknowledge that may be the first step in our repentance.