



## THE LORD'S PRAYER

In this meditation, the Lord's Prayer is used as a focus.

## OVERVIEW

Praying the Lord's Prayer with focused intention of the heart.

## MATERIALS

Paper and pencils for each student to write the Lord's Prayer or a printed copy of the Lord's Prayer for each student.

## Scripture

### MATTHEW 6: 5-13

And whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, so that they may be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. But whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

When you are praying, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do; for they think that they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

Pray then in this way:

Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed be your name.  
Your kingdom come.  
Your will be done,  
on earth as it is 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.

## Quotations

"Until we have acquired true prayer, we are like those who introduce children to walking. Make the effort to raise up, or rather, to enclose your mind within the words of your prayer; and if, like a child, it gets tired and falters, raise it up again. The mind, after all, is naturally unstable, but the God Who can do everything can also give it firm

"If you are careful to train your mind never to wander, it will stay by you even at mealtimes. But if you allow it to stray freely, then you will never have it beside you. "I would prefer to speak five words with my understanding" (1 Cor. 14:19) and so on, says the mighty practitioner of great and high prayer. But prayer of this sort is foreign to

endurance. Persevere in this, therefore, and do not grow weary.”

— *Saint John Climacus*

infant souls, and so because of our imperfection we need quantity as well as quality in the words of our prayer, the former making a way for the latter, in accordance with the saying about giving prayer to him who prays resolutely, albeit impurely and laboriously (cf. 1 Kings [1 Sam.] 2:9).”

— *Saint John Climacus*

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## Introducing the Practice

Our prayer practice today is inspired by Saint John Climacus’ teachings on prayer. St. John Climacus was a Christian monk who lived during the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> centuries at a monastery on the Sinai Peninsula (modern day Egypt). Little is known about the details of his life, though his influence in Christianity is exceptional. His famous work, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, is one of the most popular spiritual books among Eastern Orthodox Christians, and it is often read aloud during the season of Lent in Orthodox monasteries and churches. St. John Climacus discusses the spiritual path within the framework of a ladder reaching from earth to heaven – an image that he takes from Jacob’s dream in Genesis 28. There are 30 steps to the ladder, which mirror the 30 years of Jesus’ life before the beginning of his ministry. Each step marks a different virtue to be practiced or vice to be avoided, and the final step of the ladder is Love.

On Step 28, St. John Climacus gives some wonderful advice on prayer, and it is this advice that shapes our practice today. Climacus acknowledges that we are easily distracted, and he insists that the greatest prayer is one in which our hearts are turned to God with focused intention. He encourages us to gently raise up the mind each time it wanders in prayer, as a parent would raise up a child each time it falls while learning to walk.

Today, we will be praying the Lord’s Prayer (Our Father) with St. John Climacus’ advice in mind. This is a prayer that is familiar to many of us, and some of us likely have it memorized. It is a wonderful prayer, and it is particularly special because, while there are many models for prayer given throughout the Bible, this is the only prayer that Jesus himself teaches us. Its familiarity does, however, make it easier for us to become distracted when saying it. Because we know it so well, our thoughts can easily drift off while we mindlessly recite the words. Today’s practice forces us to really pay attention to each word of the prayer. In doing so, this ancient prayer has surprising potential to become new and our own.

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## Preparing for the Practice

Give everyone a piece of paper and have them write out the version of the Lord’s Prayer that your tradition uses. Go through this together if there are some people who do not have the prayer memorized. Then have everyone spread out with their papers to sit and pray in silence.

## The Spiritual Practice

Center yourself as you prepare your heart and mind to come to God. You may close your eyes as you go through this exercise if you have the words of the prayer memorized, but feel free to keep your eyes open to look at the words on the paper if you need to.

When you feel ready to speak to God, slowly begin to go through the Lord's Prayer. If you feel comfortable doing so you can softly whisper the words out loud; otherwise you can pronounce them silently in your head. As you go through the prayer, make each word count. There is no need to rush through this process of praying. Focus your heart on the divine, knowing that you are saying each word directly to God.

At some point you will notice that your thoughts have wandered off. When you notice this, gently lift your mind back to God as if you were lifting up a young child who had stumbled when trying to walk. Return to the last word of the prayer that you remember focusing on intently, and begin again from there.

You may find that your thoughts wander very often. That's okay. The point is not to race through the prayer to see how many times you can say it in 15 minutes. It is better to only get through the prayer once with a focused mind than a hundred times with a distracted mind.

When we pray the Lord's Prayer with focused intention of the heart, we make the words our own. Be conscious of each word you pray and your intention behind each word, and you will find that the words of this prayer – first spoken by Jesus of Nazareth over 2000 years ago and spoken by Christians of all times and places since – can feel surprisingly intimate and personal for yourself.

*Duration: 15-20 min*

## Discussion Questions

We have all prayed this prayer many times before. What was different about it this time?

What does it mean to you that this prayer was taught to us by Jesus himself and has been prayed by Christians throughout the world for over 2000 years?