



THY KINGDOM COME
NOVENA



the
**LORD'S
PRAYER**

Ten lessons
and one great hope

Archbishop of York
Stephen Cottrell

Thy Kingdom Come: Novena
(Written by Archbishop of York Stephen Cottrell)
Copyright © 2025 Thy Kingdom Come.
Used with permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

Scripture quotations taken from The Holy Bible, New International Version® NIV®
Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.
Used with permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

New Revised Standard Version Bible: Anglicized Edition, copyright © 1989, 1995
National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America.
Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

Cover photo: Joris Visser (unsplash.com)
Photography provided by unsplash.com and stock.adobe.com.
Photos used with permission.



THY KINGDOM COME
NOVENA

the
LORD'S
PRAYER

Ten lessons
and one great hope

Archbishop of York
Stephen Cottrell

Introduction

What is prayer for?

Listening to prayer being offered in church, you'd be forgiven for thinking the idea is to change God's mind. Or maybe to let God know what's going on down here. But that can't be right.

Just before He teaches His disciples the prayer we call the *Lord's Prayer*, Jesus says that God '*knows what you need before you ask Him*' (Matthew 6:8).

In which case, why pray at all? Or to ask the question again: what is prayer for? Well, perhaps it's to change *our* mind.

The Lord's Prayer is an education in desire. God may know what we need: but we don't. It teaches us what to want and how to live, as well as what to pray for.

At a recent meeting of bishops in the Church of England we were addressed on Zoom by a young climate activist from Uganda, one of those places in the world where the debilitating effects of the climate emergency are felt most

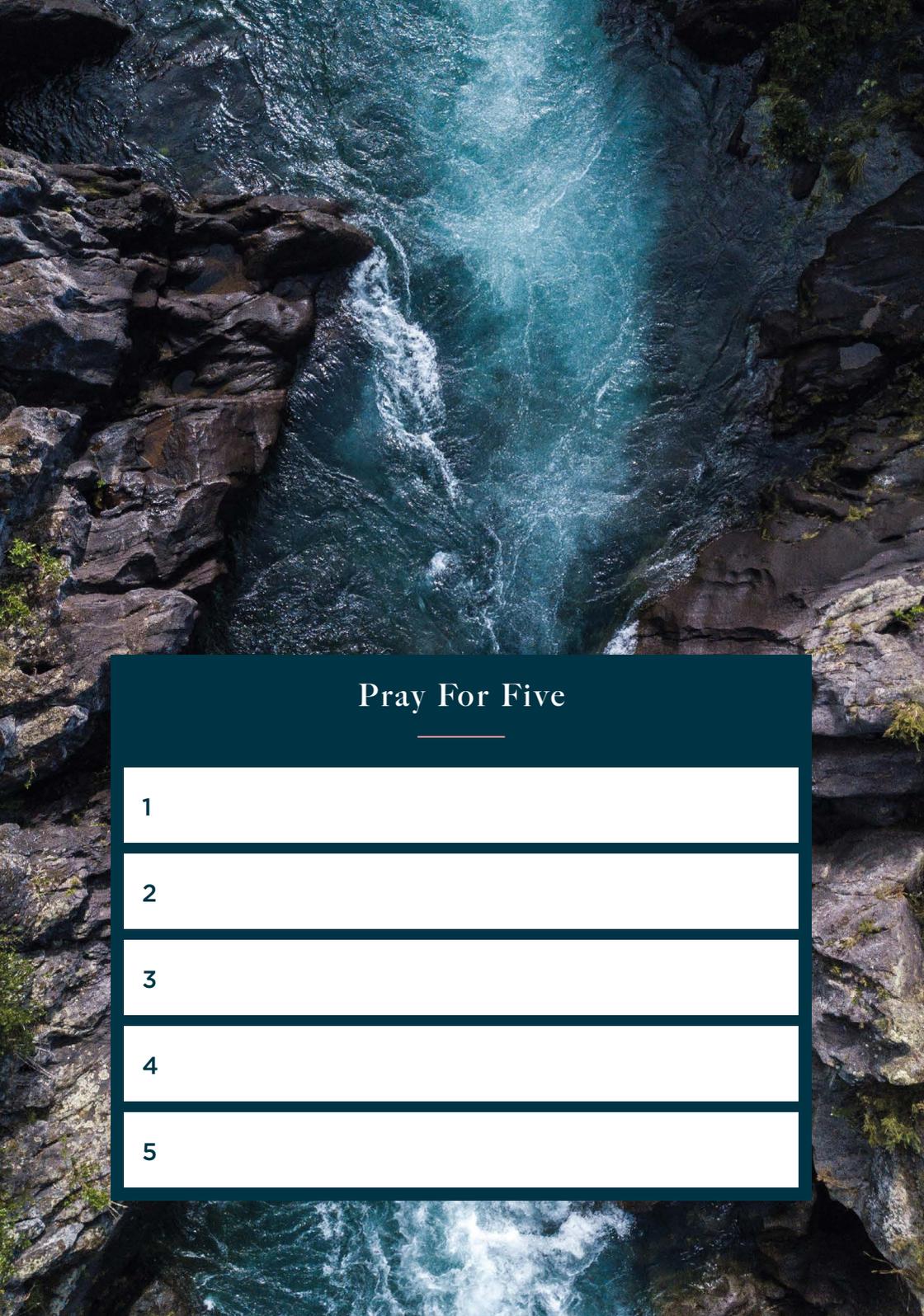
keenly. She was asked about where she found her vision and resolve. She replied by speaking about her Christian faith, the narrative of hopeful change that faith declares, and the life of prayer. In prayer, she said, 'we envision a world that we cannot see with our eyes'.

Prayer is for God. We are God's children and we offer God our praise and adoration. We acknowledge God's sovereignty. We seek God's way. We discover God's vision. And we pray for others that they may know this too.

Thy Kingdom Come celebrates its tenth anniversary this year. For ten years we have been praying *Thy Kingdom Come*. In particular, each year, we have been praying for five people we know that they may come to know Jesus. This year, as we continue in this pilgrimage of prayer, we focus on the prayer that Jesus taught us: the prayer that teaches us how to pray and live, the prayer that contains this amazing hope, *Thy Kingdom Come!*

As we come to know Jesus, and as new people come to know Him, so may God's kingdom be alive in us all.

The Archbishop of York, Stephen Cottrell



Pray For Five

1

2

3

4

5

God is intimate and holy

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name...

Matthew 6:9

Jesus teaches us to call God ‘Father’.

Even though we know that God is neither male nor female, and even if some of us have had difficult relationships with our parents or challenging relationships with our father, what Jesus is showing us is that, though human relationships may let us down, God won’t. Our relationship with God is the beautiful, intimate relationship that is best understood as like the relationship between a loving parent and a dearly-loved and cherished child.

It is all there in the opening word of the Lord’s Prayer: Father! Which, by the way, in the Aramaic Jesus spoke and the Greek in which it is written down for us in the New Testament, is the first word. Our English translation is ‘Our Father’. But a literal translation of the Greek would be ‘*Father of ours*.’

The order of the words don’t really matter, of course. But the ordering of relationships

does. As we say the Lord’s Prayer, so we place ourselves in the good ordering of this loving and intimate relationship with God.

And because we’ve said it so often, and as with so much else in the prayer, there is a danger we take the words for granted and overlook the radical content of what we are saying.

Yes, God is the all-powerful and all-creative Creator of everything.

Yes, God is the just Judge who will bring all things to completion and perfection at the end of time.

Yes, God is awesome and beyond us, the source of everything, all-knowing and almighty.

Yet we call God, *Father*. Or even *Dad*. For one of the words that Jesus uses in the gospels when He prays to the Father is the Aramaic word, *Abba* (see *Mark 14:36*), the



tender affectionate term of endearment that a child uses. For now we know that we are children of God; that God's power is the power of love.

As well as *Father*, the Lord's prayer also says that God's name is *hallowed*. The God who is revealed to us in Jesus is both the most intimate *and* the most holy. We need to

understand both: the closeness of God and the awesome majesty of God.

As we pray for the five people we know whom we long to know Jesus, let us pray that they may know God as intimately and confidently as a child knows the parent who loves them and as the one who is the source and end of everything.

We belong to each other

Our Father...

Matthew 6:9

As the first word of the Lord's Prayer tells us about our relationship with God, so the second – or the first in English – tells us about our relationship with each other.

It isn't *my* Father or *my* God, but *ours*.

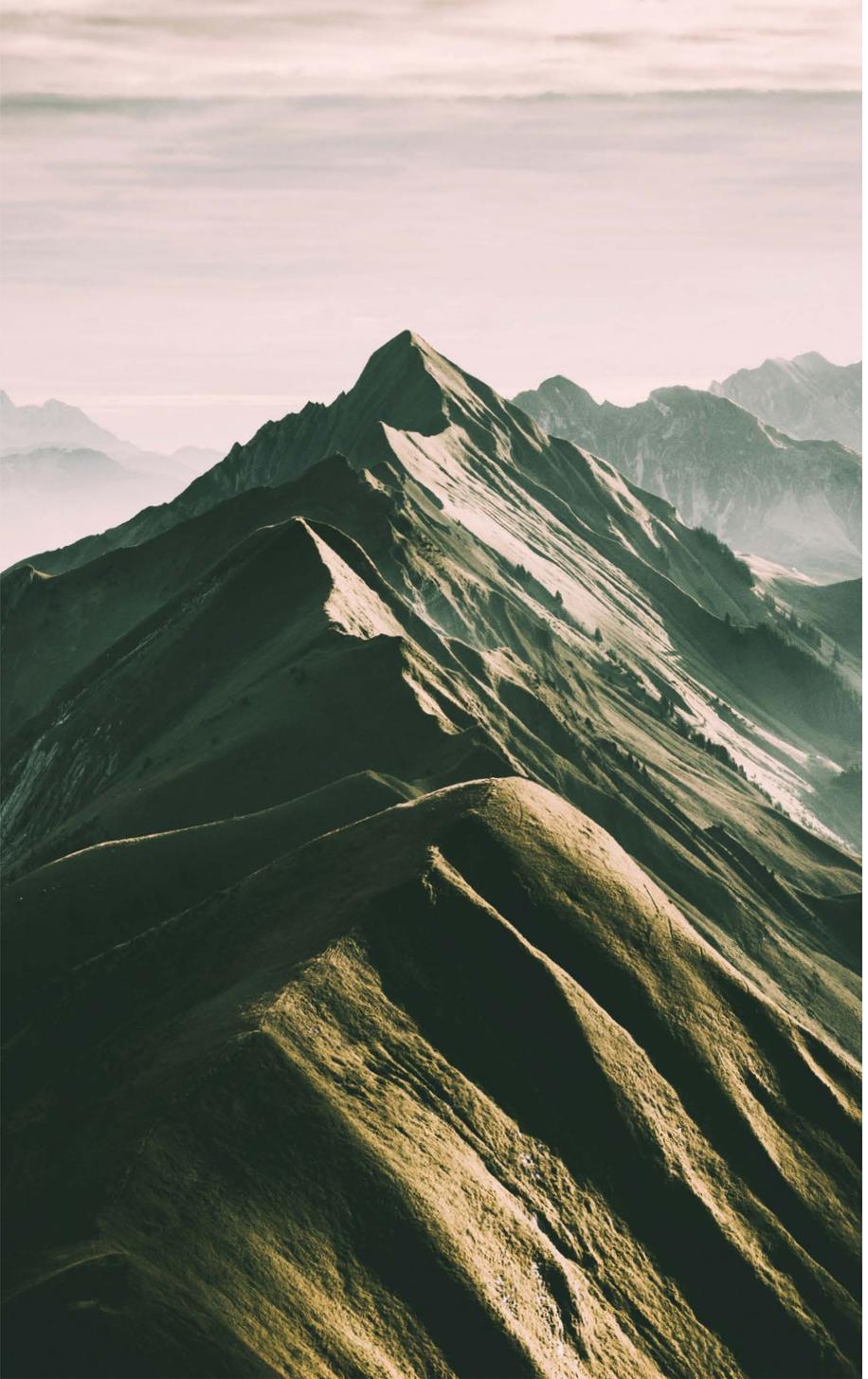
As we say this prayer we declare a deep belonging to one another. In fact, if we change the prayer from the first person plural to the first person singular, the prayer wouldn't just be changed, it would be destroyed. It is only the beautiful prayer it is because it is *ours*, not *mine*.

I'm not just asking for *my* daily bread. I'm not just asking for *my* sins to be forgiven. I do want to pray for what I need. I do need to be forgiven, but I must not separate out my needs from the needs of my sisters and brothers. The Lord's Prayer is a prayer for *everyone* to be fed and for *everyone* to be reconciled to God and to each other. Therefore, in a single

word, the radical heart of the Christian faith is revealed. In Christ, barriers of separation and distinctions of race, ethnicity, sexuality, gender, class, caste, and kin are reconfigured into what the Apostle Paul calls 'a new humanity' (see, for instance, Ephesians 2:15).

The Christian Faith always challenges us to welcome strangers, to love one another, to dismantle barriers. As we say even this one word of the Lord's Prayer we commit ourselves to demonstrate on earth the radical hospitality of God. This isn't easy. Loving neighbours includes loving enemies. We don't get to choose who's in and who's out. Everyone who says this prayer is my sister and my brother.

We pray for our five people today. As we do so, let's remember everyone else who is praying Thy Kingdom Come around the world, each with different needs and perspectives. And let's remember the five people that each of them are praying for.



God has a purpose for our lives and for the world

Your kingdom come...

Matthew 6:10

The Kingdom of God isn't a place. You can't find it on a map. Its boundaries run through human hearts. It isn't like the kingdoms of the world. It is not driven by the love of power, but by the power of love.

Strangest of all, it is almost a kingdom without a king. Yes, of course, we *call* Jesus 'King of Kings' and 'Lord of Lords', and He is the one to whom every knee must bow. Yet He's also the one who stoops to wash our feet (see John 13:3-5); who humbles Himself; who comes to us as one who serves (see Luke 22:27); and who was obedient to suffering death (see Philippians 2:6-8). So when we speak about the kingdom of God and when we pray, 'Thy kingdom come', we are referring to God's rule of justice and peace: that the servant-hearted leadership that we see in Jesus may be the hallmark of the leadership of the world.

Therefore, Jesus teaches us about the kingdom, and in His own life and ministry

shows us what living as a child of God's kingdom looks like.

We become citizens of God's kingdom by the free grace poured out for us in Christ by His death and resurrection; but, as a consequence of grace, we are called to live like Jesus as well. As Jesus is compassionate, merciful, hungry for justice and servant-hearted, we must be too. This is how God's kingdom comes and how its boundaries are extended.

Jesus Himself taught us that we should receive this kingdom as a child and that children are the greatest in the kingdom (see Mark 10:14-15).

To pray 'Thy kingdom come' is to ask the Holy Spirit to make us children of this kingdom. Not childish, but with child-like trust in God, for it is this parent child relationship which is the defining characteristic of our relationship with God. Therefore, we do not seek our own way or our own dominion over others, but God's.



Today we ask this not just for ourselves, but for those we love, for the leaders of the nations, and for all those who have responsibility over others or influence and

agency in the affairs of this world; and for the five people we know who do not yet know Jesus.

Prayer is not about trying to change God's mind – but the other way round!

Your will be done...

Matthew 6:10

God's will is like the single unifying note played throughout the universe to which everything else and every one of us and all creation must be tuned in order to find the harmony we long for. It is mysterious and beautiful. But when we hear it, it is compelling. And like the greatest treasure or a pearl of great price we seek it (see Matthew 13:44-45).

Just like an orchestra tuning up, the principal oboist ascends to the stage and plays a note which everyone else then tunes their instrument to, Jesus comes to embody and reveal the will of God, God's way of being human, and God's rescue mission to the world to reconcile us to God and to each other.

What we must do is tune in. We do this by listening to Jesus and learning from Him. Therefore, when we pray, although we ask things of God and bring everything to God (God is, after all, our loving Father) prayer is

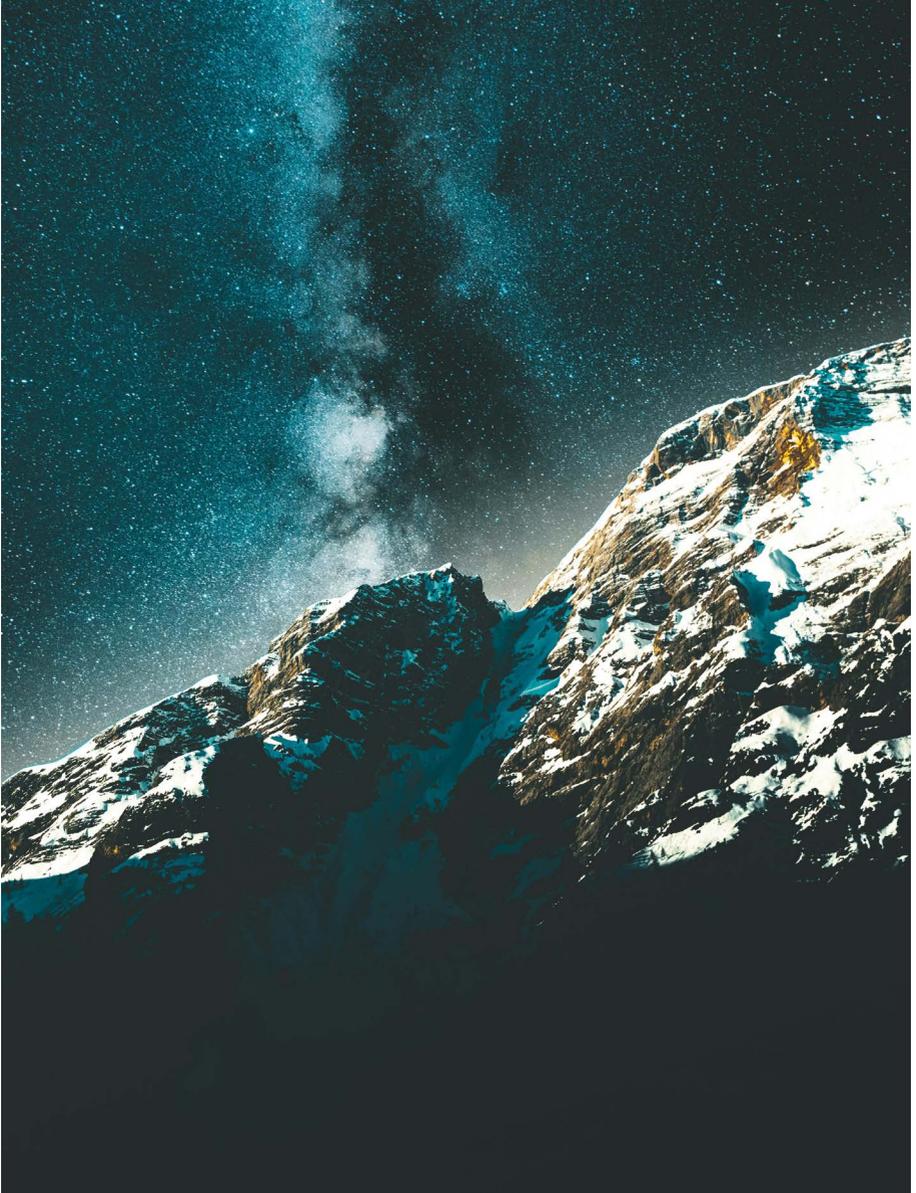
essentially about the alignment of our minds and hearts to the will of God.

We rarely know what's best for us, let alone what's best for the world. Left to our own devices, we follow our own way and build our own kingdoms.

We believe we know best. Therefore our prayer often sounds like we're trying to get God onto our side, like we're trying to change God's mind!

But really it's the other way round. God wants to change us. And it is by prayer, by tuning in to the will of God, that by the Holy Spirit dwelling within us, embodying the will of God as we find it in Jesus, we are changed.

We need our hearts and minds tuned to the will of God. This will not only be good news for our lives, it is the only way of finding lasting joy and peace.



It is also very good news for a confused and combative world where the powerful and the vengeful seek their own kingdoms and impose their own will. Only what we see and receive in Jesus can save us. This is why we pray, 'Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done'.

So we pray that the people we are praying for today may encounter and apprehend the will of God as it is revealed in Jesus. And then tune in. Or to be more accurate, to be so open to the grace of God that God tunes them into the waveband of the kingdom.

Earth is supposed to be like heaven

On earth, as it is in heaven...

Matthew 6:10

The first part of the Lord's Prayer concludes with a petition that echoes the great biblical vision of a new creation and a new humanity, a new heaven and a new earth (see Revelation 21:1-2).

This is often misunderstood. The promise of the gospel isn't really us going up to heaven, but heaven coming down to earth; or, as the Book of Revelation describes it, a new creation.

Therefore, everything we pray for is gathered in to the phrase, 'on earth as it is in heaven'.

May God's name be hallowed *on earth as it is in heaven*.

May God's kingdom come *on earth as it is in heaven*.

May God's will be done *on earth as it is in heaven*.

The second part of the prayer shows us what we should be asking for ourselves as citizens of heaven.

Halfway through the very famous *Hallelujah Chorus* of Handel's great Oratorio, *Messiah*, the choir breaks off from its triumphant phrases to declare, 'The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our God and of His Christ' (Revelation 11:15). This too, like every bit of Handel's *Messiah*, is a quotation from scripture, again from the Book of Revelation. It is a declaration of the great Christian hope; a longing for heaven which we now understand to be a re-creation and a re-ordering of the whole creation according to and guided by the loving purposes of God. In this new creation God reigns for ever. There is no need for sun or moon because Jesus is the light. There is no temple, because in Jesus we all now have access to God. We worship in Him and through Him (see Revelation 21:22-23). Its gates are never shut (Revelation 22:24).



As we pray, Thy kingdom come, we are praying for earth to be heavenly, for the things of heaven to be seen on earth, and for the people we are praying for to arrive at that point where they too sing Alleluia and worship the Servant King. All because they

glimpse the new creation and long for it to be established in the earth. And we also pray for ourselves: may God's kingdom be seen in us; may God's light shine through us; may our lives bear witness to an earth which is like heaven, and be living signposts to God.

This is what enough looks like – and why it matters

Give us today our daily bread...

Matthew 6:11

It took me a long while to grasp what this first specific ‘ask’ of the Lord’s Prayer is actually all about. There is a sense in which it can mean the bread of eternal life. It certainly takes on this meaning when we say it just before we receive Holy Communion, as is the tradition in most churches. But its basic meaning is altogether simpler. And very hard to live out.

It means, ‘give me what I need for today and stop me wanting more than my share’.

In which case it may be the most important and most radically challenging prayer we will ever say, especially in a world and in an economic system that trains us and expects us to want more – not just today’s bread, but tomorrow’s as well.

In the West many of us have so much more than enough. We don’t seem to mind if others go hungry, or if the whole planet burns

because we want cheap meat each day and strawberries at Christmas.

The whole human race urgently needs to learn what ‘enough’ looks like: so that the world is fed, but also in order for the planet to be saved.

This is the great and uncomfortable challenge of these words. Every time we say, ‘give us today our daily bread’, we are committing ourselves to inhabiting the world differently: recognising our need, but also acknowledging our interdependence with all our sisters and brothers across the world – and with the earth itself.

Many people in the West worry that there aren’t so many younger people in our churches nowadays. Is it all too challenging, they wonder?

I think the opposite. It’s not challenging enough. Younger people – maybe the five people we’re praying for – may be more



excited by the call of the gospel when they see the clarity and challenge of following Jesus and living like Jesus and rise to the challenge of saying this prayer and trying to mean it.

For if we could say these words and mean them, life would be changed.

So we pray today for those who have no daily bread and for those who have far too much. Help us to change. We ask this for ourselves in all the compromises we live with, and for those for whom we are praying that they may encounter the radical challenge of the gospel.

We all get lost sometimes

And forgive us our sins...

Matthew 6:12 ¹

The tricky word ‘sin’ is an update on the older word ‘trespass’. Many people and churches still use the version of the Lord’s Prayer which speaks of trespasses rather than sins.

Now ‘trespass’ is not a word we use much in everyday conversation. There is, however, one exception which may turn out to be quite helpful in learning what this petition of the Lord’s Prayer means.

‘Don’t trespass on the grass,’ and ‘Trespassers will be prosecuted,’ are still phrases we know. Trespass therefore means going where you shouldn’t go.

This is also a good way of explaining sin.

It is about going in the wrong direction, of being in the wrong place, of finding yourself where you shouldn’t be, of getting lost.

Sin, therefore, isn’t just what we do wrong or

say wrong (though it is this!), it can also be the wrong, hateful and selfish ideas which take hold of us and lead us down the wrong roads and poison our spirit – even if we don’t actually act on the things we are thinking.

Sin is deeper and more dangerous than just doing bad stuff. It is being completely lost. It is trespassing far from the path of goodness and peace that God maps out for us. And when you’re lost, and when the place you’re lost in is dark, dangerous, and all-consuming, then what you really need is someone to guide you home, someone who can shine a light that leads in the right direction.

The whole of the Christian faith is about God’s great love for us in Jesus Christ who comes to a people – us! – who are walking in darkness and going the wrong way, and shining a great light. His death on the cross, His taking on Himself the consequences of all our trespassing, is the defeat of sin and death and darkness.



Like the thief who cried out to Jesus on the cross, ‘Jesus, remember me’ (Luke 23:42), the Lord’s Prayer teaches us to do the same: ‘Forgive us our sins. Help us find the right way. Show us in Jesus the way that leads to life. Help us to follow.’

Our penitence is the right response to God’s amazing forgiveness. We walk His way with humble and grateful hearts.

So we pray for penitent hearts; and because we know it is a stubborn lack of penitence and a hardening of heart that often get in the way of knowing and receiving Christ, we pray for those we are praying for to be able to stop and see where their lives are going in the wrong direction, turn around and seek the way of Christ.

¹ I am using the words of the Lord’s Prayer that are familiar, but the actual word in the Bible isn’t ‘sin’ or ‘trespass,’ but debt.

We give from the overflow of what we have received

... as we forgive those who sin against us.

Matthew 6:12 ²

Blessed are the merciful,' said Jesus, 'they will receive mercy.' (Matthew 5:7)

To which we might also add: 'Blessed are those who receive mercy, they shall be merciful to others.' For this is the one petition in the Lord's Prayer which comes with a condition attached: 'Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.'

This is hard. We like the idea of our sins being wiped away. We are less keen on offering this mercy to others. Paul reminds us that Jesus died for us, making peace with God 'while we were still sinners.' (Romans 5:2) i.e. when we were unpenitent; when we didn't even know about the grace and goodness of God, let alone seek it.

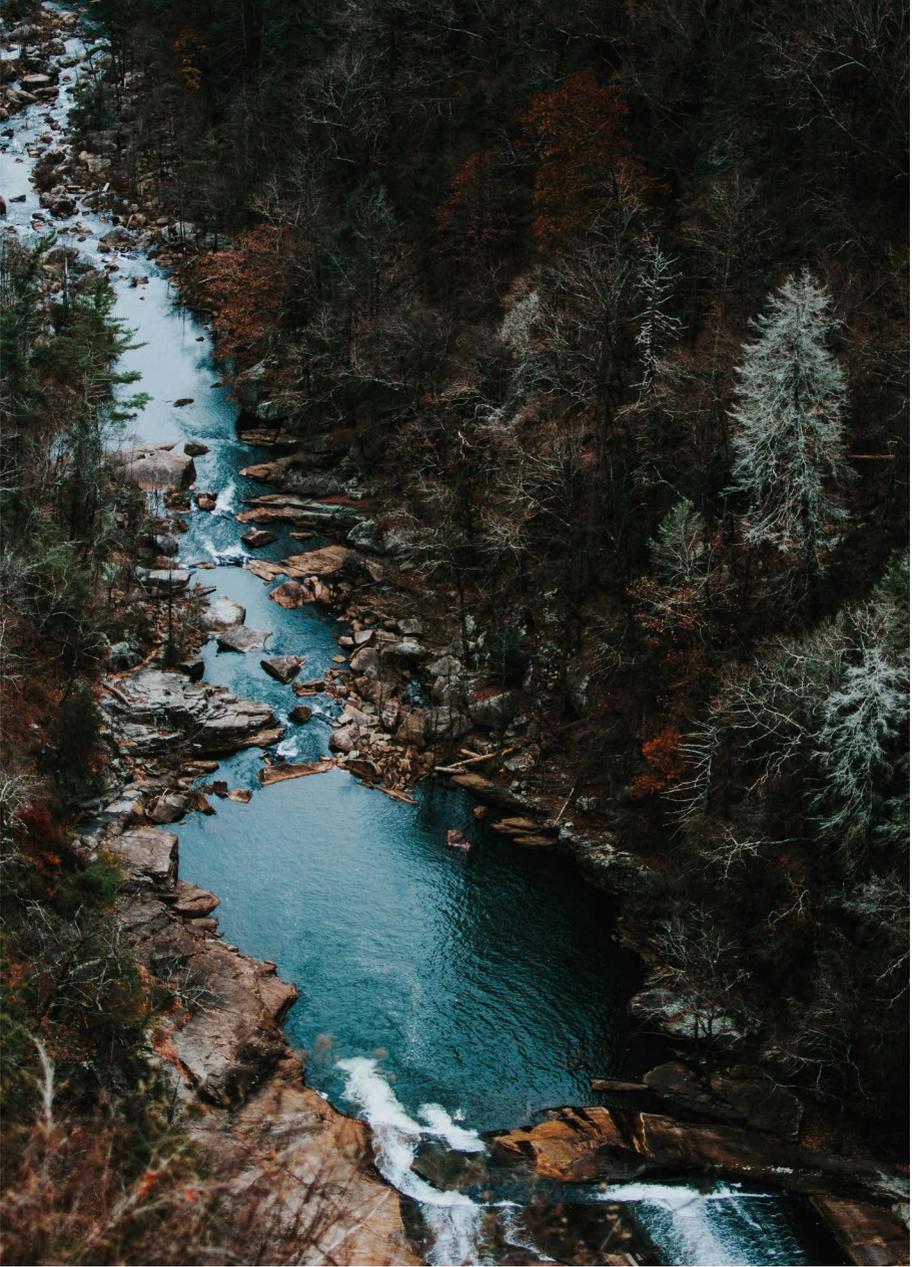
So it remains true, that in Jesus every person is offered the liberating gift of forgiveness and perhaps our best and most honest response to the challenge of this petition in the Lord's Prayer is to make sure we are ready to offer

forgiveness and ready to seek out ways of truth and reconciliation so that there can be honesty, understanding, and penitence. In this way we are ready and able to give to others the mercy we know we need ourselves and have so gratefully received. There is no other way to break the cycle of retribution and revenge that fuels the conflicts and conquests of the world, hardening people against one another and creating only more misery and violence.

Hence, we cannot ask for forgiveness without also praying for the grace to be forgiving. 'How many times?' Peter asked Jesus. 'As many as seven?' 'No,' said Jesus. 'Seventy times seven.' (Matthew 18:21-22)

So go on asking for forgiveness.

Go on being ready to give that forgiveness to others.



Generous and forgiving God, cleanse our hearts and forgive our sins and make us ready to forgive others. We particularly pray that more people will come to know

you and receive your gift of forgiveness, especially the five people we are praying for at the moment.

² *Again, the actual word in the bible is debt.*

God is always there for us

Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil...

Matthew 6:12

The more we dig into this prayer, the more challenging we discover it to be, the harder it becomes to live the life that God shows us, and the easier it becomes to fall away and to live life just for ourselves. Which is why the Lord's Prayer ends, 'Lead us not into temptation' – or in some versions, 'Save us from the time of trial' – 'And deliver us from evil'.

'The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want', begins Psalm 23, another very famous and beautiful text. 'Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and your staff – they comfort me' (Psalm 23:4).

When we pray, as we must pray each day, 'Lead us not into temptation, deliver us from evil', we are claiming the protection of the God who is our shepherd and who walks with us and is alongside us in all the snares and temptations of life.

However, since God would never actually lead us into temptation (this is something everyone else will do!) some people have commented that it is a strange thing to ask for. But maybe the greatest temptation of all is to imagine that we don't need God, that we can manage on our own so that we end up putting our trust in ourselves, even to stop believing in God and believing in ourselves instead.

Oh, but this is the way that leads to all kinds of evils. Rather, the Lord's Prayer continually invites us to be ruthlessly and scrupulously honest before God. So it really means, Lord help me when I'm tempted. Because that will be often.

There are all sorts of other ways to live your life. There are many other paths to take. In these final words of the Lord's Prayer we are asking God to lead us on the way that is to life and we're praying using the words of Jesus who told us that he is that way Himself (John 14:6).



Steadfast God, amid all the snares and temptations of life lead me on the path of life eternal, save me from evil, and when I stray from the path, find me and lead me

home. Oh Good Shepherd, protect me. And not just me, all those I love, and those for whom I pray today.

God invites us to join in

**For from Him and through Him and for Him are all things.
To Him be the glory for ever! Amen.**

Romans 11:36

When we say the Lord's Prayer we nearly always finish with the formula, 'For thine is the Kingdom, the power and the glory, for ever and ever, Amen.'

These words don't actually appear in the version of the Lord's Prayer that Jesus teaches His disciples, but as you can see from the quotation from Paul's letter to the Romans above, it is based upon a whole number of biblical texts which ascribe to God power and glory, and always end with the word 'Amen'.

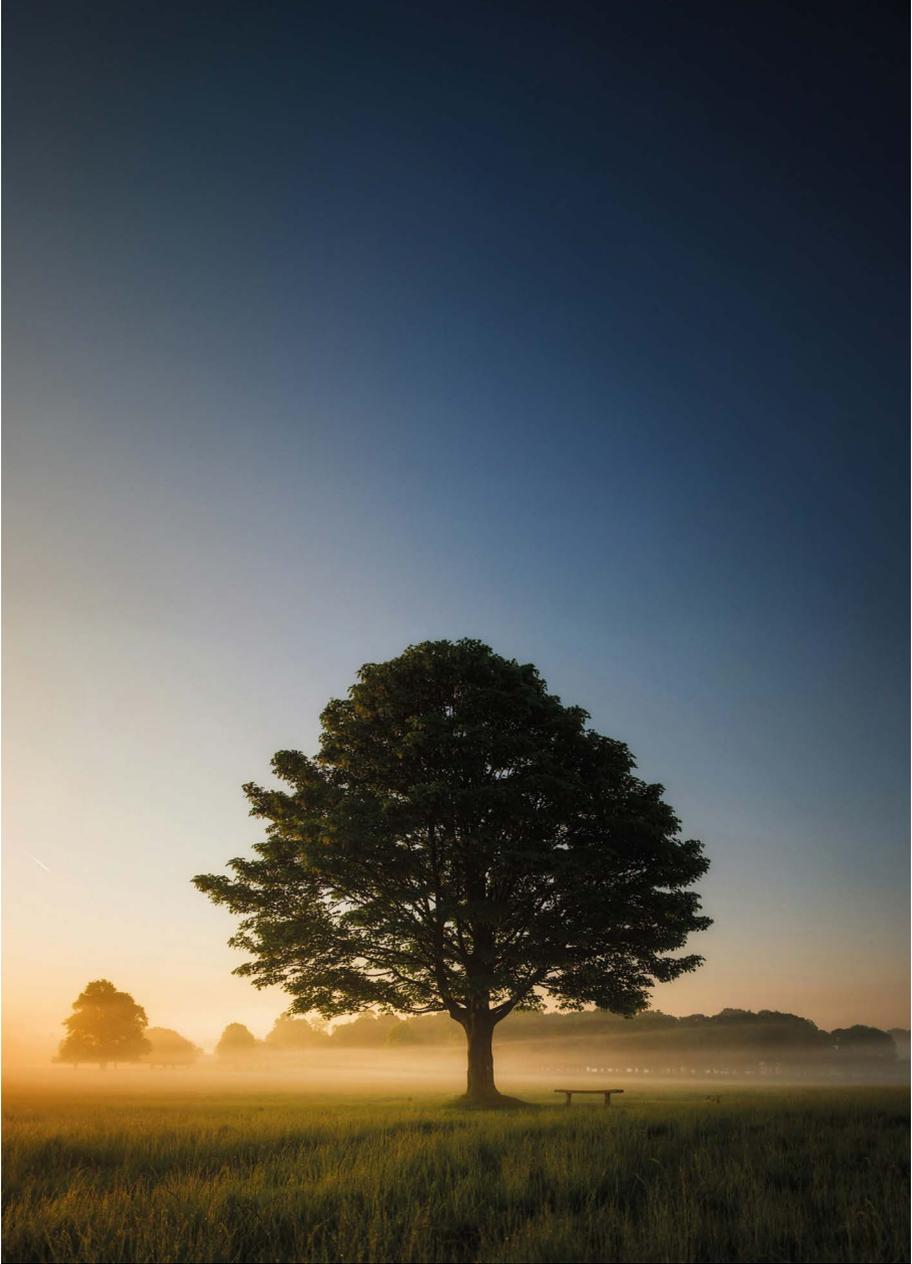
Amen means 'I agree'. It is, therefore, probably the most challenging word in the whole prayer. We are, as it were, signing our name at the bottom of this prayer, and, by pledging our agreement, committing ourselves to doing something about it. But do we?

Are we actually letting this prayer shape our lives? Do we really agree, or are we just going

along for the ride, saying 'Amen', but not actually intending to change the way we live in the ways this prayer directs?

It is for this reason that I've said elsewhere that perhaps the Lord's Prayer should come with a health warning: Be careful about saying this prayer unless you are prepared to change.

When I say 'Amen' I am saying, I agree that I have responsibilities to my neighbour. I agree that I need to seek God's Kingdom and God's will and not my own. I agree that I need to stop wanting more all the time. I agree that I am a sinner in need of God's grace, and that I must be ready to offer that grace and forgiveness to others. I agree to let go of my desire for power and my chasing after glory, and humbly follow in the way of Jesus instead. He teaches me these words so that I may know how to pray and know how to live.



Loving God, teach me to pray. Help me to live in peace with you and with my neighbour and to know your will for my life. Open my lips that I may declare your

praise. Be with those I love, especially the people I am praying for today that they may know you too. Help me to say 'Amen' and mean it.

Come Holy Spirit

Today is the great feast of Pentecost, the festival of the Holy Spirit.

‘All who are led by the Holy Spirit are children of God,’ says St Paul (Romans 8:14). We have ‘received a spirit of adoption. When we cry “Abba! Father!” it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God’ (Romans 8:15-16).

Paul goes on: ‘The Holy Spirit helps us in our weakness.’ And in those times when we don’t know how to pray, this same Spirit ‘intercedes with sighs too deep for words’ (Romans 8:26).

This is amazing and liberating stuff.

God is our Father. Made in a wonderful and God-given diversity with all our languages and cultures, we are all God’s children.

The Spirit prays within us especially when we are finding prayer difficult, and the first word the Spirit gives us is the opening word of the Lord’s Prayer!

So on this great feast day of the Holy Spirit, and as we finish our journey through the

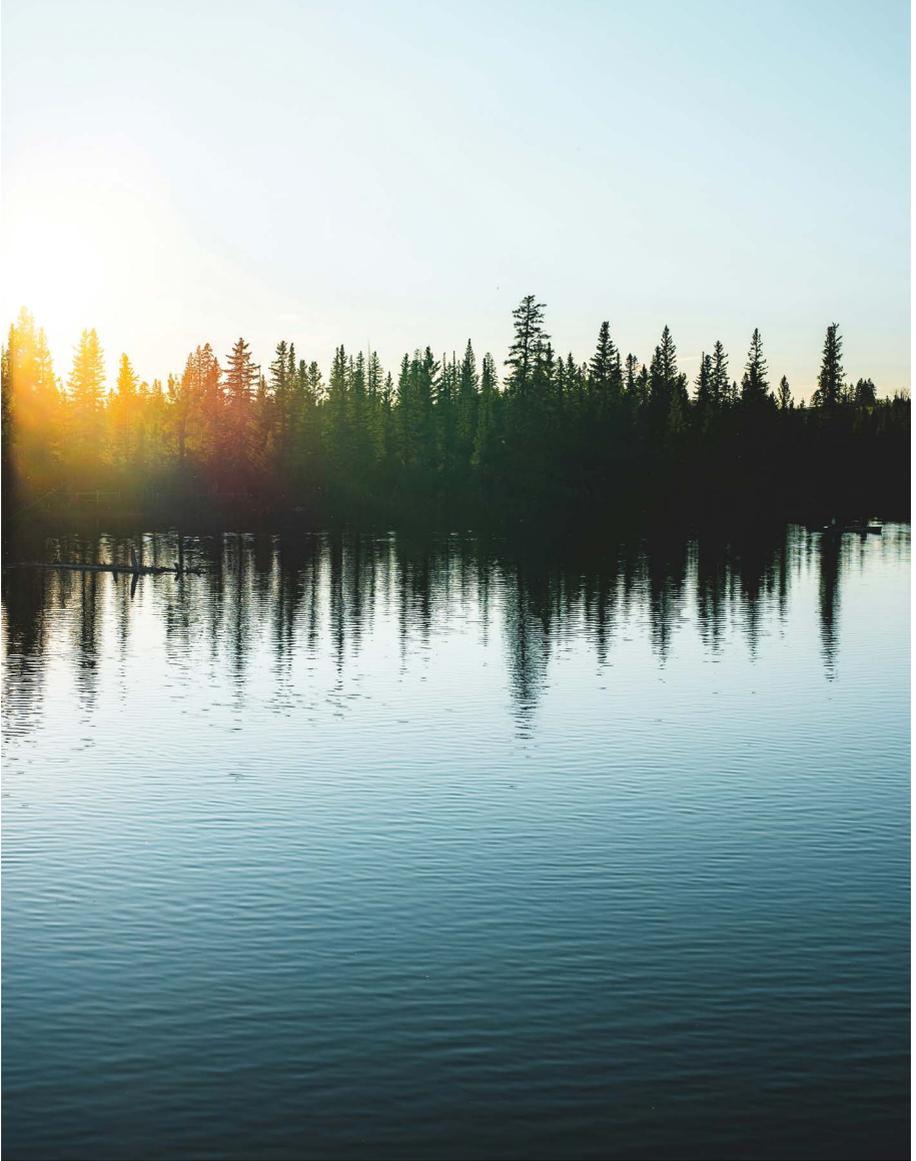
Lord’s Prayer, we humbly remember that prayer is always the work of the Holy Spirit within us.

The Holy Spirit leads and guides, opens hearts and minds, and enables the whole church to speak the diverse languages of the world, so that everyone in every place, context and culture can hear the gospel of peace.

That’s why it is so beautiful to worship with people from other languages and cultures. When we say the Lord’s Prayer together, we all say it in our mother tongue. It is a little taste of Pentecost. We’re saying the same thing, but we’re saying it in the languages of our heart. Different voices become one.

It is a great gospel truth: everyone who says this prayer is my sister and brother. And those who do not yet know this prayer, the people we have been praying for during this Novena of prayer for Thy Kingdom Come, we earnestly pray that they will come to know Jesus and make his words their own.

We pray this, because we know it is what’s best for these people we love. But we also



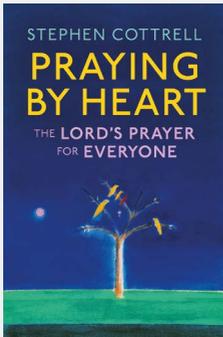
know it is good for the world. The Holy Spirit is always extending the boundaries of the Kingdom by bringing people to Jesus, and by translating the language of the gospel into the languages and cultures of the world. So that all may believe, and so that the church and the world may be one.

**Oh come Holy Spirit, speak and pray in me.
Use me for the building of God's Kingdom
in the world.**

Postscript

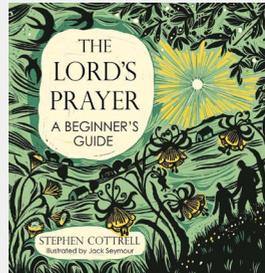
The Lord's Prayer is the most well-known and most said prayer in the world, but maybe the least understood. We say it, but do we mean it?

If you have enjoyed exploring the Lord's Prayer over the past ten days, I have written two other books that you might find helpful:



Praying by Heart, the Lord's Prayer for Everyone

is a book for adults and contains study material for small groups.



The Lord's Prayer, A Beginner's Guide

is a fully illustrated picture book for children and families explaining the meaning of the Lord's Prayer in a friendly and accessible way.



thykingdomcome.global