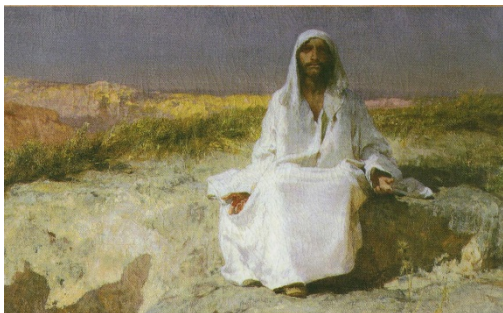


# Abba, Father

Twelve Days  
with the Lord's Prayer



An hour-a-day retreat  
for home, vacation, or  
daily walks in a favorite place.

David G. R. Keller

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## Preface

I say the Lord's Prayer often. In my faith community, the Episcopal Church, we recite or sing the Lord's Prayer at Morning and Evening Prayer and at the Eucharist (Holy Communion). Why is this prayer used so often? Is it possible to grasp its meaning from Jesus' point of view, even in an approximate way? The fact that Jesus was a Jew and not a "Christian" is often overlooked. The Lord's Prayer is a Jewish prayer. It reflects aspects of the piety and worship of Jesus' Hebrew tradition, practical wisdom discerned from his unique relationship with God, and his understanding of what God desires for individuals and society. Why did he recommend this form of prayer to his disciples? Will praying as he suggests make a difference in our lives?

## Suggestions for Your Retreat

*Abba, Father* offers opportunities to reflect on the Lord's Prayer and what it teaches us about Jesus' life of prayer:

- After a few introductory reflections, each day focuses on one or more phrases of the Lord's Prayer
- There is background information that will help you discover the meaning of the phrase or phrases from Jesus' point of view as a devout first-century Jew
- Each day offers a poetic interpretation of the phrase or phrases for that day (in a different font) as a guide to assist you in discerning the wisdom Jesus' learned and put into practice from his *Abba* expressed in that section of the Lord's Prayer

- You are invited to reflect on each day's phrase or phrases, the poetic interpretation, and to write your own interpretation.
- You will find it helpful to begin and end each hour-long "day" of the retreat with a ten minute period of contemplative prayer. If you are not familiar with this type of prayer, a format is described on page 30 of this booklet. This daily contemplative prayer is an essential part of your retreat. Keep in mind that Jesus had a pattern of going off by himself to spend quiet time with his Abba. He advised his disciples: "*But whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father...*" He was speaking of the fundamental practice of finding time to experience intimacy with God in the inner chamber of your heart.
- Beginning on page 31 you will find the text of the Lord's Prayer as it appears in the gospels of Matthew and Luke (NRSV) as well as a poetic interpretation of the Lord's Prayer by the author of this retreat booklet.
- If you have the time, you may spend more than one hour for each "day", but it is best to do only one "day" at a time.

Inclusive language: I prefer to use inclusive language in my writing unless it changes the meaning or intent of an original text. In *Abba, Father* I have chosen to retain the words Jesus used to address God in the "Lord's Prayer". The Aramaic word "abba" is congruent with Jesus' awareness of God as the source of his life, his words, and his works. "Abba" came to his lips naturally as he experienced the intimacy and respect that bonded him with God in prayer.

## A Context for Reflection on the Lord's Prayer

The four gospels reveal a four-fold pattern in Jesus' life that was the source of his life with God: *quiet listening, faithful discernment, commitment to the scriptures and worship of his faith community, and compassionate engagement with the needs of society*. Jesus always found time to listen to God, his inner self, and the world around him. This listening heart was the source of the guidance and will which, along with direct experience of God's love, led and sometimes drove him into compassionate involvement in the lives of others. All this took place in the context of and in fulfillment of his religious community. Jesus' life of prayer opened him to the vitality of God's energy and wisdom. He became a manifestation of the Abba he experienced in prayer. He loved unconditionally. He transformed what he touched and restored dignity to human lives. His experience in prayer was tangible in his daily life. Mirrored in Jesus' life is the wisdom and challenge that prayer is both a personal journey and an opportunity to transform society at the same time. Prayer and living must be congruent because they are integral parts of the same reality. As a teacher Jesus proclaims: "My life is my message."

What is the "message" of your life?

## Day One

### The origin of Jesus' prayer

*"...then the Lord God formed the human of dust from the earth, and breathed into the human's nostrils the breath of life; and the human became a living being." (Genesis 2:7)*

The early Hebrew wisdom teachers describe the first prayer. First the human (*adam* in Hebrew) is bonded with the earth (*adama* in Hebrew). The human is formed from the earth, the ground. The human is described as "dust" until "the breath of life" enters the human's physical body. Only then does the human become a "living being". The human body and God's energy are united and the creation of the human is completed. God takes the initiative. The flow of God's life-giving energy becomes the first prayer. Prayer is nothing more than the flow of energy between God and a human being. It is the source and sustaining power of human life.

As you begin this retreat, what is your experience of prayer?

The disciples asked Jesus, "Lord teach us to pray." They longed for something they did not experience in prayer. What is your longing?

In what ways has prayer connected you to God and other persons?

## Day Two

### The first and last words a child heard each day

*“Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord, alone. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down, and when you rise.” (Deuteronomy 6:4-7)*

Jesus learned to pray in his home in Nazareth. Like all children in rural villages in Galilee, Jesus was mentored and cared for by his mother until the age of seven or eight. His religious life began at home and the first words he heard each morning and the last words that entered his ears before sleep were Joseph’s recitation of the *Shema*, the foundation of all Jewish prayer: *Hear, O Israel...*” Jesus grew up learning that he must frame each day listening to God, not only with his ears, but in his heart. He learned that love of God embraces a person’s whole being at all times and in all places. Gradually, he realized that prayer bonded him to God, not only in his heart, but in his might. Prayer begins in the heart and is expressed in the power of our lives.

How do you remain rooted and grounded in God each day?

In what ways does your love of God become tangible?

## Day Three

### When you pray, say...

*“He was praying in a certain place, and after he had finished, one of his disciples said to him, ‘Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples.’” (Luke 11:1-2)*

Jesus’ response to his disciples is what we call “The Lord’s Prayer”. Although it is probably the most familiar passage in the New Testament, used both in corporate liturgies and personal prayer, it will be helpful to explore its meaning in the context of Jesus’ Hebrew culture. If the request, “*Lord, teach us to pray...*” expresses the disciples’ desire “to be like Jesus”, then the prayer can be seen both as a self-portrait of Jesus’ relationship with his “Father” and his understanding of how that intimacy relates to daily life. If this is true, then, the “Lord’s Prayer” reveals a lot about the dialog that took place in Jesus’ inner or secret chamber, his heart, and how that experience guided and energized his ministry. Jesus is sharing the essence and character of his life and not simply an instruction on “how to pray”. The Lord’s Prayer gives the disciples and us an experience of Jesus’ “consciousness”, his inner and authentic self. After Jesus’ resurrection Saint Paul urged followers of Jesus to share his consciousness: “*Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus.*” (Philippians 2:5) In the Hebrew scriptures there are many prayers. The language and images used in those prayers express what God is like in the minds of Jesus’ ancestors. They tell us a lot, too, about the lives of Jesus’ forebears and how they may have influenced him.

If the disciples wanted “to be like Jesus”, what was unique about his personal prayer and what does it reveal about his consciousness?

In what ways do you want to be like Jesus?

What does your prayer reveal about your inner consciousness?



## Day Four

### Something unique

*“He was praying in a certain place, and after he had finished, one of his disciples said to him, ‘Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples.’ And he said to them, ‘When you pray, say: Father, hallowed be your name. Your Kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread. And forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us. And do not bring us to the time of trial.’” (Luke 11:1-4 NRSV)*

Every faithful Jew in Jesus’ time joined others for prayer in the local synagogue and participated in more personal prayer in the family. The *Shema* was recited at the beginning and end of each day. The *Amidah* prayers (also called *Tefilla*, meaning “standing”) were recited along with the *Shema* (morning and evening) and in mid-afternoon at the same time the afternoon sacrifice was being made at the Temple in Jerusalem. The *Amidah* included eighteen prayers honoring God and God’s care for Israel. Some pious Jews would spend an hour in silence before reciting the *Amidah* as a way to prepare their hearts for addressing the Holy One. Each of Jesus’ disciples recited these prayers daily. Prayer was already an integral part of their lives. It is clear, then, that when they ask Jesus, “*Lord, teach us to pray...*” they want to share his unique relationship with God that was formed through his personal prayer. There is no reason to believe that their intent was to replace their traditional daily prayers.

It is in this context that Jesus responds, “*When you pray, say: ‘Father, hallowed be your name. Your Kingdom come.*

*Give us each day our daily bread. And forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us. And do not bring us to the time of trial.'"* (Luke 11:1-4)

In Matthew's gospel Jesus responds, *"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.'"* (Matthew 6:9-13)

In what ways do you want to share Jesus' relationship with God?

What does the Lord's Prayer mean to you?

## Day Five

### *“Our Father in heaven...”*

In Matthew’s gospel Jesus exhorts his disciples, *“Pray then, in this way: ‘Our Father in heaven...”* In Luke, Jesus’ response is: *“When you pray say, ‘Father’”*... In both gospels Jesus’ use of the name “Father” demonstrates a specific relationship with God. In Jesus’ experience, prayer begins with an acknowledgment of God’s intimate presence as “Father”. In Hebrew culture a name carries not only an identity, but also the agency or active influence of the person named. To call a person by name is to enter into a relationship or continue an existing relationship. To address God by name is to acknowledge a genuine bond and recall God’s prior actions that have formed and sustained that connection. At the time of his baptism Jesus became aware of a distinctive relationship with God that he would continue to experience as a filial bond between father and son. Many New Testament scholars conclude that this “consciousness” evolved and was strengthened during Jesus’ ministry based on authentic experience of God in both prayer and active ministry. It was not a static awareness based on a rational acceptance of God’s revelation during his baptism. Throughout his ministry the gospel narratives attest to Jesus’ awareness that he was loved, cared for, and empowered by God. He looked to God for guidance, wisdom, and authentication. He experienced God as a faithful father and parent and used that image in his teaching using both male and female images.

The Hebrew scriptures use the term “father” twelve times to describe what God is like in both simile and metaphor. Female images are used as well. But Jesus’ use of

“Father” as a personal title is distinctive. Since he spoke Aramaic he used the word “*abba*”. “Ab” is the word a child uses for “father”; it is informal. In Middle Eastern cultures “*abba*” reflects an intimate, affectionate, and physical relationship. “Abb-a” may mean “my father” or “our father” depending on the context. Since the gospels were written in Greek the word *πάτερ* (father) is used in place of *abba*, even though *abba* carries a more informal meaning. There are three exceptions. Mark uses “*Abba, ὁ πάτερ*” together to emphasize the intimacy of Jesus’ emotions as he prays: “*Abba, Father, for you all things are possible; remove this cup from me; yet, not what I want, but what you want.*” (Mark 14:36) St. Paul recalls Jesus use of “*abba*” when he writes “*When we cry, ‘Abba, Father it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God...*” (Romans 8:15) Paul understand clearly that the relationship Jesus had with his “*abba*” is ours as well because we are “*heirs with Christ*” (Romans 8:16) and share both his suffering and glory. To begin a prayer with *Father* or *Our Father* is to claim the most fundamental relationship in our lives. *Father* is very personal. *Our Father* is also personal, yet recognizes that we share that relationship with all those who call God *Father*.

“*Father in heaven...*”

“When you pray, turn your heart to the One who loves you and delights in you as his child.

Heaven

and earth call him Lord, yet you may call him Father and he will listen...”

What do you call God? How do you relate to God?

## Day Six

### **...hallowed be your name...**

Jesus' adult life is totally embraced and energized by his relationship with his Abba. His childlike intimacy and dependence on his Father may explain these firm instructions to his disciples: *"Let the children come to me, and do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of heaven belongs."* (Matthew 19:14) But like so many Aramaic words, "abba", has more than one meaning. A child uses it to express both affectionate bonding and more formal respect and honor. In Jesus' culture a responsible and caring father provides sustenance for and is the organizing center of family life. In addition to providing food and a dwelling, he teaches and corrects the children and protects the whole family. This does not minimize the role of the mother who, in addition to managing food, preparing meals, bringing water and making and caring for clothing, raises the children, male and female, until the age of seven or eight. But a family that loses its father is endangered and if it is torn apart, widows become vulnerable and may be cast off.

These two images of a father, and his own Hebrew scriptures, formed Jesus' experience of God. Jesus grew up reciting twice a day the eighteen blessings that acknowledged God's loving care of humankind. *"You alone reign over us. Blessed are you, O Lord, who love justice...Hear, O Lord, our God, the voice of our prayer. Show us your mercy, for you are a good and merciful God. Blessed are you, O Lord, who hear our prayer."* The gospels of Mark and John describe Jesus looking up to heaven

as he prayed. The Creator who is in heaven and is also a loving and intimate abba is the source of light and life on earth. The whole “world” (heaven and earth) are full of God’s presence and nurture. The psalms, the prophets, and the Hebrew wisdom literature are full of references to God’s concern for justice, for the care of widows and orphans, the hungry, and the poor. God is the source of wisdom that guides human lives and inspires human consciousness.

All these attributes and caring acts of God are manifestations of God’s name. As we have seen a “name” is both an identification of a person and the essence and agency of the person. Jesus exhorts his disciples to “hallow” God’s name, to reverence God’s presence in their lives as holy and worthy of honor. It is never to be abused, forgotten, or (as the Torah instructs) to be used for personal gain or control of others.

*“I trust in the steadfast love of God forever and ever. I will thank you forever, because of what you have done. In the presence of the faithful I will proclaim your name, for it is good.” (Psalm 52:8-9)*

*“...hallowed be your name.”*

“My heart falls to its knees whenever it hears  
justice,  
steadfast love, mercy, and wisdom sing Alleluia  
to  
your name. All names have their home in you  
and  
long to bless you.”

In what ways are you called to hallow God's name? How is God's name hallowed in your daily life?

## Day Seven

*"Your kingdom come,  
Your will be done,  
On earth as it is in heaven."*

This is Matthew version. Luke is more concise: *"Your kingdom come."* A literal translation of the Greek text in Matthew is "Let come, your kingdom, let be done, your will, as in heaven, also on earth." The latter translation conveys a more dynamic and urgent intent. The Greek word θέλημα can mean design or purpose as well as "will." (Some scholars are convinced that Luke's version is what Jesus probably said and that Matthew added the last two phrases because he was convinced they represent, also, what Jesus taught.) We say these words so often that it is possible to miss Jesus' passion to manifest God's love and righteousness (the fundamental realities of "heaven") in the daily lives of ordinary people.

Jesus is telling his disciples that congruency between life in heaven and on earth is what God desires more than anything else. The ancient wisdom defined the "world" as heaven *and* earth, a unity. Life in heaven is the model for life on earth. But that is not always the way it is:

*"How the faithful city has become a whore! She that was full of justice, righteousness lodged in her – but now murderers!...Your*

*princes are rebels and companions of thieves. Everyone loves a bribe and runs after gifts. They do not defend the orphan, and the widow's cause does not come before them.*" (Isaiah 1:21-22) In contrast, the prophet Micah describes what God wills: *"He has told you, O mortal, what is good: and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God."* (Micah 6:8)

This is not easy. How can God's kingdom enter life on earth? John the Baptist proclaimed that God was about to give his people a new beginning. After John's death Jesus exhorted people, saying, *"The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news."* Jesus' passionate message was not about theology or waiting until things "got better." His message was action rooted in prayer; he was conscious that the energy of God in his life was a sign of the coming of the kingdom: *"But if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come to you."* The kingdom "comes" through being involved in the needs of people. But how does this happen and where does the power come from?

Jesus was clear that the kingdom is not only "outside" in society, it is also within a person's heart. It does not come in great blasts of super activity or political reform by themselves. The "outside" manifestations are born slowly, mysteriously in each person. The realm of God is like a tiny mustard seed or yeast in the bread dough. "Let come, your kingdom" is not asking God to change things in the world. It is a prayer that we will be open to God's energizing Spirit and desire intimacy with God with the same intensity as we would seek a treasure hidden in a field. Jesus knew that just as a tiny seed eventually becomes a tree, our experience of



God in prayer will give birth to justice in society and bond people to each other, one person at a time. "Let come, O Lord!" reminds us of what God desires for the life of the world and exhorts us to collaborate with God in making that tangible. In Jesus' experience it begins with prayer because we do not create the realm of God; we are invited to share it.

*"Your kingdom come."*

"May the inner room you have formed in every human heart welcome the living water of your divine nature."

*"Your will be done..."*

"Teach every person's heart to be fluent in the silent language of your desires for the life of the world,"

*"...on earth as it is in heaven."*

"so that waters of righteousness will flow from your dwelling place and water the seeds of your life in us."

How do you experience God's kingdom (realm) within yourself?

What should God's kingdom on earth be like? How is God calling you to help make that possible?

## Day Eight

*"...Give us each day our daily bread..."*

The first three petitions in the Lord's Prayer have parallels in the daily prayers of all Jewish people during the lifetime of Jesus. He grew up with and continued to say prayers honoring God whose dwelling is heaven and whose name is to be revered, although Jesus' use of "Father/Abba" to call on God directly is most likely unique. In the *Qaddish* prayer and the prophetic tradition there is also mention of the fervent desire for the justice of God's kingdom to become the model for life on earth among the people. With "*...Give us this day our daily bread...*" Jesus' prayer makes a transition to petitions for fundamental needs of people whom God loves.

In the Middle East bread is an essential part of every person's diet as well as a symbol of food as an indispensable part of life. The petition "*Give us...*" demonstrates Jesus' awareness that food is a gift of God and not something we create or control for ourselves. In Jesus' culture the agricultural process from the planting of seed to the maturation of a crop at harvest was seen and revered as a

mystery. People could see “what” happened, but did not understand “how” seeds were transformed. The mysterious gifts are from God and the petition “*give us*” reminds us that God sustains life and this truth gives birth to gratitude.

“*Give us this day our daily bread ...*” reminds the disciples that they are asking for enough bread for their daily needs and no more. Most peasants in Jesus’ day worked all day for enough money to buy one day’s food for a family. This petition is setting emphasizes easily satisfied needs for everyone. The phrase “...*our daily bread.*” is different from asking for “my” daily bread. Bread is for everyone and is to be shared. God’s gifts are for all.

The phrase “...*our daily bread.*” has caused confusion for biblical translators because Matthew used an obscure Greek word usually translated “daily” in place of Jesus’ original Aramaic word. The second century Old Syriac gospel of Matthew translates this petition “Amen, bread today give to us.” This is significant because Syriac is very close to Aramaic and the word “Amen” can mean “lasting or never-ceasing.” Perhaps Jesus is saying that the disciples should pray for bread to last today as well as the release from worry about running out of bread for the future.

Jesus’ petition for bread reveals his awareness that everyone depends totally on God for basic needs and that God’s gifts of food are for all. He exhorts his disciples not to ask for more than they need and to remember how hard it is for most people to feed their families day after day. Jesus exhorts his disciples to remember that the manna they ate during their time in the wilderness came directly from God; it was a heavenly gift intended to give every family enough to fulfill their need each day and no more.

*"Give us each day our daily bread."*

"Father, you are the loaf that feeds our bodies and souls like the lilies of the field. Fill every hand and heart with enough of you to last each day without care for tomorrow."

What are your needs, each day?

What does it mean to say the bread is "ours", rather than "mine"?

How do you respond to God's daily generosity?

## Day Nine

*“And forgive us our sins, as we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us.”*

*“And forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us.”* (Luke 11:4) In this petition Jesus continues to emphasize that our life with God cannot be lived in isolation from our neighbors. There are two kinds of daily sustenance to be shared: basic bread that will sustain us physically and forgiveness that will restore our relationships with God and our neighbor. Luke’s version of this petition retains the double meaning of the Aramaic word “khoba” (most likely used by Jesus) which means both “sins” and “debts.”

Matthew chooses to render only the Greek meaning that refers to debts and debtors. *“And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.”* (Matthew 6:12)

Jesus lived in a culture that was intent on preserving honor and avoiding shame. In Galilean peasant culture debt was a common source of shame and could endanger a

person's or a family's status and well-being. A small land owner might lose his land because of debt and be unable to sustain income and care for his family. He would be considered "poor." His relationship with neighbors and family was shattered. Gossip and public comments about his situation could intensify his shame and that of his family. In some cases he became an outcast, offering himself for day labor at a wage so small he could barely buy a day's amount of bread. The only way for him to regain his former status and honor was through forgiveness of his debt or receiving generous wages. Jesus used these images in several parables describing God's forgiving heart.

A similar relationship existed between every Jewish person and God. The Torah was the guide for each person's relationship with God. From childhood every Jew learned that God desired each person to be holy, because God is holy. *"Happy are they whose way is blameless, who walk in the law of the Lord! Happy are they who observe his decrees, and seek him with all their hearts! Who never do wrong, but always walk in his ways."* (Psalm 119:1-3) But what if a person's heart falters because of jealousy, greed, or the desire to obtain revenge when another person causes harm to that person or his or her family, especially if that brings dishonor? What if two people are hopelessly engaged in a disagreement that fosters violence? What happens when someone "lingers in the way of sinners?" (Psalm 1:1) From the point of view of Jesus' first-century religious conventional wisdom that person or persons become indebted to God. They are vulnerable to God's response. They often fear punishment and desire mercy.

These relationships of indebtedness to a neighbor and to God form the context for Jesus' petition *"And forgive us our*

*sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us.*" His religious heritage already knew God as a forgiving God, long-suffering, and eager to forgive. *"Have mercy on me, O God, according to your loving-kindness; blot out all my offences. Wash me through and through from my wickedness and cleanse me from my sin."* (Psalm 51:1-2) Everyone would understand the need for the first part of Jesus' petition. But Jesus goes a step further. He links God's forgiving heart with his awareness that we must have the same kind of heart. This was counter to the conventional wisdom of Jesus' day. The wisdom in Jesus' petition came from his own **experience** in prayer of God's generous heart and unconditional love. If the forgiveness of God restores a person's relationship with God, a person's forgiveness of another person will restore that relationship as well. And our relationship with other people influences our relationship with God. Forgiveness influences the way we will deal with conflict, injustice, and negligence. It is an indispensable ingredient for the restoration of broken community life and personal relationships. It does not excuse injustice, but makes the resolution of its consequences possible. The power of time with God in prayer softens our hearts. That is not weakness; it is strength.

*"And forgive us our sins, as we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us."*

"And take the stones we use to build walls that separate  
us from you and our neighbor and help us turn  
them  
into firm pathways leading toward healing and reconciliation."

What do you experience when you know you have been forgiven?

What does forgiving another person make possible?

### Day Ten

*“And do not bring us to the time of trial, but rescue us from the evil one.”*

This is Jesus’ last petition according to Matthew. In Luke it reads, *“And do not bring us to the time of trial.”* What is *“the time of trial”* and would God put us in such a place intentionally? As we have seen, in Jesus’ culture a temptation or trial is a situation in which a person has an opportunity to prove one’s self rather than being a seduction to wrong doing. Every person, as Jesus found out for himself in the wilderness, is faced with opportunities where personal need, pride, power, or other desires can lure her or him to behavior that harms our relationship with God and other people. This last phrase from the *“Lord’s Prayer”* mirrors verses from Psalm 40: *“For innumerable troubles have crowded upon me; my sins have overtaken me, and cannot see; they are more in number*



*than the hairs of my head, and my heart fails me. Be pleased, O Lord, to deliver me; O Lord, make haste to help me."*

But does God place us in these situations on purpose? Looking again at original texts will help us understand what Jesus is asking in this petition. As we have seen, Matthew wrote in Greek and Greek words do not fully convey the meaning of Semitic thought. This has made it difficult for biblical translators to find accurate meanings in English. The Greek word Matthew used that is translated "bring" in English is "*eisphero*". But the Aramaic word "*nisyon*" that Matthew translates "*eisphero*", like so many Aramaic words has two possible meanings: "cause" or "permit." Which meaning did Jesus intend here? We know from Jesus' preaching and healings that he is telling people around him, emphatically and dramatically, that God is acting through him to demonstrate God's love to people and manifest God's kingdom in their daily lives. In this context it seems clear that Jesus is exhorting the disciples to pray "Do not *permit* (i.e. "keep us from") the times of trial. Jesus is affirming the need for total dependence on God. A paraphrase of this intent is: "Lord we look to you and trust you to lead us on the right path. Let your power help us make right decisions and act according to what you desire." Life brings trials to every person. God's power and wisdom will help us avoid mistakes and sinful behavior.

Jesus' petition infers that these trials are enticements by "*the evil one*." This phrase, also, may have two meanings that are both plausible in a culture that asserted the reality of demons. It may mean either personified evil, "the evil one or satan", or an evil influence from outside of or within a person. Perhaps Jesus had a verse from Psalm 23 in mind as

he prayed using the image of being rescued from the evil one: "Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil." Once I was walking with my wife, Emily, through the Wadi Quilt near Jericho. As we walked along the ancient path Jesus used from Jerusalem to Jericho, our friend and guide, Abed el Hawash, pointed out several caves near the path where robbers could hide in the darkness. A traveler's eyes would be adjusted to the bright sun and unable to see the danger lurking in the darkness. It is possible that Jesus has such an image in mind when he calls on his Abba "deliver us from the evil one." There are times in life, sometimes unexpected, when the "eyes" of our mind or hearts are unable to see into the "darkness" of options we face; on the surface they may seem both reasonable and good. Evil is adept at masquerading as good! At such times we need to be rescued. Jesus is saying we need to look to God during these dangers.

At the heart of Jesus' last petition in the "Lord's Prayer" is fidelity to God and what God desires for each person. The *Shema*, which would have remained part of Jesus' daily prayer as a faithful Jewish adult, is at the heart of "*do not bring us to the time of trial, but rescue us from the evil one*". The *Shema* is a twice daily reminder to love God completely with heart, soul, and might. Temptations and trials can lure us away from this relationship. Jesus reminds us to remain loyal to God at times when we are tempted to betray that relationship. The strength to remain faithful comes from God and nowhere else. That is the intent of this final petition.

***"And do not bring us to the time of trial, but rescue us from the evil one."***

“When we are in the midst of life’s storms that blind and tempt us to rely on what is false, give us patience to wait for you and follow you toward what is real.”

The desert mothers and fathers placed great emphasis on “guarding the soul.” They recognized their vulnerability to influences that could scatter their hearts and lead them away from God. “Guarding the soul” meant being a steward of what was most valued in their lives: love of God and their neighbor.

How do you guard your soul? How do you depend on God during difficult situations?

### **Day Eleven**

#### **Where your heart is...**

“*Lord, teach us to pray.*” It seems like a simple request, similar to the beginning of a Lenten discipline. But the disciples wanted more than technique. They saw Jesus in action and realized how often he was alone in prayer early in the morning and sometimes late into the night. They saw that Jesus, himself, was changed by what he experienced in prayer. He was *different* because he prayed and the disciples *wanted to be like Jesus*. “The Lord’s Prayer” is not a list of things to “pray for.” It is a rare opportunity to look into the heart of Jesus and listen to the dialog of his heart with the heart of God. Jesus’ response to the disciples’ request is an opportunity to experience his consciousness, the vision and fundamental wisdom that were the source of his words and

passionate engagement with the needs of people around him. In “The Lord’s Prayer” we catch a glimpse of the intimacy that lay behind his realization that “I and the Father are one.” He was not making a theological statement about divine status; he was speaking about the location of his heart! This, more than anything else, is what Jesus wanted for all human beings. Therefore he leads us toward the intimacy he experienced and how it will change our lives.

Here is each phrase of the Lord’s Prayer again, followed by a suggestion describing how our lives may be changed by desiring what that phrase requests:

*“Pray, then, in this way...”*

***“Father in heaven,...”***

Direct your heart and mind to God’s presence...

***“hallowed be your name.”***

Honor God’s sacred nature and activity in your life...

***“Your kingdom come.”***

Open your heart to God’s desires for the life of the world...

***“Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.”***

Give your heart and life to manifesting God’s righteousness and unconditional love in your personal relationships and care of the earth.

***“Give us each day our daily bread.”***

Fill all human beings with what we need without caring for tomorrow.

*“And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.”*

When we stray from God and what God desires we can ask God to restore us to a right relationship with God, and at the same time seek reconciliation with persons who have harmed us.

*“And do not bring us to the time of trial,”*

There are many situations that challenge our loyalty to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. If we remain rooted in God, God will help us avoid being tested beyond our strength.

*“but rescue us from the evil one.”*

Only God can release us from the grip of sinful and self-centered behavior and desire repentance and new life. Our lives will manifest God’s presence when our hearts reside in God’s presence.

What have you discovered about the Lord’s Prayer since this retreat began?

How will this wisdom become tangible in your life of prayer?

What invitations for change or growth are you sensing?

## Day Twelve

**“For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours,  
now and forever. Amen”**

In the gospels the Lord’s Prayer does not include this doxology. The earliest followers of Jesus were Jews and the first community of “the followers of the Way” was in Jerusalem with James, the brother of Jesus, as spiritual leader. Most scholars agree that this doxology was added after Jesus’ death and resurrection by these early faith communities because most Jewish daily prayers, especially the *Kaddish* and *Amidah*, included and ended with praise and blessings to God.

*“May his great Name be blessed forever, and for all eternity. Blessed, lauded, glorified, exalted, extolled, honored, upraised, and praised be the Name of the Holy One. Blessed is He, above all blessings, songs, praises and words of consolation that may be*

*uttered in the world; and say, Amen.*

(From Kaddish Al Yisrael: Morning Prayer)

Eventually the doxology became part of the Lord's Prayer in many, if not most, Christian faith communities and denominations. Although it was added to the end of Jesus' original prayer, it is congruent with its beginning.

*"When you pray, say: Father, hallowed be your name."* (Luke 11:2)

Let our days and our prayers begin and end with praise to the Holy One.

### **Simple Sitting: A Form of Contemplative Prayer**

Find a relatively quiet place in your home, your workplace, a church, mosque or synagogue, a park or another favorite place. Find a place to sit comfortably with your back straight, but not rigid. With your eyes closed or partially open, begin breathing slowly in and out. Be conscious of your pattern of deep breathing. Let your body and your mind become as relaxed as possible. As your mind becomes relaxed you will experience many thoughts. Let them come and go. Try, as best you can, to let your mind and inner being become empty. Let your whole being be an open vessel for God's presence and voice. Avoid expectations or hoped-for outcomes. Simply be present to God. Some persons repeat a word or short phrase in their mind to help let go of distracting thoughts and bring themselves back to silence of mind. You can choose a word that has special meaning to you. Some persons repeat a name for God such as "Holy One" or a short request such as "Come

Holy Spirit". Other possibilities are "Abba, Father", "Abba", "Amma Mother", or "Amma". When you have sat in silence for about 20 minutes, open your eyes, wait for a minute or two, give thanks to God and then resume activity. If you have not experienced this form of prayer before, try it for five minutes and then gradually increase the about of time.

### **The Lord's Prayer in Matthew and Luke**

(New Revised Standard Version of the New Testament)

#### **Matthew 6:9-13**

"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."

#### **Luke 11:2-4**



“When you pray say: Father, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread. And forgive us our sins, for we ourselves everyone indebted to us. And do not bring us to the time of trial.”

## **A poetic interpretation of the Lord’s Prayer**

The disciples said to Jesus, “*Lord, teach us to pray.*” Jesus responded,

When you pray, turn your heart to the One who loves you and delights in you as his child.

Heaven and earth call him Lord, yet you may call him Father and he will listen.

Say to him...

"My heart falls to its knees and sings Alleluia when I hear justice, steadfast love, mercy, and wisdom pronounce your name.

Every name has its home in you and longs to bless

you.

May the inner room you have formed in every human heart  
welcome the living water of your divine nature.

Teach every person's heart to learn and respond to the silent  
language of your desires for the life of the world,  
so that waters of righteousness will flow from your  
dwelling place and water the seeds of your life in us.

Father, you are the loaf that feeds our bodies and souls like  
the lilies of the field.

Fill every hand and heart with enough of you to last  
each day without care for tomorrow.

And take the stones we have used to build walls that separate  
us from you and our neighbor  
and help us turn them into firm pathways leading  
toward healing and reconciliation.

When we are in the midst of blinding storms that tempt us to  
rely on what is false,  
give us patience to wait for you and follow you  
toward what is real."

David Keller 2010 (Paraphrased in poetry after study and meditation on texts from Matthew 6:9-13 and Luke 11:1-4 NRSV and the original Greek texts from *The Greek New Testament: UBS 4<sup>th</sup> edition, Nestle-Aland 27<sup>th</sup> edition*. I have attempted to convey the meaning and spirit of Jesus' words recorded in the Greek text from the point of view of a devout First-Century Jew as well as Jesus' unique experience of his Abba that led him to proclaim that the realm of God was becoming tangible in his words and actions. I am convinced that the "Lord's Prayer" gives us a window into the consciousness of Jesus and an authentic look at his experience of God's desires for human life.)

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