

# LIVING THE LORD'S PRAYER

*The Way of the Disciple*



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FOREWORD BY GERALD L. SITTSER

  
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# Preface

## *Guiding Spiritual Formation*



ONE DAY, A DISCIPLE SAW JESUS PRAYING. After Jesus finished, the disciple said, “Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples” (Luke 11:1). Surprisingly, Jesus did not respond with a method or technique. Rather, he responded with words that captured the essence of his teaching and ministry. This prayer quickly became a treasure of the early church. Jews and Gentiles preparing for Christian baptism found out about it rather late in their formation and then, like all Christians, committed to praying it three times a day.

The prayer is found in only two Gospels (see Matthew 6:9-13; Luke 11:2-4). All Christians today pray the longer version found in Matthew. The concluding doxology (“For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory, now and forever”) does not date back to Jesus; scribes of Matthew’s Gospel added it later.

Many people have looked on this text as more than simply a prayer. In his commentary on the Lord’s Prayer composed around 198–200 C.E., Tertullian, a priest of the Christian community of Carthage in North Africa, referred to it as a *breviarium totius evan-*

gellii, “an abridgement of the entire Gospel.” Eighteen centuries later, Rowan Williams, the Archbishop of Canterbury, wrote, “If somebody said, give me a summary of Christian faith on the back of an envelope, the best thing to do would be to write Our Lord’s Prayer.” Clearly, the prayer encapsulates the good news of Jesus.

Down through history, great saints and mystics have commented and reflected on this prayer. The list of names is impressive: Augustine, Francis of Assisi, Julian of Norwich, Teresa of Avila, Martin Luther, John Wesley and Simone Weil, to name a few who instantly come to mind.

*Living the Lord’s Prayer: The Way of the Disciple* is my commentary and reflection on this prayer of Jesus. I consider the prayer to be a trustworthy guide for spiritual formation and a compact handbook for holiness. Viewed in this way, the prayer offers both interesting insights and practical tips for growing more deeply in our baptismal commitment to become *Christian*, which literally means “little Christ.” To *live*—rather than to simply *say*—the words of the Lord’s Prayer is to walk in the way of the disciple.

Each chapter is a reflection on one phrase of this prayer. I have chosen not to reflect on the concluding doxology, since it did not come from the mouth of Jesus and was a later scribal addition.

For each phrase, I turn to Jesus and the rich Jewish tradition that he lived and breathed, to help grasp its significance. Indeed, the prayer traditionally has been called the “Lord’s Prayer” precisely because its words, attitudes and actions come straight from Jesus’ life. These words, attitudes and actions set the standard and are the benchmark for us disciples to reach our truest identity as little Christs.

I also turn to great people and classics of spirituality to help illustrate how these words, attitudes and actions have been lived in the past by the great witnesses who have trod the disciple’s way before us. Sometimes I tell the stories of people I have met in my

life and ministry as friar, priest, spiritual director and teacher. To respect the latter's privacy, I have changed their names and the details of their stories.

I have placed reflection questions at the end of each chapter; these questions can be used for personal meditation, for spiritual direction sessions or in small-group discussions. I have also placed two references to the Gospels at the end of each chapter; these passages capture an aspect of the chapter and can be used for personal prayer.

I first met Jerry Sittser in my office at Mayslake Ministries on a cold March morning in 2008. His sincerity, humility and self-depreciating humor were not only disarming but also made me realize he's the "real deal." Upon meeting Jerry and hearing his story, you know he's been tried and tested—and yet he continues to faithfully walk the way of the disciple. I am deeply humbled and grateful that he agreed to write the foreword to this book. I could think of no one better to write it.

I hope that as we continue to pray the Lord's Prayer, we give flesh to its words by the way we live. Then and only then will we be formed into our truest identity as little Christs.

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