

My Lord's Prayer

Introduction	2
Context	3
Grammar.....	3
Lord's Prayer Analysis.....	6
Our Father	6
Who Art in Heaven	8
Hallowed be Thy Name.....	9
Thy Kingdom Come.....	11
Thy Will be Done, on Earth as it is in Heaven.....	12
Give Us this Day our Daily Bread.....	13
And Forgive Us our Trespasses.....	14
As We Forgive Those who Trespass against Us.....	19
Lead Us not into Temptation	25
But Deliver Us from Evil	26
For Thine is the Kingdom	27
The Power	28
And the Glory	29
For ever and ever, Amen	30
My Lord's Prayer	31

Introduction

You only find out how much, or how little, you understand a thing when you try to explain it to someone else.

Teaching a child to pray is not an easy feat. The idea that all prayers are answered, and you can ask God for anything you want, can elicit a delighted response. There then follows a number of caveats. There's no use praying for the ability to fly, for example. Praying for material things isn't really what it's about, and praying for things your parents don't want you to have, such as a bunny or a hamster, is unlikely to get you anywhere.

One time a friend's cat went missing. Having assured my children that if you want something you should pray for it, they suggested we pray for the safe return of the cat. And so we prayed, every night, for Gus. After about 2 weeks of praying, I was starting to get a bit unsure of how to proceed. Chances were, the cat was probably decaying in a hedgerow somewhere, and would never be found. I was starting to suggest that, maybe, on this occasion Gus had gone to a better place and it was possible he wouldn't be seen again. And then, against all the odds, the cat appeared, slightly thin and scruffy-looking, but very much alive. My daughters were delighted. I was over the moon.

Then a friend got ill. My daughters had met her and loved her. They suggested we pray for her. We prayed for her every night. Until she died.

Were our prayers not heard? Did our prayers not matter? It was around this time that their approach to prayer became somewhat more sceptical.

Experiences such as the death of a loved one can challenge faith. Life events can act to pull the picnic blanket from underneath your feet, leaving a mess of food and overturned crockery.

Another moment that caused reappraisal of prayer was when I read that Pope Francis wants to amend the translation of the Lord's Prayer.

The Lord's Prayer is central to the Christian religion. Whereas much of the foundations on which Christianity is built, for example the Nicene Creed, were put together centuries after the time of Jesus, the Lord's Prayer uses words that Jesus himself taught his disciples to say.

How surprising, then, that Pope Francis, in the 21st century, should suggest that we've had the translation of it slightly wrong all these years. In fact, he's managed to get a change approved, at least in Italian, if not in English.

The line that has been under scrutiny is "Lead us not into temptation". The point raised is why we should be asking God to "Lead us not into temptation" when God would never lead us into temptation. The approved change is for the translation to be "Do not let us fall into temptation," which many say is a better translation of the original text, being closer to the meaning of the verb used.

Not everyone agrees with this, as you might imagine. It calls into question the kind of God you believe in. Is the God of whom Jesus speaks one who would tempt us to evil? Pope Francis says not, and many share that view.

For me the surprise is that nobody ever raised the issue before. When it's pointed out it seems so obvious. The fact that it is being disputed in some quarters is to be expected, being so ingrained in our learning over so many generations. It made me question, though, whether this could lead to a more significant rethinking of the Lord's Prayer.

Having studied Greek, I decided to start with taking the prayer line by line, to see what I could find. Perhaps it would give me some ideas that might also help me with my other questions about prayer.

The approach I take in analysing the Lord's Prayer is to be as open-minded as possible. I want to see everything anew through fresh eyes.

I make extensive use of biblehub.com for the original Greek.

Context

The Lord's Prayer is found in Matthew, chapter 6, and in Luke, chapter 11.

In Matthew 6, before explaining how we should pray, Jesus gives us examples of wrong ways to pray. He refers to the hypocrites standing praying on street corners so that they might be seen by others, and the pagans who use repeat the same words over and over again. The hypocrites, it would seem, are praying for the benefit of the people who would overhear them, ie they're not focused solely on their relationship with God. The pagans, in their repetitions, are asking many times when they only need to ask once.

Jesus also says "Your father knows what you need before you ask him", which suggests to me that we don't need to go to God with a long shopping list.

Luke dives straight in with one of the disciples asking "Lord, teach us to pray".

Grammar

In order to analyse the verbs within Lord's Prayer, there are certain points to consider.

A verb can be described as having the following:

- Tense (past, present, future)
- Mood (indicative, subjunctive, imperative)
- Voice (active, passive, middle)
- Person (I = 1st, you = 2nd, he/she = 3rd)
- Singular or plural (I or we etc).

With respect to tense, there are 2 tenses used within the Lord's Prayer. In "Yours is the kingdom", the word *is* uses the present tense, all other verbs in the prayer are aorist tense.

The aorist tense is a past tense, when in the indicative mood, but becomes a command when in the imperative mood. The aorist imperative means "do (something) now", with a sense of urgency, or a need for an action to be completed. This is as opposed to a present imperative, which would have a sense of "keep on doing". It seems odd to consider a past tense as being a command or request. I like to think of it as an American might say "do it already!"

Most verbs in the Lord's Prayer are aorist imperative:

- Hallowed (be thy name)
- (Your kingdom) come
- (Your will) be done
- Give (us this day)
- Forgive (us)
- Deliver (us)

However there are 2 exceptions:

We forgive = aorist *indicative*
Lead (us not) = aorist *subjunctive*

The aorist indicative (we forgive) can have a sense of something we *should* be doing.

The aorist subjunctive, when combined with a negative (lead us not) can either have a sense of “you should not” or it can be a negative command, along the same lines as the aorist imperative, hence “lead us not”.

Therefore we effectively have a list of commands. Those that are in the second person are us telling God to:

Give us our daily bread
Forgive us our trespasses
Lead us not into temptation
Deliver us from evil.

I find this odd in the context of Matthew where we are told “Your father knows what you need before you ask him”.

In being aorist imperative there is a sense of “do it now”, and a sense of the action needing to be completed, rather than “do this and keep on doing it”.

Could there be another explanation?

Could they be indicative in meaning, rather than imperative, yet past tense? This would translate as:

You gave us our daily bread, (or *you have given*, if it was the perfect tense)
You forgave us our trespasses, (or *you have forgiven*)
You led us not into temptation, (or *you have not led*)
You delivered us from evil, (or *you have delivered*).

This would make the prayer largely about gratitude, which could be what was originally intended. Contextually, the perfect tense makes more sense, “you have given” etc, as opposed to “you gave”, where the implication is that “you gave” once in the past. However I think this stretches the grammar beyond that which is likely.

Alternatively, translating into present indicative we would have:

You give us our daily bread
You forgive us our trespasses
You lead us not into temptation
You deliver us from evil.

This has a timeless quality, which I believe to be appropriate. I think that, given the context, there’s something to recommend it.

Time is, I think, an important point to consider. When do we pray for? Now, or for some time in the future? I think that prayers are all for now. The future is a set of endless opportunities, the past has gone, we pray for now.

The Greek of the bible wasn’t as refined as you might think, and it’s hard to pick up subtleties of expression. Ancient Greek is far more complex than the Classical Greek of the bible, and I think in summary that context is the most important factor.

Regardless of tense, or of the specifics of grammar, the message we are being given is that God can be relied upon to:

Give us our daily bread
Forgive us our trespasses
Lead us not into temptation
Deliver us from evil.

Perhaps the point is that in praying to God, aside from asking God to do these things, we are reminding ourselves that this is what God does. Therefore it is not how we ask, or even what we ask, but who we ask.

It is also important to pick out from the prayer those things identified for other than God to do. There are several verbs in the 3rd person:

Hallowed be thy name
Thy kingdom come
Thy will be done
Thine is the kingdom.

The prayer is that these should “be done”. By whom? Other than “Thine is the kingdom”, which is present indicative, they are imperatives also. If God isn’t the one doing them, since they’re not in the 2nd person, then it must be someone else: us, or, possibly, something we achieve together.

The only thing that is clearly written and without doubt for *us* to do is to forgive others. Forgiveness of others is therefore given a priority, something we must remind ourselves of every time we pray the Lord’s Prayer.

Within the context of “Your father knows what you need”, the imperatives (give, forgive, lead, deliver) are like reminders, or clarifications. It makes me think of a project manager assigning roles: “brick-layers, lay the bricks; carpenters, do the woodwork” etc. We are saying “God, give us our daily bread, forgive us” and so on. Then in terms of the part we must play, we must forgive those who trespass against us. In this way the prayer is like a contract or a pledge: “you do these things and we promise to do this”.

“Lead us not into temptation” is indeed us asking God to not do something that God would never do, but in exactly the same way “Give us this day”, “Forgive us” and “Deliver us” are things that God will always do.

The verbs are an important part of the prayer, but study of all of the words brings to light many other points.

Lord's Prayer Analysis

Our Father

Πάτερ ἡμῶν

Pater hemon

Father of us

Use of the word "our" suggests that we should pray this prayer together, which might seem to be at odds with Matthew 6:6 where Jesus suggests we should close the door and pray in secret.

Whether we pray together or alone, use of the word 'our' is a reminder that we all have the same father.

If I approached my father with my sister, I wouldn't feel the need to say "Our father", we both know he's father to both of us and he knows that too. However if I'm sitting next to someone I've never met before and we say the Lord's Prayer, it's a potential bonding moment when we both say "Our father". We may be different in every possible way, it may seem that we have nothing in common, but we share the same father.

How powerful is a prayer that simply says "God, you are my father". More powerful still is the prayer "God, you are *our* father".

The word for father is pater, rather than the Aramaic, less formal "Abba" which appears elsewhere in the New Testament.

A father is a giver of life, a father passes on DNA, there is a little of the father in each child.

We are created in God's image. I used to think that meant that God looks like us, with eyes, ears and a nose, but now I think that God is love and God created us to be love also. We were created from love, by love. It is reasonable, then, to expect that our home, our happy place, our true satisfaction and peace comes from anything that resonates with that love.

Jesus teaches us about love. Comparing God to a parent is illustrating that love. We can relate the love that God has for us to the love that we have for our children, or our parents, and the love that they have for us.

One of the problems a lot of people have with the teachings of Jesus is that they don't have experience of, and therefore understand the role of, a loving parent, particularly a loving father.

It is worth considering why the male gender is used here. Why 'Our Father' and not 'Our Mother'? Mother gives birth to us, mother gives us milk. Father can do his bit for procreation and then disappear without trace, whereas mother is involved for 9 months at least.

We talk of 'mother earth', so why should God be a father? Is it a reflection of the patriarchy? Does father command more respect?

I believe there is sufficient evidence elsewhere in the gospels to suggest that Jesus saw beyond gender. There are strong female characters, perhaps surprisingly so given the status of women in society at the time.

I don't think it is of material consequence which pronouns are used in relation to God. God is neither male nor female, God just is. It is to illustrate the love of God, and the fact that God is a giver of life, that God can be thought of as a parent. A male parent, particularly at the time of Jesus, would have been the more powerful, and Jesus talks of a God who is both loving and powerful, hence Father.

In the moment of our physical conception, just as that of all our ancestors, and everyone else on this planet and beyond, that which gave us life is the same. When we walk around a busy street and we see people we've never met before, they are our brothers and sisters. The love that created us is the same. One is not better than another. We might feel closer to some than to others, and we might prefer the company of some to others, but we are all members of the same family.

"Our" doesn't mean "us believers" or "us Christians". Jesus was referring to everyone in his teachings (John 14:23 – "Anyone who loves me... my father will love them").

An interpretation I like of "Our father" is:

Giver of life to us all.

Who Art in Heaven

ὁ ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς

Ho en tois ouranois

Who (is) in the heavens

There is no verb here, it literally means, in reference to our father, “the one in the heavens”. The word is plural, heavens, rather than the common translation, Heaven.

This is not an earthly father, who can only love us as much as a human can, this is the father who abides in Heaven, who is without limit. This is like the address on the envelope, this makes it specific that we’re talking to someone other-worldly, non-human.

And where is heaven, or where are the heavens? Where does the envelope get delivered to?

The simple answer is we don’t know. It used to be thought of as “up there”, (pointing to the sky). This was before we’d explored the “heavens” and understood the concept of stars, galaxies and the wider universe. Presumably the pluralisation refers to the fact that the sky changes over time, so it was thought that there were multiple heavens above us, rather than us being given a glimpse of different parts of a constantly moving universe.

We now know that there is a vastness that exists outside our earth that is beyond our imagining. What we also know, from quantum physics, is that there is a vast emptiness within everything. That which is matter is a tiny portion of every atom. What is important, therefore, is not the material substance but the energy that moves the substance.

To my mind, it’s in this vastness, within or without, that we find God. I see God as a form of energy. It is everywhere. It is potential beyond limit.

If you don’t believe in a positive energy force that is the source of creation, the alternative would seem to be pure random chaos. The best argument for the existence of God, to me, is the order of things. There are exquisite patterns to be seen everywhere, in every snowflake, every blade of grass, and a uniqueness that defies reason.

We don’t understand the patterns in things very often, and events seem to be at random. But if we believe in a positive creative force, then there must be something we can’t see that would explain the seeming chaos that exists in front of us.

What is the aim of life? Surely it’s to be with our heavenly Father? Does this mean in death, when we drop our earthly body? Or does it mean during life when we manage to feel close to our Father?

There’s a kind of bliss that can be experienced in life that gives us an idea of what it would be to be in heaven. It’s a spirit-soaring, deeply-felt joy, which is above all other pleasure, though it may only be felt in a fleeting moment. It’s there for us whenever we can totally put aside our earthly troubles and focus on pure love. It may come from focusing on God, or love for another person, or admiration for a view, or musical sound. It is pure love, peace, ecstasy. This, I believe, is what it would be like to be where our Father is. This is a taste of what we want after we die, but it’s something that’s within reach whilst we’re alive.

Heaven would seem to me to be a word that describes a state rather than a place. God gives us access to that state.

Where Heaven is You are.

Hallowed be Thy Name

Ἄγιασθήτω τὸ ὄνομά σου

Hagiastheto to onoma sou

Hallowed be the name of you

The word hallow means to “honour as holy”, therefore this could be translated as “Let Your name be honoured as holy”. Holy means “having a spiritually pure quality” or “entitled to worship”.

The verb is passive, it references “your name” (object) but there is no subject, nobody named as doing the honouring.

It is reasonable to imply that we are the ones that should honour God as holy, worship God.

Why do we need to worship God? Does God need our worship?

No, we need to worship God because we need to constantly remind ourselves that there is a power greater than us, instead of thinking of ourselves as a single lone individual, an ego. If we kid ourselves that we’re in charge, that we can control the things that happen around us, then we’ll be like King Canute sitting asking the waves to stay back. God is in charge. God can make things happen. Our task, minute by minute, is to recognise our place in relation to God.

God does not need us to honour what He is, God has no ego that needs to be inflated. We need to recognise God’s role in relation to ours, for ourselves.

I find it interesting that the word “name” is used (onoma). We should honour God’s *name*. Why the emphasis on name, why not “we should honour God”?

A name is something we call people, therefore I think the emphasis is on the act of “calling”, or on us as the “callers”. I think there’s a distinction to be made between a child calling on his or her human parent, and any of us calling on God.

My children often call to me from the lounge and ask me something. I may or may not hear, depending on the volume of the tv or any music that’s playing, and depending on whether I’m doing something that interferes with my ability to hear them – talking on the phone or boiling the kettle perhaps. As earthly parents we don’t always hear, but God always hears. All of us, all the time. When we call to God we don’t have to shout above the background noise, we are always heard. Even if we all call at the same split second, there is no limit, there is no waiting in line.

This is what sets our relationship with God apart from other relationships, and makes time spent talking to God holy, unlike any other conversation.

The clarity of the response or the answer to our prayer might not seem so obvious, that depends on the level of background noise we generate around us, but our prayers are always heard.

The relationship each of us has with God is unique, personal, and not shared. If one person needs me for something then I am temporarily unavailable to another. God, on the other hand, is available to each of us, in whatever way needed, all the time. This is hard to imagine. It’s as if each of us has our own private God, available to us 24x7. Yet we all share the same God. God’s power cannot be used up, in fact it can seem that the more power you use, the more you get. The power that’s available is beyond measure and beyond comprehension.

The resistance to that power is what we need to concern ourselves with. If you think of a hosepipe that allows water to gush along it, it’s possible to stand on the pipe, slowing or stopping the flow. It’s the same with a blood vessel or an electric cable – if the transport mechanism is compromised then it all goes wrong.

What can happen when we are anxious or scared, though, is that we can squeeze onto this cable or pipe and, in gripping so tightly, stop the flow. The hardest thing when you're scared is to relax, but in relaxing and being calm, with a call to God, we allow God's goodness to flow freely to us.

Our earthly bodies are potential transport mechanisms for God. If we allow God's power to course through us then we can amaze, delight and empower ourselves and those around us.

The glory is God's. If we take off the veil, wipe the windscreen, unravel the cable, adjust the hosepipe, that glory can shine through us. We just need to call God's name.

We call Your Holy name.

Thy Kingdom Come

Ἐλθέτω* ἡ βασιλεία σου

Eltheto he basileia sou

Come the kingdom of you

The word “come” has the sense of “draw near”. It is 3rd person singular, referring to the kingdom.

What is God’s kingdom? A kingdom is ruled by a king, therefore God’s kingdom is ruled by God. But isn’t everywhere ruled by God anyway? There seems to be a distinction being drawn between what is God’s and what is ours. Perhaps the kingdom of heaven is God’s, and ‘the world’, with all its imperfections, is ours.

Luke 17:21 says that “the kingdom of God is within you” (NIV). Does this mean heaven is within us all? Does it mean we can all access heaven? Does it mean that the kingdom of God is something we can reach individually, rather than waiting collectively for the kingdom of God to come to us all?

I used to think this was referring to the fact that one day God’s kingdom would come to everyone all at once. Now I wonder if it means that, within the context of saying this prayer, Jesus is suggesting we should focus on connecting with God, approaching God’s kingdom, or finding the kingdom of God that is within us.

The tense is aorist imperative, a command requiring immediate response. It isn’t a future tense or a statement of what will happen at some later date, it’s referring to the here and now.

I don’t think we’re asking for God’s kingdom to come “one day”, this is for immediate action. “God, come to me now”, or since God never left, perhaps the onus is on us to draw near to God.

Let us draw near to You.

Thy Will be Done, on Earth as it is in Heaven

Γενηθήτω τὸ θέλημά σου, Ὡς ἐν οὐρανῷ, καὶ ἐπὶ γῆς

Genetheto to thelema sou, Hos en ourano, kai epi ges

Be done the will of you, as in heaven, (so) also upon earth

“Be done” is third person singular, passive, therefore an action for it (the will) to be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

I don't believe this is a request for God to carry out God's will, it's a reminder to us of the need for God's will to be done.

Even the most egotistical of us would concede that we can't make things happen in heaven. God is synonymous with heaven. Heaven is the aim, it is 'with God'. Who makes things happen on earth? We do. We make daily, hourly, minute by minute decisions that affect our lives. We can ask God for help with these decisions, and they can be according to, or against, the will of God, as far as we can ascertain what the will of God is. The choice is ours. We have to first establish what God's will is, in any given situation, and then we have to do our bit to carry it out.

In heaven, everything is God's. Since God is love then that means that in heaven there is nothing but love and peace and harmony. What we want is for that same love, peace and harmony on earth, that is God's will. By praying 'thy will be done' we are asking for more of Heaven's goodness around us on earth.

If we think that anything other than God's will is going to make us happy in the long run, we are mistaken. If our heart's desire is something material or physical, or something that gives us status or power, we will at some point find that the happiness these things brought us is shallow and short lived. Whereas if our will is aligned with God's will for us, it's like swimming with the current and we're lifted along the path of life.

We have the ability to tune into God's will. It's not easy, it's not always clear, but, with practice and dedication, understanding God's will in any given situation is something we can get better at. We can learn to recognise when we get it right by listening to the feeling we have deep down inside when we know something to be true.

We want to carry out Your will.

Give Us this Day our Daily Bread

Τὸν ἄρτον ἡμῶν τὸν ἐπιούσιον δὸς ἡμῖν σήμερον

Ton arton hemon ton epiousion dos hemin semeron

The bread of us daily grant us today

The bread we are referring to is quite specifically ‘daily bread’. It is a way of saying ‘the food we need each day’. It doesn’t imply ‘all the food we might wish for’, rather ‘the food we need to keep us sustained.’

To me, it reinforces my doubt about the 2nd person singular as a request or a command. If “your Father knows what you need before you ask him” (Matthew 6:8), why should we ask for the most basic need we have? “Please give me the food I need to survive.”

Ultimately, the important point is who does the giving. God does the giving. The prayer is a reminder that, as we know from elsewhere in the bible “All things come from You” (1 Chronicles 29:14). All the bread, all the food, all the sustenance we need, when it comes, it comes from You.

As we bring this to mind by saying the Lord’s Prayer, we are bringing to mind the generosity of God and therefore feeling gratitude.

If a child considered his or her father and approached him saying:

Father, you always make sure I have food to eat, clothes to wear and a roof over my head. You teach me right from wrong, you send me to school and encourage me in my education. You always give me the support I need. You love me and care for me.

The words “thank you” aren’t included but they’re very obviously implied. The same is true with God. The fact that He gives me the food I need each day is worthy of acknowledgement.

This is subtly different from:

Father, give me food to eat, clothes to wear and a roof over my head. Teach me right from wrong, send me to school and encourage me in my education. Give me the support I need. Love me and care for me.

The sense is that “I ask because I know that you can and you will”.

In My Lord’s Prayer I prefer to not use commands, but statements. Whilst I can’t totally defend it in terms of grammar, I think that the implied thanks are important, and it fits in the context of “your father knows what you need before you ask him.”

If you ask someone for something, then you are also saying that it’s them that provides it. A translation I like is:

It is You that gives us the sustenance we need each day.

And Forgive Us our Trespasses

Καὶ ἄφες ἡμῖν τὰ ὀφειλήματα ἡμῶν

Kai aphes hemin ta ophilemata hemon

And forgive us the debts of us

Once more we have aorist imperative active, as with “give”, which is translated as a command “forgive”.

Forgiveness is the only concept that is mentioned twice and therefore it must be important for us to understand.

Forgive what?

This is one of the sections where Matthew and Luke diverge a little.

In Matthew the word is ophilemata, which is commonly translated to mean debts, whereas in Luke the word is τὰς ἁμαρτίας, tas hamartias, which means “failures, faults, sins”. It is likely that the Aramaic word used was *ḥōbâ*, which can mean “debt” or “sin”.

In the time of Jesus, a sin or a failure might result in a debt, in the form of a sacrifice. To do wrong, therefore, is to incur a debt.

I was brought up with the traditional version of the prayer, so using the word “trespass”, rather than “sin”. I like the word trespass. It suggests you’ve lost your way a little and ended up walking across a field that doesn’t have a public right of way. I can’t think of a time when I’ve deliberately set out to do something wrong. I may have been attracted by the wrong priorities, done something to please someone and ignored the little voice inside that suggested this might not be the best idea. I can think of times when I’ve taken a risk that with hindsight wasn’t the best, but I struggle to think of times when I’ve said to myself “I know this is absolutely the wrong thing to do but I’m going to do it anyway”. I think that’s true for most people, most of the time – we don’t set out with ill intent but, somehow or other, we occasionally end up on the wrong path.

Saying “set us loose from our debts” could be Jesus’ way of telling us that we owe God nothing in order to receive His love. We don’t need to make sacrifices of animals, and we don’t need to wear hair shirts or whip ourselves in order to win God’s favour.

“Set us loose from our sins”, as Luke has it, is an easier stepping stone to “Forgive us our sins.”

I love the idea of being set loose. What is common to both gospels is the idea is that God sets us free from those things which would weigh on our hearts. This covers debts as well as sins.

What does weigh on our hearts? What would we be set free from?

It might be that we’ve broken the law, or gone against what we’ve been taught is right, but not given it any thought. In that case, we’d be unlikely to ask God for forgiveness, or to be set loose. We only ask God to set us loose from the things that weigh us down.

What things then do weigh on our hearts? Something we did that we shouldn’t have done, or not done that we wish we’d done. Guilt. Shame. Regret.

The idea is that we hold this thing before God and say “Let me not feel this burden”. Once we’ve done this the burden can leave us. Before we gave it to God it weighed us down, affected our behaviour, but after we’ve given it to God we are set free.

Some things we do give us a deep feeling of happiness, a feeling of lightness, being right with God. When we have this feeling we know, deep down, that we've done the right thing. I call it the 'inner yes'.

Some things leave us unaffected – whether I wear the blue or the green, it doesn't really matter, neither affects me deeply.

Some things leave us feeling uneasy, or on a sliding scale from a little bit unsure to absolute dread or regret. These are the things that weigh on our hearts. This is what I call sin, it's an 'inner no'.

I don't refer to an external measure of right and wrong, or the way in which those around me might judge me, I refer to the inner compass, the 'inner yes' or the 'inner no'. We need to know that we're forgiven, and released from the weight of those things that we find give us that 'inner no'.

Therefore sin, trespass, debt, or anything that we need to be set loose from, is simply anything that resulted in us following an 'inner no' rather than an 'inner yes'. Sometimes the inner guidance system isn't clear, but when it becomes clear, and you realise you've not been on the right path, that's the point at which you feel guilt and you can change path.

A sin can be a deliberate, calculated wrongdoing. Suppose you deliberately leave a restaurant without paying. You convince yourself you need the money more than the restaurant owner does and you walk away. You might feel an 'inner no' but if you do you ignore it. You might get away with it and do it again somewhere else. It could escalate, you could start to avoid paying for all manner of things. This will either continue and grow so that you're taking chances every time you go out, maybe even enjoying the thrill of the risk, or you'll start to be aware of and pay heed to the 'inner no' and start to feel uncomfortable with the choices you've made. It might be that you need to understand the consequences to those you've affected – the anger and disappointment from the individuals you've stolen from, before you can make a resolve to adapt your ways.

Most often, though, I think we go the wrong way without realising it, at least at first. We take the soulless high paying job and neglect our families, our friends and ourselves, before we realise there's an 'inner no' screaming at us to change course. This isn't what would traditionally be referred to as a sin, this is us wandering off course for a while. Maybe we do something with good intention, try to help someone in some way, but the other person sees it as interference and resents our involvement. If we question our motives we might find the 'inner no' – I thought I was doing this for them but actually I was doing it for me and I was being too controlling, for example.

When I sit and think about where I might have gone wrong, it's often in the area of getting cross with my family. I ask several times for something to be put away and it isn't, so I get angry and shout. Is this a sin? Yes, I should have more patience. They don't share my desire for the house to be kept tidy, therefore this is the potential for a constant source of mild conflict. Learning to live with each other in harmony, respecting each other's wishes, is a challenge indeed.

Are we guilty?

The issue is not whether the world thinks we're guilty. The world could have us tried and convicted but if we don't carry the weight of guilt in our hearts then we won't ask God to take it from us. Conversely, we could feel guilty for something that, when questioned, 100 people out of 100 might say was not our fault. Our perception is what is key.

I have been accused, and admitted to, driving above the speed limit on more than one occasion. What are my feelings about these offences? I feel silly for having been caught – I should have been more aware of the presence of speed cameras – but I don't feel guilty. Have I repented to God? No.

Being guilty of speeding when there were no consequences has not left me feeling guilty. Had there been consequences, had I been involved in an accident where someone was hurt, then of course I would feel guilt. Each time I've driven above the speed limit I've taken a risk, and, other than a speeding fine, I've got away with it.

Incidentally, the speed awareness course was an effective deterrent against speeding, so I am a more careful driver as a result, but I've never seen this issue as something I've had to put right with God.

The world, or the local constabulary at least, had me as guilty, but I didn't feel guilt.

I remember an occasion when I was at the kitchen sink on a Sunday afternoon, when my husband came up to me, put his arms around me and said "I'm sorry about earlier". My heart warmed at these words and I said "Don't worry, it's fine." We continued to talk and it very quickly transpired that the thing he was apologising for was not the thing I thought he should apologise for. What he was actually apologising for was something I'd barely even noticed, whereas the thing that I thought he should apologise for was something he defended as being right and he still stood by it. Instead of being a lovely make-up moment it degenerated into the continuation of an argument.

Our feelings of guilt often don't match others' perceptions and often don't follow any logic at all.

There are sociopaths who don't feel guilt for the most abhorrent crimes, and there are lovely, innocent people who live their lives plagued with a guilt that no-one else can understand. There's a world of difference between guilt in the eyes of the law and a feeling of guilt. Feeling guilt is entirely subjective.

Have you ever watched a film where the main character, the one you relate to, is a crook? Of course you have. Have you ever found yourself wishing the character success in his or her purpose, whether it be stealing the money, exacting revenge or getting away with a deed the like of which you yourself would never attempt? If you have then you are, just for a moment, getting caught up in their story, where they convince themselves it's ok to steal, cheat, lie or even kill.

How does God forgive?

Is anything we do ever unforgiveable in God's mind? I don't think so. You hear stories of prison inmates finding God and turning their life around, no matter what their crime was.

God gives second chances, then third, fourth, fifth, and so on. God wants us to become aware of the 'inner no' and move towards the 'inner yes'. God doesn't want to punish us for the things we've done, rub our noses in it, feel the weight of His disappointment, God just wants us to change direction.

Losing the feeling of guilt

What can we do to lose the feeling of guilt? We can't undo the past. We have to accept the present. We have to accept ourselves.

God doesn't want us to feel guilty. That's why God forgives. Over and over again, God forgives.

If God forgives then what are we worried about? Why carry the guilt? How ridiculous then to say "Yes, but my partner/mum/friend/neighbour hasn't forgiven me!" Who is more important?

Sin, that which we need to be forgiven for, is a perception. If we believe we need to be forgiven for something then we believe we have sinned, that is our perception. There may be other things we may stand accused of, but if we don't recognise them as sins then we won't ask for forgiveness.

What we need to do is ask for help in identifying where we've strayed from the course God has for us. We need help in hearing and understanding the 'inner no'.

The "sin" may be something other than the way we've defined sin in the past. The sin may be that we've been fearful, lacking in trust, lacking in self-belief. The sin may be that we've judged someone harshly, even ourselves.

Steps to receive and accept forgiveness:

Step 1 – Tune in to the 'inner no', in terms of things that are in the past, or things we're currently doing. This might mean identifying the guilt we're holding onto, or the ways in which we believe we are currently straying from the path God has for us.

Step 2 – Say "Forgive me." This means "Let me take a different path. Take this guilt away from me. Let me not feel this burden".

Step 3 – Trust that we will have help in finding the way forward, and that the guilt has no place in our lives and is gone. Change thought patterns every time the old ways beckon, or whenever guilt tries to reappear.

All of these steps can be difficult to achieve.

I can think of things I've done in the past that I can admit were wrong. I remember once being difficult with someone at work and coming to the realisation later that the action I took, and the words I said, were unnecessarily harsh. This person left the job and I've never seen her since, so I've never had a chance to tell her I'm sorry. She probably thinks of me as a mean person, quite justifiably. I realise now I'd strayed down a path of self-importance at the time, and I was annoyed that she hadn't pandered to my ego. However, I've learned from this experience and whether or not she thinks ill of me, there's nothing to be gained by carrying around guilt in relation to this. So, I've identified the guilt, I've asked for it to be taken away, and now I have to remind myself that I'm not guilty, and any time the thought "I'm a bad person because..." comes into mind, I have to let go of it. I need to replace it with the certainty that I've handed it over, and now it has gone.

The amount of worry caused by something I feel I've done wrong can seem to be at odds with the severity of the transgression. I can give myself a hard time over some really small things. Maybe I've said something to a friend and I'm worried they might have misunderstood me, and been upset by what I said. These are things that can keep me awake at night. It doesn't matter how big or small, or whether anyone else would see them as sins. If I feel guilt then I need to hand them over and I need to check myself from continuing to feel guilty.

What about the times when I've been completely unaware that something I said was misunderstood by a friend, and they've been upset as a result? I need help in identifying where I've got it wrong, so that I can offer, ask for, and receive, full forgiveness.

There is nothing to be gained by living in the past, obsessing over things that were done that might have been done better. We should focus on what is in front of us now. We should accept that God forgives us for anything that isn't helpful to the goal He has for us. We should lose the past, lose the guilt, and therefore free ourselves to be what we can be.

When we say the Lord's Prayer we aren't, at this point, listing those things that we need forgiveness for, therefore the request for forgiveness is generic, and could even be a statement, said as a reminder to us.

You forgive us when we go wrong. You set us free from our guilt.

As We Forgive Those who Trespass against Us

Ὡς καὶ ἡμεῖς ἀφήκαμεν τοῖς ὀφειλέταις ἡμῶν

Hos kai hemeis aphekamen tois ophiletais hemon

As we also forgive the debtors of us

The word “hos” is a small word that means a lot. Literally it can be translated as “in the same way”. We should forgive others in the same way that God forgives us.

The way this is spoken often sounds as if we’re asking God to forgive us in the same way that we forgive others, which is of course completely the wrong way round. Pity the world if God forgave in the same way that we do!

How does God forgive? God forgives us every time we stray. Every time, even if we keep making the same mistake over and over again. Like the drug addict child who comes back to take money or steal from his or her family, only to disappear again then turn up months later and repeat the same pattern. God forgives, constantly, repeatedly.

Does God need an apology or a confession before He forgives? No. “Forgive them Father, for they know not what they do”, Luke 23:34, is just one example of many where we see forgiveness without the need for an apology.

In that same way, we should forgive others.

Of course it’s easier to forgive someone if they ask us to, and we can feel great resistance to the idea of forgiveness without an apology, but, I believe, the harder it is to forgive somebody, the more important it is that we should.

Our forgiveness of others is given emphasis by being the only thing it’s suggested we should pledge to do, within the Lord’s Prayer, therefore it must be very important in our relationship with God.

Thinking of the process of forgiveness, what precedes it is a feeling of being wronged. If I feel wronged by someone then I judge them harshly.

When I first read the New Testament from beginning to end I was struck by the constant repetitions of “Do not judge”. I came away with a clear feeling that Jesus does not want us to judge each other. Unforgiveness is judgement plus a righteous feeling that our ill-feeling is justified, because “they are wrong”. Unforgiveness suggests I’m right to not extend loving thoughts to someone.

Yet how unambiguous is the message, here in the Lord’s Prayer, that we should forgive just as God does?

Why forgive?

Other than “because Jesus told us to forgive”, why else is forgiveness so important? The answer is that holding on to unforgiveness distorts our thoughts and therefore our behaviour. We avoid a person or a situation, or we have something like a stone in our shoe that is painful when pressure is applied. Not forgiving harms us, it doesn’t affect the person we aren’t forgiving, it affects us.

Forgiving someone sets us free, not them.

If I pause to reflect on the opposite of love, I’d say it was unforgiveness. You might think it would be hate, but hate has a cause, and that cause is unforgiveness. I hate someone because I consider they’ve done me wrong, or they’ve disrespected me, or excluded me. Maybe I hate someone

because somebody told me they did something I don't like, or maybe they remind me of someone else who has done me wrong.

Not forgiving is the opposite of loving, it's keeping hold of an unloving thought and feeling justified in doing so.

"Yes but they need to learn" you might say. Whether or not the person learns that what they did had implications for others, or whether they moderate their behaviour, that is a matter for them. My forgiveness is a matter for me.

Who is it that judges what another person has to learn? Who is it that sees all sides to any interaction, and sees past all misunderstandings? Not me. I am not the one that should be judging.

How to achieve forgiveness

Forgiveness can be achieved in many ways.

A misunderstanding might be uncovered. Rather than making assumptions about what another person meant by what they said, or assuming someone has knowledge that they don't have, a simple conversation can often clear up a misunderstanding and any grievance previously held can be dropped.

Seeing an issue from the other's perspective can give an insight into why a person acted as they did. Maybe someone pushed in front of you in the queue because they were, literally, on a life or death mission.

Maybe someone has said something that has hurt me, that has caused me to lay awake at night worrying about what has been said. When I am able to step back and look objectively on the situation, I might see that I was being over-sensitive, or that the words hurt because, deep down, I knew the person was right. When I can own and understand my reaction, then I can truly forgive.

The key point is to accept is that there may be a different way of looking at any situation I'm struggling to forgive. In accepting that we must forgive, we may need to first ask God to show us how to perceive of a situation differently. Let us see the situation with fresh eyes, see it as God sees it, because God sees it and forgives.

The deeper, more painful hurts are far harder to rationalise and therefore much harder to forgive. If someone has knowingly, deliberately, hurt you or someone you love, then you can't pass that off as a misunderstanding, or satisfy yourself with seeing things from their point of view.

Therefore we are being called to forgive without the benefit of understanding why. Maybe that's the point. Maybe the lesson is in letting go of a grievance, simply because to let go is the right thing to do, with no need and no ability to understand why things happened as they did.

There are ways of partially forgiving someone. Saying "you were wrong but I'll let you off this time" isn't true forgiveness. Keeping a record of the "wrong" means you can bring it out of the cupboard and wave it around at any time in the future. It has to be true forgiveness, true letting go. The harder it is to forgive, the deeper the unforgiveness goes, the more necessary it is to forgive.

Having forgiven someone, we don't need to necessarily be their best friend, or move in with them. What we want to get to us a place where we can let go of the grievance and where thoughts of them don't leave us feeling angry. We need to take the sting out. Once the sting is removed we can be around them or not, just as we wish.

Add love to the mix

Whenever there is an exchange between people that is unloving, such as an argument, then the only way forward is for love to be added to the exchange. Love comes in the form of forgiveness.

For example, my daughters came back from an afternoon at the park with their friends, upset at having been accused of being intimidating to a couple of younger girls. The mother of one of the girls, who was new to the area, challenged them, and was very angry and verbally abusive towards them. There was much upset at the accusation, and particularly at the way it was put across. When I was told about it I considered my response.

My first instinct was to find out who the woman was that had used apparently foul language and threatening behaviour against teenagers. This was no way for her to behave. What example was she setting and what did she hope to achieve by being so aggressive? I'd find a way of identifying her and approach her with an accusatory stance "Nobody speaks to my daughters like that!"

What would this achieve? This would be a continuation of bad behaviour. I would be descending to her level, even without swearing. She would get confirmation of her perception that these girls are trouble "See, look at the mother!"

A calmer approach would be to adopt a more measured and reasonable stance. "Look, I know a group of teenagers can look menacing, particularly when most of them look older than they are, but if you knew them you'd know they're good girls and I really don't think there was any need to swear at them like that."

I liked this idea better. The only trouble is she could deny swearing, or being aggressive in any way. Also, she might not like to be told off. My stance would be as one of a teacher. Why would she accept being taught by me? Teaching requires skill, and is best when it starts with someone who wants to learn. She might take offence, the argument might continue, like a tennis match, each trying to counter with a stronger, more emotional return.

Then I paused to ask myself what would Jesus do? I don't think Jesus would get into a slanging match. I think Jesus would see inside the person, recognise the fears that must surely be at the root of such anger and I think he would tell this woman she's loved and she has nothing to fear.

I therefore believe my job in this interaction is a simple one. Assuming I'm able to talk to her, I'm not going to enter into an argument with her. I'm not going to tell her what is ok and not ok to do, nor am I going to talk to her about the love of God that protects her, which she might not be ready to hear. I'm simply going to forgive her. I'm not even going to tell her I forgive her, that could be sanctimonious and condescending. I'm going to assume that her actions were out of protectiveness for her daughter and out of fear of individuals she saw as threatening. I'm going to treat her as a reasonable person, maybe ask how she's settling into the village, wish her well.

Part of this feels uncomfortably passive, like I'm giving in. I have a need to protect my daughters and this pulls at a cord within me. However, I know my girls are looked after. I know that, whilst this interaction was a painful one, it was necessary for them to learn that not everybody sees you the way you see yourself. It's also important to learn that the right response to an aggressive person is not more aggression. Someone needs to add love to the mix, that's the only way it can be resolved.

Is anything unforgivable?

Would God forgive anything? I think the answer is yes. Therefore we should forgive anything. Even the most heinous crime, committed against us or our loved ones.

There are some wonderful stories of forgiveness told by holocaust survivors (for example Eva Korr and Edith Eger). They are mind-blowing. How can someone forgive individuals who caused untold suffering, on a personal and global level? The answer is they forgave because they realised it was the only way that they could achieve peace of mind. The same is true for any of us, with any grievance.

Unforgiveness is a defence mechanism. It says “I’m right, you’re wrong, I’m not going to let you do it again”. It says that the person, or the situation is not to be trusted. It gives power to the person, or the event. For as long as the grievance is felt, that person has a hold over me and affects the way I respond in certain situations. If I manage to let go of the grievance, through forgiveness, I am freeing myself from that hold. It’s not about the other person. We’re not letting them off the hook, or condoning any particular behaviour, we’re saying, “this happened, I’m letting go of it, it’s in the past, it can’t hurt me any more”.

There are people who are violent and pose a risk to those around them and I’m not suggesting we ignore that risk. There are people who need to be incarcerated, for the protection of society as a whole. These people can still be forgiven, however. Maybe they grew up around violence or abuse, or maybe they have urges they just can’t control.

It is not easy to forgive, far from it. Even the smallest grievance can really niggle and be hard to let go of. I can think of many occasions when I’ve felt wronged by somebody – I’ve felt that someone has been rude or thoughtless or made a judgement of me that I didn’t like. It’s very hard to just drop it, even in situations when the perpetrator is someone I never met before and may never meet again.

The point is that we need to let go, from the smallest irritation to the deepest hurt. We need to give it to God and let go of it ourselves. We need to let go of the judgement that what happened was wrong.

I judged that the woman who swore at my daughters in the park was wrong. I have to examine the situation. She was angry because she was fearful. She swore to emphasise how angry she was and to show that she was prepared to do what she needed to protect her children.

Was what she did wrong? She was afraid for her daughter’s happiness, I can identify with that. She wanted to teach a group of teenagers that they were seen as intimidating, I can identify with that. She used words that would shock, presumably because she thought she needed to get their attention, and I imagine she also thought this was language that they used themselves. Words are just sounds, swear words are best tuned out as they don’t mean very much in themselves.

I don’t judge this woman any more, there isn’t really anything to forgive. One day I hope she comes to realise that she doesn’t need to be so afraid and speak so aggressively to people. She’s more likely to realise this if she sees people around her being reasonable with each other, and with her. I can hope that she sees that there are consequences of aggressive behaviour that she might not be aware of. She has her own path and I believe she’ll get there in her own time. Sending her loving thoughts, prayers and forgiveness is all I believe is needed of me.

I believe that all the things that happen to us teach us something about life and about ourselves, if we let them. Whether other people are able to learn is a matter for them and not for me. If asked, I can give my opinion, but to “teach” when I haven’t been invited to is more than likely going to fall on deaf ears.

Resonance

One reason things can irritate us so much is because the behaviour of others sometimes resonates with something within us. If I call someone stubborn and argumentative then could it not be that I am also stubborn and argumentative? If I complain because someone talks too much, or always wants the limelight, could it be that I like to talk a lot and I like the limelight? If I'm working with someone and I find them controlling and set in their ways, could it be that I'm controlling and set in my ways?

It's precisely those things that upset us the most that tend to be reflections of ourselves, especially when the thought is a painful one, no matter how vehemently we deny the possibility. What we need is some self reflection.

I found myself annoyed by someone who was being rather bossy and it occurred to me to ask my husband whether he thought I was bossy too. How he laughed! He was amazed I didn't know that about myself.

Of course there are situations where there won't be resonance, where we suffer at the hands of someone else and there is no explanation for it that we can see. The answer is still the same, though. Forgiveness.

Forgive them Father, they know not what they do

Most of the forgiveness examples I can think of hinge on the fact that a judgement has been made against a person for something where the person is likely to be unaware of the consequences, either completely or in part.

This covers all manner of misunderstandings, and cases where excessive aggression has been used. It can also cover selfish acts, such as leaving a restaurant without paying – if you've ever worked in a restaurant kitchen or waiting tables surely that would make you less likely to do this.

Abhorrent crimes must surely be the result of a lack of empathy. I knew someone who'd once interviewed a paedophile, within the context of a therapy session, and had been astounded that the perpetrator said of his victims "they can always get therapy when they're older". If he had any inkling of the depth of suffering his actions had caused, I wonder if he would have stopped himself sooner.

The doctors who worked for Josef Mengele must have known what they were doing was evil, surely? Or did they? They'd been brainwashed into thinking that Jews were an inferior race, however absurd that sounds to us now. Just like the hunters that kill purely for the prize, they had no empathy with their victims.

When we get to the end of life, if we look back on the path our life has taken, imagine if the consequences of our actions, or lack of action, are shown to us, how illuminating must it be. Will we be taught, like I wanted to teach the lady in the park, with reprimands and harsh words, or will it be enough just to be shown the ripples our actions caused. If you believe that we are made from love, and love is at our core, all be it well-hidden in some cases, then I think that empathy, once learned, will bring us back to love.

The tense used in the verb is aorist, the mood is indicative. In the 1st person the aorist indicative can have a sense of "we should", ie "we should forgive others". It's as if we're giving ourselves the command.

Our lack of forgiveness leads to unloving thoughts and to a closed mind. If we hold onto a grievance against someone its affect is far reaching. Lack of forgiveness creates tension and anger that can smoulder for years, even from something seemingly trivial, even when we can't quite remember the cause of our grievance.

There can be no valid reason for lack of forgiveness. Not even for the most unthinkable wrongdoing. Being sure that we are right is not a justification for holding on to a grievance. Holding on does nothing to affect the person we aren't forgiving, it affects us. It is bad for us and our relationship with God.

Letting go enables us to relax. Letting go allows us to open the doors in our mind that we've wanted to keep tightly shut. Letting go allows God into every situation. Letting go enables healing.

We should let go of unforgiveness in the same way.

Lead Us not into Temptation

Καὶ μὴ εἰσενέγκῃς ἡμᾶς εἰς πειρασμόν

Kai me eisenenkes hemas eis peirasmon

And not lead us into temptation

Having studied the context, and the other verbs within the prayer, I see this request as no different to the others, in that we are asking God to do what God would always/never do. God would never lead us into temptation. In the same way, God provides our daily bread, God always forgives us and God delivers us from evil. Therefore, taking all the imperative verbs (give, forgive, lead, deliver) they are stating what happens rather than necessarily asking.

Why would Jesus tell us to ask God to do what God does anyway?

There's the 'project manager' approach, as mentioned earlier: "carpenters, do the woodwork "etc. There's also another point of context. At this point in time, people were being trained away from belief in many gods. The early followers of Jesus would have been swimming against the tide of popular belief in maintaining that there is only one God, who is the source of everything. Therefore maybe the point is that Jesus was emphasising that we entreat the same god for everything, for food, for forgiveness, and for the way forward.

Is it us that need to be reminded that God gives, forgives etc? Is the point of the prayer an explanation to us of what God does, rather than necessarily a request for God to do something?

Temptation is a menace. Temptation is something that's bad for us wrapped up as something appealing. It depends on your own particular weakness. It could be a glass of wine, a cigarette, a piece of chocolate cake, a line of cocaine, a flirtatious smile, a website, lovely things to buy, the urge to place a bet, the point is that it's whatever you find hard to resist that you know ultimately will lead you to no good. What we're asking for is help to overcome the temptation and walk away.

We need to recognise the difference between the thrill of the thing that tempts us and the "inner no" that recognises this as something that is ultimately not good for us.

"Let us not be led into temptation" is suggesting we should ask God's help in not giving in to temptation, whereas "Lead us not into temptation" is asking God to only ever lead us the right way. God will only ever lead us the right way.

The point is that if we stick with God, and with our "inner yes", we won't go the way of temptation.

Jesus is saying 'you will be tempted, but you don't have to give in to it'. To be tempted is not the issue, and we shouldn't feel guilty about it. Temptation is all around, and will always be. The point is that if we want to avoid temptation as much as possible, we stick with God.

Whatever it is that would lead us the wrong way, the way that is not helpful to our purpose and our calling, it's not God.

It is not You that leads us into temptation.

But Deliver Us from Evil

Ἀλλὰ ῥῦσαι ἡμᾶς ἀπὸ τοῦ πονηροῦ

Alla rusai hemas apo tou ponerou

But deliver us from evil

Not only do we ask to be kept away from things that would harm us, we also know that whenever we end up in a bad place – physically, mentally or emotionally – we just need to call out to God and we'll be back on track.

Like the line above, this is about our direction in life. At any crossroads we can go the way that is right by God, or the way that isn't. If we believe in a God that has our best interests at heart then we must go the way we feel God is leading us all the time. Every decision, even minor ones, should be given to God. God knows what is right for us and what isn't.

Bad things are out there, but we mustn't worry about ending up on the wrong side of the tracks. If we worry about avoiding evil then we could end up being worried about going anywhere. Evil isn't to be feared. God will deliver us back safely if we find ourselves where we shouldn't be. When the 'inner no' is screaming to us that, though this looked like the right path, it plainly isn't, we just call to God and we find our way to 'inner yes'.

If we are to achieve whatever it is that God has planned for us, there will be times when we need to be brave. If we sit around waiting to be absolutely positive every time we think of doing something, we might end up stuck, frozen in the headlights. If we know that a wrong turn does not mean the end, we can plough ahead, secure in the knowledge that if this way turns out to be the wrong way, we'll know about it quickly and we'll be able to get back to where we ought to be.

How do we get back to where we need to be? By developing our listening skills, by interpreting the 'inner no' and being able to find the thing that gives us the 'inner yes'. This, like the line before us, is about guidance through life. When we stick with our Heavenly Father we can always get back on track, and we'll be forgiven for having gone the wrong way.

But You bring us back when we go wrong.

For Thine is the Kingdom

Ὅτι σου ἔστιν ἡ βασιλεία

Hoti sou estin he basileia

For yours is the kingdom

This section isn't included in all translations, and recent translations of Matthew and Luke omit it, as most scholars feel it was never part of the original texts. It is commonly added to the protestant version of the Lord's Prayer, and is consistent with other advice on prayer, such as in 1 Chronicles 29:11.

It rounds the prayer off with a certain symmetry, echoing the nature of God as referenced at the beginning of the prayer.

We start the Lord's Prayer by saying "your kingdom come", and at the end we say "yours is the kingdom". If "your kingdom" meant heaven, as discussed earlier, then "yours is the kingdom" is a reminder that the kingdom of heaven belongs to God.

We now know that we are a planet that exists within the universe, so by that definition, with the heavens being "up there" in the sky, then we are saying "yours is the universe". Everything is yours, everything in the whole of the universe.

Back in the time of Jesus, however, the earth was thought to be flat and the heavens were something separate, set apart from the land. The distinction between earth and heaven was a question of opposites, rather than earth being part of the universe, or "the heavens". Here we have a different concept – that God's kingdom is "up there", and we want God's kingdom to manifest on earth. The starting point is that earth, whilst created by God, is not God's domain. If it's not God's domain then what is it?

The physical realm relates to everything we can see, hear, smell, touch and taste. The spiritual realm is where God is, since we can't see God. Also we can't see the Holy Spirit, or any other spiritual being. The spiritual realm is what gives life and inspires creativity.

We want us and everyone around us to be happy, healthy, peaceful and to shine with love. We want more of God in everything.

"The world", as it's often referred to, is where the problems are. Materialism, competitiveness, selfishness, desire for power and control all relate to the world. We are in fear of the threats that exist in the world, and that fear feeds our anger and our wars.

If we want improvements in our life, we look to Heaven. Heaven is devoid of all the negative things that blight the world. Heaven belongs to God.

Heaven is Yours.

The Power

καὶ ἡ δύναμις

kai he dunamis

and the power

The power is God's. What do we mean by power? Strength, ability, force, energy? God is where we came from and God is the source of all creativity.

If we think of power in the form of electricity then electricity needs an appliance in order to have a function. A house with electric sockets has the ability to have lights that shine, ovens that cook and a television that streams entertainment. Without the appliances it does nothing, it just has potential.

What are the appliances for God's power? We are. We have the ability to plug ourselves in and do amazing things. We can sing, dance, create, heal. We can love, we can radiate happiness, we can literally shine.

We don't all shine, at least, not all of the time. What happens is that we come unplugged, or we turn down the brightness, by focusing our attention in the wrong place. We have anxieties, fears, anger, unforgiveness, and all these things diminish our light.

God's is the power, but the power works in and through us. We are necessary for God's power to be apparent in the world. This is the purpose of life. We just need to allow God, let God do what God does.

When we align with God, when we seek to follow the path that is right for us, the unique path for us as an individual, we access God's power. Everybody does it, whether they know it or not. Musicians, artists, writers, poets, teachers, doctors, nurses, therapists, lawyers, computer programmers, chefs, gardeners, those in positions of power and influence, shop workers, everyone has the ability to tap into and express God's power. In some it is more obvious than in others, such as those whose work obviously relies on creativity, but everyone, even pencil-pushers in repetitive office jobs, or factory workers, everyone has the potential to express God's power, in every aspect of life. It is what gives inspiration and generates success.

What if I'm not aligned with what God wants me to do? How will I know? You'll feel an "inner no", or you'll become aware that you're doing your job simply for the money and enduring it rather than enjoying it. Or you're doing something to fit in with somebody else's agenda and that just doesn't feel right. There are options, there are always options. The right option enables God's power to shine through us.

The power that we get from God is the power for good – to create, to heal, to love. It is limitless, immeasurable, unimaginable in scale.

The power to do anything is Yours

And the Glory

καὶ ἡ δόξα

kai he doxa

and the glory

The word used is doxa, which has a sense of “opinion” or “reputation”. Another way of expressing it might be to say “you take the credit”.

This is perhaps a reminder to keep humble. When we are aligned with our true purpose and achieving great things, the power is God’s, and we must remember that. If we get carried away, thinking about how well we’re doing and invincible we are, we might lose the connection we have with God, which is the source of our greatness.

The word doxa is rarely used in a negative sense, ie a poor opinion or bad reputation. Therefore it doesn’t mean that God is to blame for all the bad stuff, or when we don’t have the success we think we might deserve.

When things go well, we should thank God. When things go badly, we should look to ourselves and ask where we might not be aligned with God, so that we might allow more of His power through us.

If we think of ourselves as electrical appliances that God brings to life and uses for good, then the arms, legs and head might be ours, but the power is Gods. Likewise the credit for what we achieve is God’s.

All the credit, for what is achieved through us, goes to You.

For ever and ever, Amen

εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας, Ἀμήν

eis tous aionas, Amen

For the ages, Amen

This is the way things are and the way things will always be. This hints at the timeless nature of God, God has always been there and always will be.

This is what we pray together.

This always has been and always will be the case

We say this prayer together.

My Lord's Prayer

Giver of life to us all.

Where Heaven is You are.

We call Your Holy name.

Let us draw near to You.

We want to carry out Your will.

It is You that gives us the sustenance we need each day.

You forgive us when we go wrong. You set us free from our guilt.

We should let go of unforgiveness in the same way.

It is not You that leads us into temptation.

But You bring us back when we go wrong.

Heaven is Yours.

The power to do anything is Yours.

All the credit, for what is achieved through us, goes to You.

This always has been and always will be the case

We say this prayer together.