

FESTOONING: THE LORD'S PRAYER

(MATTHEW 6:9-14; LUKE 11:1-4)

PRAYING

In his book, *Letters to Malcolm*, C.S. Lewis describes a spiritual practice he calls “festooning” as a way to pray with the words of Scripture. He shares his daily practice of “festooning” the Lord’s Prayer-- embellishing and adorning the prayer with his own personal requests, concerns, and thoughts.

Lewis writes, “I call them ‘festoons,’ by the way, because they don’t (I trust) obliterate the plain sense of the petition but are merely hung on it” (*Letters to Malcolm*). Festooning is not a way to replace or rewrite Scripture, but to use Scripture as a guide to help you deeper into intimacy with God. Over time, festooning becomes a way of expressing our own personal and unique experiences into our ability to pray, converse, and hear from God.

STEP 1:

As a group, set a timer for 30 minutes to festoon the Lord’s Prayer-- taking each line to intentionally “festoon” your own petitions, concerns, and requests. Remember, while festooning, you will rewrite each line of the Lord’s Prayer in your own words.

“Our Father, who art in heaven”

We first approach God as our Father or Mother. In the midst of the many reverent names we have for God, Jesus teaches his disciples to know of God's closeness and personal availability when we pray. Jesus emphasizes this even more when he adds "in heaven." Heaven is not a faraway place; it is the dwelling of God. God is always close, and no point anywhere is too far for him, including the point where you are at this moment.

Now it’s time to festoon: Spend time engaging God as your Father or Mother. In the way a child simply and freely shares the concerns and joys of their heart, do the same with your loving Parent whose dwelling place is with you now.

"Hallowed be Your name..."

Jesus teaches us to hallow the name of God. The word “holy” means to be set apart. To hallow something is to recognize how intrinsically special it is.

Now it’s time to festoon: Spend time thanking God for who God is. Express prayers of adoration around the attributes of God- God’s majesty, holiness, justice, sovereignty, goodness and beauty.

“Your kingdom come, Your will be done”

In praying “your kingdom come,” we’re not simply praying about a future event. Each time we sincerely seek to do God’s will, God’s kingdom breaks into the world in and through us. God’s kingdom is present right here and now, and each moment is a chance to live in it and pray for its extension into the world.

This portion of the Lord’s prayer reminds us of Jesus’ words before his death: “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, NRSV).

Now it’s time to festoon: What are the things you are currently holding tightly to? Spend some time in prayer asking God what areas in your life can be surrendered to God’s loving embrace. Do you sense God’s invitation of freedom to you? Spend some time receiving God’s invitation of freedom to you.

“On earth as it is in heaven”

Spend some time in lament. As we see the people of God lament throughout the pages of Scripture, we need spaces to cry out to God with genuine cries for justice, healing, and mercy.

Now it’s time to festoon: Spend time in reflection, praying about ways you have been complicit in lacking mercy for your neighbor. Pray for ways to embody God’s compassion and be a part of bringing God’s kingdom in your spheres of influence.

“Give us this day our daily bread”

When the children of Israel followed Moses into the wilderness, they were given a form of daily bread called manna. God provided exactly what the Israelites needed for food every day but it required trust and expectation in God. In this section of the Lord’s Prayer, two forms of “bread” are nuanced- actual food that nourishes our physical bodies, as well as the “food” that Jesus says will bring us life, the Word of God.

Now it’s time to festoon: Spend some time asking God for any foundational needs you may have. Pray for your needs and those whose lives are closely linked with your own. Pray for those who are in danger, suffering and in places of decision-making or costly love. Consider ways you can meet these needs in a tangible way.

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“And forgive us of our sins...”

We are called to confess the sins we passively engage, and sins we actively pursue. God’s desire for us is to experience abundant life (John 10:10) and healing into the areas where our sin has distanced us from God.

Now it’s time to Festoon: Spend some time in confession. Think about the ways you passively or actively turned away from God this week. Open your hands and lay your burdens to God. Trust that God longs to bring freedom and healing. Receive the “new mercies” God promises to give you.

Pray also for our nation, church communities, and the institutions we are a part of. Confess ways we have perpetuated systemic injustices. Pray for God’s supernatural intervention and wisdom to rest on our global, national, and local leaders.

“As we forgive those who sin against us”

God extends us mercy so that we can extend it to others. We are called to forgive one another because God’s love is intricately linked to confession and forgiveness.

Now it’s time to festoon: Confess any grudges or bitterness you may have against individual(s) in your life. Who immediately comes to mind as someone you need to forgive? With whom do you need to make peace? Pray for healing and restoration, for courage and faith to do what God may be calling you to do.

“Lead us not into temptation”

Our temptations are great and take place often.

Now it’s time to festoon: Look back at this week and become aware of the ways you may have been tempted to spin the truth, manage your image, lose your patience, or envy someone else. Spend some time in prayer asking for the Spirit to work in you for transformation and healing. Ask for protection and courage for the days ahead.

“Deliver us from the evil one”

We live in a world filled with suffering and evil. We ask for God’s protection and provision to restore and redeem the brokenness we see within ourselves, our nation, and our world. By including a reference to the evil one in this prayer, Jesus teaches us about the realities of the spiritual world.. Where does evil reside in our world today? How can we intercede and intervene in order for God’s goodness, justice and mercy to reign in these spaces?

Now it’s time to festoon: Spend some time reflecting on the news you’ve recently read, heard, or seen. Ask God to intervene in places you’ve recognized evil in the forms of violence, oppression, injustice, and hatred.

“For Yours is the Kingdom and the power and the glory forever.”

This beautiful doxology is probably derived from David’s declaration in 1 Chronicles 29. We often live as though we have our own kingdom, but in this section, we are declaring again that God alone is God.

Now it’s time to festoon: Spend some time praying for trust in God’s redemptive plan over your life and in the world. Pray your own version of a doxology found in this final section of the Lord’s Prayer.

STEP 2:

After thirty minutes have passed, take time to share in your group. What was this experience like for you? Share your process and how this experience was for you.

If anyone would like to share their festoon based off of the Lord’s Prayer, please feel free to share.

Choose someone in the group to pray to close your time together, thanking God for the gifts of prayer and community.