

Great Prayers of the Bible
Volume 1



6 Sessions for small group
or individual study

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Introduction to the Living 4 God Study Guides

The *Living 4 God* Study Guides are designed to ground a Christian in the study and understanding of Scripture. Essentially it is designed for a person who has been in the Christian faith for a fair amount of time, however it can be adapted for new Christians as some sections will most certainly be beneficial to them. Be prepared for some challenges and some stretching as this might be the first time you are exposed to certain theological concepts or terms, or to some in-depth methods of Bible study. Celebrate the challenge and strive to do your best. Peter tells us to “*make every effort*” to add knowledge to our faith (2 Peter 1:5).

How to use the Living 4 God Study Guides

You can certainly use these guides on your own and benefit a great deal. The questions are designed to make you think, and there is space for journalling and reflection. Everything that you need is here, except for your own Bible of course. So if you want to use this guide on your own, enjoy!

At the same time, these guides are especially designed for group discussion. Most of us grow in life and in our spirituality as we talk and share with others. People learn best in an active mode of participation, conversation and dialogue, and we gain so much by hearing the ideas and insights of others.

If you use these guides in a group discussion format, you will need a leader. The leader will need to spend extra time preparing in order to help everyone to obtain the most out of the discussion. The leader's role is not to have all the answers, but to facilitate the discussion, so that everyone learns from one another and from the wisdom in the guide and in the Bible.

Suggestions for group study

1. Come to the session prepared. Looking over the theme, Bible verses and questions beforehand will make the discussion more rewarding and stimulating.
2. Be willing to join in the discussion. The leader of the group will not be lecturing, but will encourage people to discuss what they have learned in the passage. Plan to share what God has taught you in your individual study.
3. Ask questions. Any question that is a real question for someone is a great question.
4. Stick to the passage being studied. Base your answers on the verses being discussed rather than on outside authorities such as commentaries or your favourite author or speaker.
5. Try to be sensitive to the other members of the group. Listen to each other, and build each other up. Affirm each other whenever you can. This will encourage more hesitant members of the group to participate.
6. Be careful not to dominate the discussion. By all means participate, but allow others to have equal time.
7. Be open to spiritual growth.
8. Have fun!
9. If you are the discussion leader, you will find additional suggestions and helpful ideas in the Leader's Notes on page.

Suggestions for individual study

1. Begin each session with prayer. Ask God to help you understand the passage and apply it to your life.
2. A good modern translation, such as the New International Version (as is used throughout all *Living 4 God Study Guides*) will give you the most help. Questions are all based on the NIV.
3. Read and reread the passage(s). You must know what the passage says before you can understand what it means and how it applies to you.
4. Write your answers in the spaces provided in the study guide. This will help you to express more clearly your understanding of the passage.
5. Keep a Bible Dictionary handy. Use it to look up unfamiliar words, names or places.

Some additional titles have been recommended at the end of this book that will aid your study of the subject.

Icons used in the Living 4 God Study Guides



Ice Breaker Activity



Other Key Scriptures



Bible Reading



Discussion Questions



Textual Notes of Reference



Hebrew/Greek



Points or Questions that Stir the Heart



Challenge for the week

INTRODUCTION

If you seriously think about it, prayer is actually an activity that is alien to our independent human tendencies. However, at some point we have a need to cry out to God to help us in our need. But prayer is more than that, it is about communication and relationship with the living God.

Over the next six studies we will be looking at the prayers of some of the great men of the Bible. We will sit with the disciples on the mount as Jesus teaches them how to pray; we will eavesdrop on David as he prays as a man after God's own heart; we will observe as Daniel calls out to his God for the people of Israel, before finally pleading alongside Moses for the nation of Israel.

Remember that the Bible is filled with prayers said by many people in a variety of different situations. This study is not meant to be a comprehensive one of all the aspects of prayer, but one that will help us to understand some of the many dynamics of prayer and to guide us all in strengthening our personal prayer lives.

If you are new to prayer, I will try to introduce you to a few of the many of kinds of prayers that you find in the Bible. As you work through this study, my desire is for you to learn to pray better, and to pray prayers that meet God's conditions and are according to his will. By the time you finish I hope that you will have internalised some of these principles, making your prayers more effective and meaningfully.

NOTE: This study will require you to break out of your comfort zone a little as you share with other members in your group about your own prayer experiences and needs.

LESSON 1

THE LORD'S PRAYER

(MATTHEW 6:5-15)



Have each person share with the group an experience they had that was an awesome answer to prayer in their own lives



Luke 11:1-13
Psalm 5:1-3
Daniel 6:10-12



Matthew 6:5-15

How often do we read or recite the Lord's Prayer without actually thinking about how great a prayer it actually is? Of course, it is not called “The Lord's Prayer” or the “Our Father” in the Bible. How then are we to look at it? There are three basic ways it can be understood:

- An example prayer?
- A pattern prayer? or
- A prayerbook prayer to be repeated?

In the verses leading up to this prayer, Jesus is criticising some of the abuses of prayer that were prevalent at the time (e.g. prayer “for effect” - vv5-6). This is best seen in Luke 18:9-14 in the comparison of the prayer of the righteous Pharisee and the tax collector.

Jesus also contrasts righteous prayer with wordy prayers (see verse 7). It seems as though He is showing the disciples how to pray properly, so as to avoid some of the pitfalls of prayer, and to include an appropriate mix of praise and petition. Therefore, based on the context, it is best to be looked at as a pattern prayer.

It is also important to note that this was not the only prayer that the disciples were to pray. There are many prayers in the New Testament said by Jesus, and the Apostles. None of them is word for word with “The Lord's Prayer”, however all of them do follow the pattern laid down by Jesus in this prayer.

The Salutation:

The prayer begins by addressing God as “*Our Father*” (v9b).

Think about this for a moment. God, creator of the universe, is OUR Father. He who revealed himself to Moses and the Israelites in fire, smoke and thick clouds, is OUR Father. Jesus is changing the mindset of the people of Israel here. For centuries the thought of having a personal relationship with God seemed foreign to many as a result of the teachings of the Pharisees.

In the Biblical context, “father” includes the concepts of care, love, discipline, respect, responsibility, authority and blessing. In our day and age, we so often see fathers with no life-long patriarchal authority that fathers had in the Bible.

Some people remove the word “Father” from their prayers on the basis that too many bad fathers have hurt too many children, and the image of father makes it hard for some to want to come to God. Some even go to the extent of changing it to mother or father/mother to be politically correct. We need to resist this teaching that contradicts the express teaching and example of Jesus. Irrespective of how our earthly fathers may treat us, the relationship that we have with our heavenly Father is more intimate and secure.



1. What is the difference between saying “Our Father” and saying “My Father?”
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Jesus then teaches us to pray to God “*in heaven.*” Even though we are to recognise God as our Father, he is still God, and he is not a buddy sitting on the couch next to us, or some holy bell-boy to satisfy our desires at our command. These words add an infinity to our understanding. A concept that Solomon clearly understood when he prayed, “*But will God really dwell on earth? The heavens, even the highest heaven, cannot contain you. How much less this temple I have built!*” (1 Kings 8:27). When we reflect on God's greatness, it becomes easier to have faith in order to ask of him things that seem difficult to us.

The prayer then develops into a series of seven basic petitions:

Petition 1: Honouring God's name (v9c)

The first petition is “*hallowed be you name.*”



The Greek word used for hallowed is *hagiazō*. This word is derived from the word *hagios* which means holy or sacred. Hallowed therefore means to treat something or someone as holy.



2. Why does Jesus include the concept of hallowed in his prayer?
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The phrase may seem a little awkward to us, but in the Biblical understanding, a person's name stood for every aspect of that person; authority, character, heritage and actions. When Jesus tells us that the Father's name is holy, He means that the Father's whole person is holy.

It is common for people, including Christians to have a rather profane vocabulary. If, when surprised, we use any of God's, Jesus' or the Holy Spirit's names as a cuss word, we are not giving his name the reverence it deserves, but dishonouring it. We as his disciples need to discipline our mouths and hearts to reverence the Father's name at all times.

By adding "*hallowed be your name*" to our prayer means that we are approaching God not only with the familiarity of a Father, but also with reverence and respect for his greatness and holiness. This is the first and most important lesson we need to learn as we are learning to pray.

Petition 2: God's Kingdom on Earth (v10)

One of the greatest temptations when we pray is to quickly move onto our own list of concerns. But here we see that we are to first pray about the concerns of God's kingdom. As disciples we are to think, pray and act with God's kingdom foremost in our minds.

The Kingdom of God

The idea of the Kingdom of God is complex and can be traced all the way back to the book of Exodus. Here God revealed himself as Israel's King and makes a covenant with them. He knows the plans He has for them and leads them by day and night to the promised land. Later, under Samuels judgeship, the people of Israel sin in wanting a king when God was already their king (1 Samuel 8).

At the start of the New Testament, John the Baptist comes proclaiming, "*Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near*" (Matthew 3:2). A message that Jesus takes up in Matthew 4:17. When He sends out his disciples with the authority to do miracles, they also proclaim "*The kingdom of God is near you*" (Luke 10:9,11). Essentially the Kingdom was here in Jesus, and also in us through His Holy Spirit. However it will only come completely when Jesus returns to earth to reign over all as King and Lord (Revelation 11:15).



3. Jesus is asking us to pray that the Kingdom of God will come soon. In what ways is this Kingdom manifested today?
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Petition 3: God's will in our lives (v10)

This petition can actually be seen as a condition for prayer: that all our prayers first conform to God's perfect will. How can we pray the kind of prayer that Jesus wants, yet still ask for trivial desires that are contrary to God's revealed will in the Bible? Part of Jesus' teaching on prayer, therefore, is to first determine God's will and then to pray along those lines. Our prayers are not to be selfish, but in line with, and guided by God's will.

Petitions 2&3 are both seeking for the Kingdom and God's will to be manifested on earth. Not only in our own lives, but in the lives of every believer, in every city, in every country,

not only in the future, but from today onwards.

Petition 4: God's daily provision

Only now do we move on to ourselves. Not in terms of wants, but needs - “Give us today our daily bread.”



There are two interesting words in this phrase that are specific in their meanings: The word translated “today” is the Greek word *semēron*. The word translated “daily,” is the Greek word *epiousios*. The real meaning of this word is one matter that Biblical scholars love to debate. It has been interpreted to mean either “for today” or “for tomorrow.” It is irrelevant which of the two meanings it is because what the word shows is that it is a prayer for the immediate and not distant future.

Not only is bread a staple part of one's life, but throughout Scripture it is used to show God's presence and provision. During the time of the exodus, the Israelites had to gather only enough manna to see them through the next 24 hours, except on the eve of a Sabbath. This was symbolically represented in the Tabernacle with ten loaves of manna being displayed on the Table of the Shewbread (symbolising God's complete provision for His people). The word “bread” is often used for food generally, but is extended to mean all of those things that we need to sustain us.



4. What then are the implications of this petition?



5. In terms of the words “give us” what then is our attitude to be?

It seems that so many people want to break free from the necessity of praying this prayer Even though not everyone desires to be rich, many would like to be comfortable. People try to accumulate enough money so that they do not have to worry - or pray - about where our next meal will come from.

I do not believe that Jesus wants us to be poverty-stricken even it may sometimes happen to us. What He desires is that we develop the habit of relying upon our Father for everything.



6. Should we thank God for our food if we have earned the money for it by our own labour? Give reasons for your answer.
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I am sure you have heard people teach that we should pray for others' needs, but never for our own, believing that God will provide without us even asking. Even though that sounds pious and faithful, it goes against Jesus' teaching. Here he is saying that we are to ask God for our daily needs.

Petition 5: Forgiveness (6:12, 14-15)

Just like we need to ask daily for our daily bread, we also we need to ask daily for forgiveness, however petition 5 has a twist. The prayer is: *“Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.”*

There are three Greek words used here and in Luke's version of the prayer in relationship to sin. Different translations and traditions have used different English words in order to express the Greek understanding behind these words: *“debt,” “trespass”* and *“sin.”*



“Debt” (Matthew 6:12) is the Greek word *opheilema*, which simple means something that is owed. In terms of morality it means a fault.

“Trespass” (Matthew 6:14-15) is the Greek word *paraptoma*. This word has been defined in Lexicons to mean a deviation from the path. In a spiritual sense: a deviation from moral standards.

“Sin” (Luke 11:4) is the Greek word *hamartia*. This is the action of departing from God's law. Elsewhere it has been defined as missing the mark.

A common error in misinterpretation here has been to say that we are requesting God to forgive us while we are forgiving others (as seen in Eugene Peterson's *The Message*). But this is not the case, for the word *“as”* actually means *“in the same manner”* (see Strong's Concordance). What we are actually praying is that if we forgive others only a little and hold grudges, we are asking God to do exactly the same to us.

Jesus explains this point in more detail in verses 14&15 when He says *“For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.”* (6:14-15)



7. What are the implications of this petition of forgiveness in our own lives?
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8. To some this may seem like trying to obtain salvation through works. Given the context of these verses and how Jesus lived His life, is this true? Give reasons for your answer.
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Forgiveness is the hardest thing we can do in our lives especially with the people we have a relationship of trust with; husbands, wives, fathers, mothers, children, brothers, sisters and our best friends. Often we feel like withdrawing in order to protect ourselves, but the path of health is forgiveness. The path of healing is forgiving.

Petition 6: Lead us not into temptation (6:13)

This sixth petition goes beyond asking for forgiveness; it asks for help in our times of trial and temptation so that we do not sin so as to require forgiveness.



9. It would seem from this verse that God could lead us into temptation, but is this so? Give a reason for your answer.
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I do not believe that people desire to be tempted, however we are attracted to sinful things and tend to flirt dangerously with them. Without Christ's help, our resistance is low. This petition, "*lead us not into temptation,*" teaches us the importance of not flirting with sin and reminds us to call upon the Father for strength when we are tempted.

Even though God does not tempt us or lead us into sin, he does allow us to be tested by it. He often allows circumstances to stretch us so that He can remould us into his own image. As James tells us: "*Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance*" (James 1:2-3).



10. Name some great men of the Bible who were tested.
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11. How are we different to those men?

Trials can be positive, and Jesus would not teach us to pray to escape what will ultimately strengthen us.

Petition 7: Deliver us from the Evil One (v13)

This is the seventh, and final, petition, and is one for our deliverance from the evil one.

Essentially this petition is a recognition of our spiritual warfare against sin. Not only do we have our own temptations to deal with, but also the one who is the ultimate tempter – the devil himself. If we only had our own strength to rely on, we would be no match for him. We need to call out to God to rescue us, for salvation from the enemy.

Doxology (v13c – depending on translation)

“For Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen.”

Depending on the translation you are using, or which denomination you belong to, this ending is not always read or heard. It is generally accepted that this was not part of the original text, but was added at a later stage in order to complete the prayer for liturgical use within the Protestant church. It is based on 1 Chronicles 29:11-13, and is generally referred to as the doxology (from the Greek *doxa*, meaning praise, and *logos*, meaning word). Whatever way you look at it, it is a fitting way to conclude the prayer, and ties in beautifully with the Salutation and Petition 1.



12. What kind of people would have difficulty praying this prayer?

This is a prayer for those who are obedient disciples and who desire to know God as He is, as the perfect Father, full of glory and holiness, and serves as a foundation for all prayer.



Challenge for the Week

Pray this prayer a couple of times through the week thoughtfully and reverently, allowing its vocabulary to become your own. Then use it to guide you in your own prayers that are direct from the heart.