

A Word for Sheepdogs

“PASTOR, WOULD YOU open our meeting with prayer?” Countless times a week the average pastor is asked to pray. It’s part of his toolkit, you might say. He enters into a wide array of circumstances in people’s lives armed only with the Word of God and prayer. Foolhardy, you might say. Yet that’s by design. According to the Lord’s own decree, everything is sanctified by the Word and prayer. (1 Tim. 4:5) That means the whole wide spectrum of life: the joys and sorrows, the exuberance and heartbreak, the births and deaths of God’s people are all made holy by the Holy Spirit by means of His Word and the believing response that Word evokes.

In this extremely practical paper, we gain a window into the daily life of a parish pastor as he goes about his rounds. We get to look over Pastor Arnold’s shoulder and gain new appreciation for prayer in every aspect of the pastoral vocation from personal devotion to visitation to catechization and, yes, even parish administration. His many examples demonstrate how we can move from perfunctory “opening prayers” to becoming genuine men of prayer who teach the sheep and lambs of Jesus to come boldly before their Father in heaven to ask him as dearly beloved children ask their earthly fathers, confident that He hears and blesses.

- *Dr. H. L. Senkbeil*



The Role of Prayer with Blessing in Pastoral Care

Pastor Tyler C. Arnold

Our Father who art in heaven.

What does this mean? With these words God tenderly invites us to believe that He is our true Father and that we are His true children, so that **with all boldness and confidence** we may ask Him as dear children ask their dear father.

“On more occasions than I care to remember, one or another of our three children would approach me with a broken toy, shove the shattered toy into my face, and boldly proclaim, ‘Daddy, fix it!’ No matter that I was (and still am) ‘mechanically challenged’; no matter that I might have to stay up well-beyond my bedtime, no matter that I might have to enlist the help of one of our members ... I was motivated because of that trusting phrase: ‘Daddy, fix it!’”¹

¹ An excerpt from a sermon written by The Rev. R. Robert Krueger, Pastor Emeritus at Christ Lutheran Church, Platte Woods, Mo., preached on Good Friday, 2015.

When Jesus taught His first disciples and now us, His 21st century disciples, to address, talk to, and pray to God, He said, “You begin by saying ‘Our Father’!” So, what does this mean? Luther’s Small Catechism eloquently guides our understanding. It supplies us with the above explanation to the Lord’s Prayer as well as the boldness and confidence that comes from the lips of a trusting child.

Notice how our Lord desires us to approach Him in our petitions. Notice again how “His true children” are to come before the heavenly throne in the words that the Savior gives to His disciples in the first place as Luther explains: “**with all boldness and confidence**” This shows us how our approach should not thrust our prayers heavenward with phrases like, “Lord, if you could ... Lord, if you might” Our prayers are not to be “bold-less” but made in confidence to our God who hears our prayers and desires His precious children to ask of Him as we ask our dear father. In other words, “Daddy, fix it!”

The approach Luther shares in the explanation is not made in some sort of arrogant or irreverent manner. Boldness in prayer flows from an understanding that God is merciful and compassionate. It flows from the conviction that God is true to His Word and can be relied on to hear and answer prayer that is prayed according to His Word (John 15:7).² And with this kind of God, a God that promises to answer prayer, our bold and confident requests are invitations to leave fear and doubt behind and enter again and again into true identity as the children of God. There is nothing to hold us back. Nothing stands in our way.

This is our God — our Father — the approachable loving Lord who desires for His children to talk to Him. He wants us to tell Him what we need. He is set, ready to pour out His blessed salve of healing upon our broken lives. As we look at the life of our Lord Jesus, we see how He shows us how to live, how to grow, and

how to be connected with our heavenly Father. We are joined to Him through a living and breathing gift called the Holy Word and this Word includes our conversations. I like to think of our Savior’s words in John chapter fifteen, “I am the vine and you are the branches If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you,” as the connecting words of Jesus that breathe into us life — breathed out in conversation — a conversation with Him that has already been given to us.³ For this reason we listen to the voice of the Father as His words direct our on-going dialog called prayer.

From the time we began to speak, we were given every word to say. We heard these words, learned what they mean, and began using them to form questions and responses. We learned from others who gave us proper definitions and contexts. For instance, we learned what to say as children by imitating what we had heard from our parents and others over and over again. This, too, is the foundation for our prayer. We hear what God says and we say it back to Him.⁴ This is how conversations go. This is how we know we can shove a broken toy under the nose of our heavenly Father and ask with all boldness and confidence saying, “Daddy, fix it!” He has talked to us and we know Him. We have spoken to Him many times. He knows us better than anyone, and, if we listen to Him, we know Him as well.

These prayer conversations with the Lord are spoken face to face. Prayer has been called the communion of the believing heart with the true God.⁵ This is taken from Psalm 27:8, “You have said, ‘Seek my face.’ My heart says to you, ‘Your face, Lord, do I seek’” (ESV). Even more vividly we see how the child in the illustration above is close enough to the Father to bring her need right to His face. Furthermore, it is no mistake that the Aaronic Benediction, which concludes the Divine Service, explicitly reminds Christians, “The Lord bless you and keep

² John R. Stephenson, and Thomas M. Winger *You, My People, Shall Be Holy, A Festschrift in Honour of John W. Kleinig* (Ontario Canada: St. Catherines, 2013), Andrew C. Pfeiffer, *Luther and the Pastor at Prayer*, 206.

³ Peterson says, “We cannot breathe out what we have not first breathed in. The breath that God breathes into us in daily pentecosts, is breathed out in our prayers.” Eugene H. Peterson, *Answering God: The Psalms as Tools for Prayer* (San Francisco: HarperOne Publishers, 1990), 60. Along the same lines, Harold L. Senkbeil says, “First we breathe in and then we exhale. God always takes the initiative. He addresses us in the Word and then we speak as we are spoken to.” Harold L. Senkbeil, *Dying to Live: The Power of Forgiveness*, 310.

⁴ Senkbeil says, “Prayer does not come naturally to the human heart. Since it is the language of faith, it must be learned just as we learn to speak — by imitation. We all learned to talk by mimicking the sound of an adult. First the basics: “mama” and “dada” — then came the rest of our vocabulary. But it all begins with those first syllables, the most important sounds in our language.” Harold L. Senkbeil, *Dying to Live: The Power of Forgiveness*, 143. Likewise, Bonhoeffer uses similar language. Bonhoeffer says, “The child learns to speak because his father speaks to him By means of speech of the Father in heaven his children learn to speak with him. Repeating God’s own words after him we begin to pray to him.” Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Psalms: The Prayer Book of the Bible* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1970), 11.

⁵ J.W. Acker, *Teach Us to Pray* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1961), 29.

you. **The Lord make His face shine on you** and be gracious to you. **The Lord look upon you with favor** and give you peace.” Prayer, bringing our needs right under the nose of God, and blessing, the Lord’s face turning toward us, belong together. The Lord is approachable in our prayers because He first brought us into a blessed relationship with Himself. His blessing of His children comes from the out-pouring of His undeserved mercy and compassion.

There are many books that exposit the purpose and essence of prayer. There are perhaps even more books that attempt to tell us the best way to pray. This paper is not for those purposes. In this paper I will focus on prayer with blessing as it relates to the practice of pastoral care. First, after sharing a few foundational thoughts on prayer, I will focus on prayer in the Divine Service. Next, I will discuss pastoral care with prayer at times of visitation. Then, I will touch on the use of prayer for the sake of the congregation in circumstances other than the Divine Service, such as meetings or other special gatherings. Lastly, I will say a few words about the pastor at prayer with his family and his own personal time in devotion. Along with each section, I will share a few thoughts on how the use of blessing, as it relates to prayer, is a beneficial aspect of Gospel enactment for those to whom we minister. As an appendix, I will share a few helpful thoughts, outlines, and prayers for individual use and use with the parish-family. My hope is that this paper will be of practical use for the sake of those ministering with prayer and blessing in the care of souls.

I. A Few Thoughts on Prayer to Lay the Foundation

A. Our Needs

Where do we begin? What is it that brings forth petitions from our lips? The answer: our needs. The language of prayer is forged in the crucible of trouble.

⁶ Eugene H. Peterson, *Answering God: The Psalms as Tools for Prayer*, 35. Also, with this point, John Kleinig says that failures motivate prayer. We tend not to like to talk about our failures. We will even focus on our successes in thought when some form of failure pops up before us. John W. Kleinig, *Grace Upon Grace: Spirituality for Today* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2008), 184ff.

In other words, we need help. We need another.⁶ This help we seek is for the sake of those specific things and circumstances in our lives that we know. Genuine prayer begins when we scrape our knee on the concrete or worry about the roof leaking during a heavy rain. Our needs are known to us because they confront us each day in one way or another. Pius Parsch says, “We are always in need of something, if not for our own souls, then surely for the Church. We have only to recall what that needed something is.”⁷ When we need something specific, we do not speak in caricatures or rudimentary generalizations. We actually say it, present it, and spell out what we want. If we don’t, Luther says in the Introduction to The Lord’s Prayer in The Large Catechism, “it can’t be called prayer.”⁸

And we have a heavenly Father who knows us so well that He knows each of our needs better than we do. God enters into our need, “gets into our skin,” and understands us better than we do ourselves. What we learn about God in the Scriptures tells us that He knows what it is like to change a diaper or unclog the bathroom drain for the twentieth time. He knows about the many times we have reached out to that particular member and yet all our efforts seem to bear no fruit of relief for his troubled soul. Yet we hear clearly from the Scriptures that Jesus taught that God-pleasing prayer depended entirely on Him rather than the person at prayer. This fact breeds comfort for us poor miserable sinners who are not worthy to approach the throne of the Lord without the breath of the heavenly Father.⁹ Jesus attends to our faithful prayers by being present with us in His words — the words He gives to us first to pray to Him. So, our cumbersome speech, our stilted thoughts, our incoherent prayer language need not hinder our heart as it attempts to search for the right things to say. No, rather, we have our Lord with us, His Words that accompany us, and the promise that He

⁷ Pius Parsch, *The Breviary Explained*, Trans. William Nayden and Carl Hoegerl, (St. Louis: B. Herder Book Co., 1952), 65.

⁸ Martin Luther, *Luther’s Large Catechism: Anniversary Translation and Introductory Essay by Friedemann Hebart* (Adelaide: Lutheran Publishing House, 1984), 136.

⁹ Prayer is like breathing for the soul. There are times in life when prayer feels as effortless as breathing. The most natural thing in the world. And, there are times when even saying the Lord’s Prayer is difficult. Pius Parsch says it this way, “Perhaps we can express the idea by saying that prayer is the breathing of the mystical body. Breath is an unmistakable sign of life. Consequently, where there is prayer, there the life of the church is manifested, whether it’s the prayer of the parish, the family, or individual souls, all of which are cells of the one church.” Pius Parsch, *The Breviary Explained*, 5.

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hears and attends to each of our petitions exactly in the way His will determines. Take comfort in this, beloved in the Lord! Listen to these words from Luther:

What greater honor could be paid us than this, that our faith in Christ entitles us to be called His brethren and coheirs, that our prayer is to be like His, that there is really no difference except that our prayers must originate in Him and be spoken in His name ... Aside from this, He makes us equal to Himself in all things; His and our prayers must be one, just as His body is ours and His members are ours.¹⁰

B. Our Helplessness

Helplessness escapes no one. For the sake of prayer, our own helplessness is not a bad thing. “Helplessness should make us attached to God and make us more strongly dependent upon Him than words can describe.”¹¹ Call to mind, again, the words of our Savior in John chapter fifteen, “Without me you can do nothing” (John 15:5). In one line Jesus tells us what takes a person a lifetime to learn. At times we may feel helpless when it comes to uttering words that seem to be frozen on our lips. We struggle with what our heart desires to present before God in our greatest moments of need. For this reason, our helplessness is our best prayer. It calls out from our heart to the heart of God with greater effect than all our uttered peals. He hears it from the very moment that our lips are seized with helplessness, and He becomes actively engaged at once in hearing and answering our prayers. Kleinig puts it this way:

That helpless cry [of a baby] is its most powerful and effective weapon in the battle for survival, as every mother knows. No matter what the trouble is, the baby simply cries out for its mother and keeps on crying until the mother discovers what’s

wrong and fixes it. The mother discovers whether the baby is hungry or uncomfortable, whether it is gassy or has a wet diaper. And so the baby receives help because it has cried out for help. Helplessness teaches that child to communicate with the mother in this most effective fashion.¹²

Beloved in Christ, do not be wearied by a lack of confidence and the feeling of helplessness in prayer. The issue is not whether or not we are confident enough in what we pray or how we go about extending our petitions to God. The idea of a certain protocol we must follow or quantity of petitions that must grace our lips can cause us to become disenchanting with prayer. As a result, prayer becomes too burdensome and time consuming. These types of issues always reach back with prayer dependent on self rather than the One who gives us prayer in the first place. We rely on God’s grace in prayer, not on ourselves. When Jesus speaks about confident prayer, He directs our attention away from ourselves and our dependence therein, to the faithfulness of God.¹³

Our attitude toward prayer is informed by what prayer is and how our prayers are incorporated into our lives in the Divine Service, in the lives of God’s people during visitation, the lives of God’s people when Christians gather beyond the sanctuary doors on Sunday morning, when our families are united in Word and prayer, and our personal times in conversation with the Lord. To sum up some general thoughts on prayer, I would like to paint a picture we can build on for the rest of our discussion. With prayer, I imagine an open room occupied by two people. There is no divide of communication in the room because the room itself is whole — just four walls. Anything misunderstood can quickly be brought into the realm of understanding because communication is unencumbered. In prayer we stand in the same room as Jesus. In prayer we are grafted

¹⁰ *Luther’s Works*, American Edition, 55 vols., ed. J. Pelikan and H. Lehmann (St. Louis and Philadelphia: Concordia and Fortress, 1955–1987), 24: 407; henceforth AE.

¹¹ O. Hallesby, *Prayer*, Trans. Clarence J. Carlsen (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1931), 26.

¹² Kleinig, *Grace Upon Grace: Spirituality for Today*, 182. Kleinig goes on to say that, “Helplessness and prayer belong together, just like helplessness and faith do.” Examples from Scripture include blind Bartimaeus and the woman with menstrual bleeding, to name two.

¹³ For more on confidence in prayer, see Kleinig, *Grace Upon Grace: Spirituality for Today*, 196.

into the same life of Jesus (back to John chapter 15). In prayer we have access to the Father through Jesus and there is nothing that stands in the way. It's not access by email or text. It's not even a voicemail service that waits for someone to pick up the phone and retrieve messages. Rather, it's a "person-in-the-room" with Jesus access. It's a "grafted-in-the-life" of the Lord access. It's a conversation spoken, listened to, and lived access. Our intimate conversations with God are informed by the Living Word through the guidance of the Holy Spirit. In this way, God speaks to those who are speaking to them.

II. Prayer Access to God in the Divine Service

A. Prayer in the Divine Service

First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time. 1 Tim. 2:1-6

From the beginning, all baptized believers were involved in offering of common prayers in worship ... they were amazed that, by joining in common prayer, Christians put aside their own interests and made the needs of others their main concern.¹⁴

The nature and function of common prayer is set forth in these words from Paul to Pastor Timothy. In the Divine Service we have a common gathering of common sinners. They partake in a

common (not ordinary) meal – a “common – commune – union” in the Lord’s Supper. The children of God also pray common prayers, not because they are commonly used, even though they might be. They are common prayers because they are prayers prayed together. The liturgy rescues us from crass individualism. In other words, prayers bring God’s people together with petitions for the sake of more than just self. We are given a picture of a family in Christ gathered in common conversation with our heavenly Father that has its roots in what the Lord has already given. The hymns, prayers, readings, and all the liturgy immerse the sinner in the Word of God. It delves us deeper into the life of Christ and what life Christ has for us as gathered guests in the sanctum of the Church.

So the Divine Service and how the liturgy breathes out the breath of the Gospel into the very body of the Church is where we begin. With prayer the Church also exhales her petitions heavenward. How do these petitions look? They can look all sorts of different ways. The use of commonly used prayer composed for each of the days of the church-year form an excellent basis for our community prayers at the Divine Service. However, prayers that are *ex corde* (from the heart) should be incorporated as well. This is not to say that prayers should not be written out or extemporaneous at every turn. Rather, prayer with the community of gathered believers still needs to incorporate the individual needs of the body of Christ. Could these needs be addressed generally? Absolutely! But what about calling out the name of “Patty Jones” while addressing her need for God’s strength and healing as she battles breast cancer? What about an *ex corde* prayer that breaks through basic generalities and brings the community of believers together with one heart toward a specific person and need – a need for which they can continue to pray in their individual prayers at home? For this reason, prayers that include specific needs go

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¹⁴ Kleinig, *Grace Upon Grace: Spirituality for Today*, 208.

beyond the walls of the sanctuary on Sunday morning and into the hearts and homes of God's people for the next day, the next week, and beyond.

Yes, in the setting of the liturgy, the Church throughout the ages was not just accustomed to prayer, they were accustomed to prayer in a certain way with certain prescribed prayers. That is why I recommend building on prayers set aside for the Divine Service that are found in the "Let Us Pray" resources produced by the LCMS Commission on Worship.¹⁵ The Prayers of the Church are written in a variety of different styles and responses. Of course, there is room in these prayers to add specific petitions based on special needs of the church or individuals. Luther says in the Introduction to the Lord's Prayer in the The Large Catechism, "God leads the way by providing the text and melody of our prayers himself, and by suggesting the very words that we should use."¹⁶ With the liturgical structure of the day/season already in place, we have the blessed ability to move our liturgical prayers in one direction or the other, bearing in mind the rhythm and rhyme set forth in God's Word.

B. Prayer as it relates to blessing in the Divine Service

In terms of blessing, the Divine Service embodies the source on the front lines of our lives. Kleinig says that while parents have the authority to bless their children according to their vocation, so also pastors are called to bless their congregation in the Divine Service and its members in pastoral care.¹⁷ More will be said about blessing members in pastoral care situations outside of the Divine Service later. As far as the Divine Service is concerned, this is the main place for the enactment of God's blessing. If prayer in the Divine Service calls God's people to join together in petitions based on our communal needs, then blessing in the Divine Service is the enactment of a promise given by God through what we

receive and what He promises so freely to give. To put it another way, our prayers are vertical, even our communal prayers — a conversation from God to us, back to God. His blessing is horizontal beginning with the vertical, an enactment from God's promise through the mouth of the pastor to the community of believers. This Gospel enactment of blessing is a divinely-given spiritual power granted to the receiver as a performative declaration of any clear promise given by Christ. Kleinig notes six different acts of blessing, each having a different function and location.¹⁸ These blessings in the Divine Service serve to enact blessings that are vital to the pastoral care of people in settings beyond Sunday morning (visitation, etc. ...).

Because our blessing of others begins with prayerful words in the Divine Service and then is enacted upon the gathered guests, these words are vitally important. Luther says because these words come from Holy Scripture, they are real blessings. "They are more than mere wishes. They state facts and are effective. They actually bestow and bring what the words say."¹⁹ So, from the words given and words received in the Divine Service, a "going forth" of blessing is put into action in more than just that particular setting. Later we will explore the importance of prayer with blessing beyond the sanctuary walls.

As you reflect on the meaning and importance of blessings, consider these words from Eugene Peterson that illustrate how the Lord gets down on His knees, gets down on our level, and shares Himself with us in this "Blessing Psalm," a Psalm of Ascents — Psalm 134. The prayer book of the Scriptures, the psalms, are connected directly into the Gospel enactment of blessing. The blessing of the Lord is the Lord's blessing to His people. And because we have it, we do it!

There is no better summarizing and concluding work in all of the Scrip-

¹⁵ Both One-Year and Three-Year Series prayers can be found at: <http://www.lcms.org/letuspray/>

¹⁶ Martin Luther, *Luther's Large Catechism: Anniversary Translation and Introductory Essay* by Friedemann Hebart, 135.

¹⁷ John W. Kleinig, "Pastoring by Blessing," *Lutheran Theological Journal* 43, no. 1 (2009), 28-38.

¹⁸ The first act is the dominical greeting: *The Lord be with you* with the response *And also with you*. The second is the apostolic greeting spoken by the pastor before the sermon: *Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ*. The third is at the end of the sermon: *The peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus*. The fourth: *The peace of the Lord be with you always*. The fifth is at the dismissal after communion: *The body of our Lord Jesus Christ and his precious blood strengthen and preserve you in body and soul to life eternal. Go in peace*. The final blessing is the Aaronic Benediction: *The Lord bless you and keep you ...* John W. Kleinig, *Pastoring by Blessing*, 28-38.

¹⁹ AE 5:140.

ture than the word blessing ... every act of worship concludes with a benediction. Psalm 134 features the work in a form that might be called an invitational command: "Come bless the Lord ... Lift up your hands ... and bless the Lord! The great promise of being in Jerusalem is that all might join in the rich temple worship. You are welcome now to do it. Come and join in. Don't be shy. Don't hold back."²⁰

III. Prayer Access to God in the Home and Other Places

A. Prayers with Blessing During Visitation

However difficult and time-consuming we may find visitation to be, we as pastors understand that the ministry is active. It moves from chancel to the home and back again. Our conversations with others form and inspire our prayers. Listening is the most important task during visitation. As we listen to the needs of others, the pastor will soon discover what to preach on Sunday morning and what to pray for in times of personal and corporate prayer. Listening is giving of ourselves during conversation. So is prayer. In intercession we use our active faith for the sake of others. We also show our love of those for whom we pray as we give ourselves spiritually to them. It isn't much to make small talk about the weather and such things. But what if our conversations included petitions brought before the heavenly throne that addressed the needs of those we are with? What if we could wrap the parishioner's greatest concerns in prayer with a word from our Lord in a psalm that also included a petition that specifically included the person, called them by name, and spoke directly to their situation?²¹ Now, see how personal everything becomes. See how the Lord is included in the discussion, wrapped into the very words, and the opportunity now arises to accentuate simple petitions with a direct blessing from the Lord.

From our petitions to God, spoken by His children as answering speech, to the blessing of Christ, actively dispensed to the receiver, prayer and blessing come together. Prayer and blessing are not intrinsically the same. However, the vertical dimension of prayer between God and man acutely lends itself to something else that can come next. That second thing is a blessing, which is a Gospel enactment from the Lord through the giver to the receiver. The blessing brings everything back to where it all begins — God's grace and mercy for the sake of those He loves.

B. An Excursus – "Three Prayers with Blessing in Forty-Five Minutes"

On a morning like any other I received a phone call from a female parishioner with two teen-aged boys who are active in the parish-family. She says, "Pastor, I wanted to call so you hear this from me first. Our family is moving to another city because "Jack" (her husband) got a job promotion he just can't pass up." At this point, I'm not sure what to say. This could be spoken as very good news (job promotions usually are good news) or with great trepidation, fear, and disappointment because they will be leaving their church family they love and a community of friends with whom they have grown very close. I couldn't tell from her voice. So, instead of jumping in with a response, I encouraged her to expound on her statement. That's when the tears arrived. Her sons, who are both in high school, have no desire to leave town (one reason was because of a girl, of course). "Kathy" didn't sound all that happy about leaving a city she loves, a good school district, a house that became a home, and, of course, her church and her friends. But, being the faithful wife she is, she continued to talk about the positives of the move yet to come — knowing that the Lord is with her and her family, He never leaves her, and He will give her strength through this transition.²² At the end of our conversation, I asked if I could have a prayer with

²⁰ Eugene H. Peterson, *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction: Discipleship in an Instant Society*, 186.

²¹ Since the Psalms are prayers, they address our needs. For example, I like to use Ps. 37 in times of illness as words of encouragement. Words such as, "Be still before the Lord, and wait patiently for him ... the Lord does not abandon his faithful people; he protects them always" can be followed by, "Dear Lord, help Janet who is struggling with illness today, to be confident that you will protect her and that you will never abandon her in her hour of need." Then, one could continue further into the Psalm, read a little more, and then tailor another personal petition surrounding those words. I also like Ps. 139 in times of illness or distress as well. It speaks clearly that the Lord "knows" us and what we need. Ps. 128:1-4 works very well as a family blessing especially when a family receives the gift of a new child.

²² I find it refreshing and comforting when parishioners minister to their pastors. Most church-going people are pretty good at it when given the chance. This situation was no different. She was talking ... I wanted to listen. She shared more of God's blessed comfort and strength in her words to me than I probably did to her. How refreshing.

her over the phone. She graciously accepted. I reached for the Psalms and opened to Psalm 103:1-2, "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name! Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits ..." ²³ Building on this psalm we prayed together, "Lord, You bless us in ways we at times don't even understand. We know that You are with us, You never leave us, and You never abandon Your children. Bless and preserve the "John-son" family as they make their transition to a new city, a new job, and a new school. Keep them ever mindful that You bless continually and that in You they are always blessed. Guard, protect, and strengthen them in every need. In Christ's name we pray these things. Amen." Then I went on to say, "And also, Kathy, I was wondering if I could share the benediction with you to close our conversation? She eagerly said, "Yes!" And so, I shared the Aaronic Benediction and accentuated the words, "... and give you PEACE!" For an upset heart and mind, for whatever reasons, stress, anxiousness, fear ... God enacted His promise through blessing with "peace" as the final word!

The second prayer with blessing came just three minutes after I spoke with Kathy. "John" came to my study seeking assistance. John is a perennial beggar. But, what he truly seeks after is more than just monetary. He is not a member of the church, but I have conversations with him quite regularly. He needed gas for his car, again. But when he enters my study, he is always in need of something else, something more important — a listening ear and the Lord's comfort in prayer and blessing. This day was no different. John reminded me of his dire physical state (he's homeless), but also his struggles emotionally. He recently lost both his father and his beloved pet within the matter of a few days. He was between jobs and living in unsavory conditions. His most recent place to rest his weary head was flooded by all the rains, and he was in the process of relo-

cating and finding another place to store his belongings. But what troubled John was not so much the move, the lack of money, or the fact that he is perennially in need. Rather, he continues to have trouble coping with loss. After listening, the opportunity for prayer and blessing occurred. This time I reach for my Pastoral Care Companion and, as I sit beside him, holding his hand, we have prayers and Scriptures spoken and received from the section called "Comforting the Bereaved." Psalm 27 is our conclusion, with one more petition, "Dear Father, You said that You would shelter John in the day of trouble and conceal him under the cover of Your tent. You said that You would lift John high upon a rock. We depend on this, Your promise ..." The prayer continued with even more prayers and Scripture from the rite itself. Built in at the end of the rite is the benediction. At that point I stood, put my hand on John's head and spoke the Lord's blessing, making sure he takes that last word with him out the door — "Peace!"

Moments later I'm out the door making home visitations. I make a call on "Sally" who I knew already was in the midst of a battle with breast cancer. What I didn't know was that earlier that day the news about her cancer went from bad to worse. She gave me the details, and the diagnosis would entail a greater level of treatment with no assurance of a favorable outcome. Instead of the kind of comfort that comes through a theology of glory, which would say something like, "Don't worry, Sally, God will make you better. All you have to do is trust in Him ..." No, rather, the words of St. Paul are so much more comforting, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness" (2 Cor. 12:9 NIV). Comfort comes through a God who knows what we go through and is with us every step of the way. The issue is not why God is doing this, but rather where God is doing this.²⁴ For this reason, I continue to check back with Sally regularly. Just as it is promised that Jesus will never leave her, this should

²³ Peterson says, "All the Psalms are prayers in community: people assembled, attentive before God, participating in a common posture, movement and speech, offering themselves and each other to their Lord. Prayer is not a private exercise, but a family convocation." Eugene H. Peterson, *Answering God: The Psalms as Tools for Prayer*, 18. Even when only one or two are gathered in prayer, it's still a prayer in the greater community of the church.

²⁴ Richard C. Eyer, *Pastoral Care Under the Cross: God in the Midst of Suffering* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1994), 29.

also be true with her pastor. Prayers continue to abound for her sake.

In the instance above, I used 1 Peter 5:6-7, 10-11, especially the words, "Cast all your anxieties on him, for he cares about you. And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ will himself restore, establish and strengthen you." I told Sally that the words "after you have suffered ..." are not "if" suffering happens words, but rather "when" suffering happens words. Suffering will happen. And based on that text we had a prayer that concluded, this time, with the apostolic blessing.²⁵ Helpful for me is using Scripture first to direct prayer. Andrew C. Pfeiffer in his contribution entitled, "Luther and the Pastor at Prayer" says, "To listen to the Scriptures before prayer raises the possibility that our prayer will be according to God's will and that it will actually be answering speech and not our own 'cut flower words, arranged in little vases for table decoration.'"²⁶

C. Blessing During Visitation

As God places a blessing upon the lives of others, spoken from our mouths, spoken first from His Word, we put the Gospel in motion. Blessing is a Gospel enactment that is not to be given in some sort of haphazard way. The pastor can only bless those whom God has promised to bless. However, the faithful we visit certainly are numbered among those who are to be blessed. We bless so that, "in keeping with God's law those who have received God's blessing can pass it on by blessing others."²⁷ With the Lord's blessing placed upon our parish-family, it's important for us to remember that when we leave our pulpits on Sunday, we don't become humanists on Monday. In other words, our Sunday prayers and preaching are not to become ambiguous antidotes that only partly assist in the real work of caring for souls. We carry our prayers and blessings from the sanctuary to the doorposts of the

homes of those we serve. We rejuvenate the vertical relationships of God's people by teaching them to pray. We dispense, in a horizontal way that began with the vertical relationship solidified by Christ, a Gospel enactment into the lives of those for whom we pray in blessing. The flow from altar and pulpit makes good through the rest of the week in prayer and blessing for the sake of God's people.

IV. Teaching Prayer and Blessing by Praying and Blessing

A. Prayer at Meetings/Gatherings

Prayer is learning a different language. For this reason, prayer does not come naturally.

So, how do we teach others to pray? First of all, we practice prayer ourselves, and we will be getting to that a little later. Second, we show others how to pray so they can mimic our prayers. Thirdly, we allow others to pray when we meet together. We learn to pray by praying.

Luther says in the Introduction to the Lord's Prayer in the Large Catechism that "we are not against prayer but aimless wailing. Christ himself forbids long windedness."²⁸ Lest we go about beating the air with meaningless words, we must work at focusing our prayers on what matters. My prayers before meetings, gatherings, or even Bible study are usually *ex corde* based on the season of the church year, readings appointed for that day, or some other liturgical foundation with which the community of believers is involved at that particular time. Without practice, praying can be awkward because, like we mentioned before, we must learn the language of prayer first. So, in order to focus my prayers on what matters, I use the psalms and other prayers from Scripture as the basis for all *ex corde* prayers. These are the perfect prayers for every time because they are first and foremost from the Lord.

²⁵ Kleinig says, "While any divine promise can be turned into a Christological or Trinitarian benediction, the simplest way of blessing people is by using a scriptural version, such as the apostolic benediction: 'The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all.'" John W. Kleinig, *Pastoring by Blessing*, 28-38.

²⁶ John R. Stephenson, and Thomas M. Winger *You, My People, Shall Be Holy, A Festschrift in Honour of John W. Kleinig*, Andrew C. Pfeiffer, *Luther and the Pastor at Prayer*, 207. The second part of the quote is from Eugene H. Peterson, *Working the Angles* (Eerdmans, 1987), 31.

²⁷ John W. Kleinig, *Pastoring by Blessing*, 28-38.

²⁸ Martin Luther, *Luther's Large Catechism: Anniversary Translation and Introductory Essay by Friedemann Hebart*, 138.

Teaching by doing so that others can mimic is extremely important in learning how to pray.

Teaching by doing so that others can mimic is extremely important in learning how to pray. But others cannot mimic and learn to pray properly unless they themselves are asked to pray. That's why the leadership in our parish-family takes turns praying at the beginning and ending of meetings and special gatherings. We have a schedule of who will pray so that there are no surprises. There is perhaps no better way to cause great apprehension in our members than to ask someone who might not be comfortable speaking extemporaneously to come up with an appropriate prayer, "off the cuff" in front of the pastor and fellow members. Most every time, the leaders in our parish-family who are asked to pray write out their prayers beforehand. These prayers, prayed by our lay-people, have been some of the best prayers I have ever heard. They are thoughtful, considerate, insightful and inclusive. But, again, the Word of God informs our prayers. It sets the tone by putting us in God's breath toward us first. Then, we answer God.

For this reason, our meetings begin in the sanctuary. We use the suffrages in Responsive Prayer I (LSB pg. 282). We gather, we kneel (we have kneelers in our sanctuary. Standing is also appropriate)²⁹, and we pray the Lord's Prayer, confess the Creed, and then continue with the morning or afternoon/evening litany that includes various psalm verses and liturgical texts. Then, the parishioner scheduled for that day prays a suitable prayer before we all pray together Luther's morning or evening prayer. Then, we receive the blessing, "The Lord bless us, defend us from all evil, and bring us to everlasting life." A long critique of the parishioner's prayer is not necessary (nor recommended). However, a nice compliment highlighting one or two main points of the prayer usually is well received as encouragement to do it again.

This can be done with the children of our parish-family as well. Our parish-family utilizes an afternoon midweek

²⁹ Senkbeil says, "Standing is the posture of praise, an effective way to acknowledge the person of God. Kneeling is the posture of humility and for that reason alone has much to commend it, for genuine humility is hard to come by. When you confess your sins or bring your requests before God, it helps the heart to do so on your knees." Harold L. Senkbeil, *Dying to Life: The Power of Forgiveness*, 156.

school for Biblical and catechetical instruction specifically for those who are in grades one through eight. It meets from 4:30 p.m. to 6:30 p.m. on Wednesdays and includes a meal for the kids, music time with Mrs. Arnold (for the younger kids), Biblical and catechetical instruction time, and chapel. At chapel we teach children to pray. Not only do we teach them the prayer our Lord taught us, but also to pray petitions that include those with whom our children are most concerned. Prayer remains liturgical in form within the context of a brief chapel time. A liturgy of some sort is used and the prayers fit into the context of that liturgy. At the beginning of the year, I pray petitions to show them how this is done. But by year's end, they are also praying appropriate petitions with language that sounds a lot like what we would recognize as "prayer language." It's fun to see this evolution in understanding as the children become less and less cumbersome with their thoughts and speech as time goes on. Sometimes we use a written litany with responses. Other times we use a kind of litany that might have a few of our children read specific portions of the prayers with everyone else responding. There are all sorts of ways to teach prayer to our children. First and foremost is to simply pray with them, lead them in prayer, and they will come to learn the language of prayer from their pastor.

B. Blessing at Meetings/Gatherings

As mentioned above, a general blessing at the end of the prayer suffrages is most appropriate before meetings/gatherings, or, even as a conclusion. Therefore, the right time for blessing can be anytime, especially if we make special time for it. Peterson mentions a particular book with the title: *The God Who Stands, Stoops, and Stays*. This summarizes the posture of blessing: God stands – He is foundational and dependable; God stoops – He kneels to our level and meets us where we are; God stays – He sticks with us through hard times and good, sharing His life with us in grace and peace.³⁰ And

³⁰ Eugene H. Peterson, *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction: Discipleship in an Instant Society*, 185.

because our Lord comes to us in blessing, it is quite appropriate to find regular times throughout the week or month to offer blessings to the congregation.³¹ There need not be a specific formula on which we must depend for a proper blessing — only the right use of God's Word. It is God's Word pressed forward as Gospel enactment that is the source and power of blessing.

Dear pastors, find opportunities to bless children. So often children are thought of as accessories in the family unit that indicate a strong future for the church. We want to see them in the Divine Service and we want others to see them, for their presence is often used as a litmus test to quantify a healthy and growing church. However, more than any we serve, they may be our most disregarded members in terms of prayer and blessing. They aren't struggling with jobs and finances. They aren't riddled with the burdensome responsibility of a "dog-eat-dog" world. Many times they don't have the health issues our older adults have. Their problems are often seen as small or just another part of growing up and getting past it. Yes, we teach them at the Divine Service and in Sunday school. However, their specific spiritual needs are often passed over as we quickly greet them at the door after Service, tell them how much they have grown, and then our attention turns to the parents who we think might need more of the meat and potatoes of our pastoral care. My personal observation is that pastors hardly ever make it a priority to visit on our children.³²

However, the Lord visits our children, comes to them, and blesses them, too. You may already encourage children to approach the altar at communion with their parents and give them some sort of blessing at that time. I say, "The Lord bless you and keep you in the graces of your Holy Baptism." It's a simple and short way to remind them of how they were made Christ's very own through water and the Word. But even more than

this, I would encourage pastors to find other times to bless the children as well. Perhaps a blessing can be given at the beginning or end of Sunday school.³³ I like to bless our kids on the last day of our midweek school before we take a break for the summer. I bring each class up to the altar, have them kneel at the altar, and then call each child by name while giving them an individual blessing. I say something like, "Avery, the Lord bless you and keep you this summer. The Lord grant you His strength and peace today and forevermore — in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit," and then make the sign of the cross on their head. This is the last thing for our midweek school children for the year. They receive the blessing and then depart in God's peace. The blessing is God's faithful attention, His faithful sending.³⁴ God is not turning away. Rather, blessing, by definition, is God's delivered Gospel — whether in the Divine Service or in pastoral care. "It conveys God's gifts as free gifts communally and personally to people as they are ready to receive them."³⁵

However, the Lord visits our children, comes to them, and blesses them, too.

V. Our More "Intimate" Times in Prayer

A. Praying With the Family

After story time with the boys tonight, it was a little late ... and it has been a long one ... I was about to turn the lights off and tell them goodnight, and Dylan reminded me that we still needed to pray. So we folded our hands, prayed The Lord's Prayer, prayed Luther's Evening Prayer, and made the sign of the cross. Westy is not two yet, and the little guy prays right along with us ... "I thank you, my heavenly Father, through Jesus..."³⁶

As mentioned earlier, those we teach learn to pray by hearing us pray. At times, our children and other family members remind us to pray. When we pray the catechism, the psalms, or even

³¹ Kleinig mentions in *Pastoring by Blessing* the useful example of a church in Malaysia that set aside time after the Service to give specific blessings to individuals or families in the sanctuary. He also mentions that a pastor could set aside other designated times for people to come to receive a blessing. This "could also provide a safe context for private confession and absolution, or intercessory prayer, or any kind of spiritual direction."

³² Personally, I would like to make this more of a priority in my ministry. We have a called worker, trained as a Lutheran school teacher, who does youth and education in our parish. He makes visitation on our younger people his priority. However, I believe it's important that their pastors also visit them.

³³ If not each Sunday, which may not be possible because of time and/or logistics, but perhaps in the fall, at the beginning of school, and then in the spring, at the end of school.

³⁴ See also Kelly Johnson, "Blessings, Curses and the Cross," *Ex auditu*, Vol 27, (2011), 82-99.

³⁵ John W. Kleinig, *Pastoring by Blessing*, 28-38.

³⁶ From a post made by Doxology grad, The Rev. Dustin Beck on Facebook – April 23rd, 2015.

*Our prayers, then,
may set the tone
for what is more
for our family —
the act of
performative
blessing.*

the Lord's Prayer, those who hear this "different" language begin to know it. The more they hear it, the more common it becomes. Pfeiffer said, "The catechism for Luther was not just a collection of church teachings, but guided Christians in what they needed to believe for salvation, to follow for daily Christian living, and to pray as children of God."³⁷ So, for the sake of our prayers with our family, first of all, do it and do it often. Secondly, the catechism is an excellent resource to begin our prayer life with our children. Prayers that are teeming with God's Word and predicated upon our faith as Lutheran Christians help build a foundation of faith in the people we love the most. It's helpful for each member of the family to have their own hymnal. Personalized hymnals make excellent gifts as well as provide the satisfaction for our children to know, "this one belongs to me. This is my prayer book." Find a time in the morning, after meal time, and/or at bed time to pray prayers that can be memorized and used wherever and whenever there is no access to their book. The hymns we sing are prayers put to music, and so, like the psalms, poetic words flow from our lips to our ears as each well thought-out word carries its weight in blessed meaningfulness. "Singing adds a third dimension to prayer. The mouth and the heart are involved in all prayer. But in singing, the whole body gets to join in; the prayers and praises originating from the heart reverberate through muscle, bone and cartilage."³⁸ Still, leave room for personal petitions that include those we love and those who need our prayers. Allow the children to pray their own special petitions for those they know. Prayers and various ways to pray with those we love are countless and bountiful.³⁹

B. Blessing the Family

Liturgies for the sake of family devotions along with hymns both old and new form a strong foundation from which we are given the substance and opportunity to bless. The blessing is a performative

utterance, a speech act that demonstrates and encapsulates the Gospel located upon God's children. We have the privilege to be close (in proximity) to our family, more than even our parish-family. We tuck our children into bed at night, we encourage them in their times of need, and, even with our spouse, we are given the opportunity to converse about the joys and the struggles of the day. These are indeed appropriate times of opportunity to pray with our family. Our prayers, then, may set the tone for what is more for our family — the act of performative blessing. And since we are so close in proximity, we can place our hand on their head, make the sign of the cross on their forehead and on their heart, reminding them that they are marked as one redeemed by Christ the crucified.⁴⁰ For example, at bedtime we might say, "The Lord bless you and keep you throughout this night as you sleep. God grant you a peaceful rest while He sends His holy angels to protect you — in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." Even more, we might teach our own children to bless us in return. They could use the same blessing offered to them or a different one they prefer. In family life together, there is more time and opportunity to carry out these treasurable benedictions and also explain their meaning.

C. Praying in Our Personal Devotional Life

In those quiet times of morning or evening prayer, times of meditation, times of struggle (*Anfechtung*), times when we listen to the utterance of the Lord in His Word laying out our celestial conversation with petitions that then flow forth from our heart and lips, we approach the throne of heaven set with a clear mind and, most importantly, a trusting faith.⁴¹ Without prayer a Christian is like a body without a soul — a living spiritual corpse. Our faith comes alive and has legs in prayer. Yet, even with movement from God to us and then us answering God, prayer, with all its work, is all about rest.

³⁷ John R. Stephenson, and Thomas M. Winger *You, My People, Shall Be Holy, A Festschrift in Honour of John W. Kleinig*, Andrew C. Pfeiffer, *Luther and the Pastor at Prayer*, 209.

³⁸ Senkbeil, *Dying to Live: The Power of Forgiveness*, 157.

³⁹ There is no "one right way" to pray. However, there are many advantages to going back to the catechism, liturgies, and ancient hymns in order to form our prayers. These foundations reach back to the Word of God to set the tone for prayer — or give us prayers directly from God's Word. Peterson says, "If we dismiss the Psalms, preferring a more up-to-date and less demanding school of prayer, we will not be without grace but we will miss the center where Christ worked in His praying. Christ prayed the Psalms — the Christian community was early convinced that He continues praying them through us as we pray them: 'We recite this prayer of the Psalm in Him, and He recites it in us.'" Eugene H. Peterson, *Answering God; The Psalms as Tools for Prayer*, 4.

⁴⁰ Lutheran Service Book, Holy Baptism, 268.

⁴¹ Matthew Harrison gives a few introductory remarks on preparation that are worth noting in Martin Luther's, *A Simple Way to Pray*. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2012), 3-5. He calls it "I.T.C.P." (Instruction, Thanksgiving, Confession, and Prayer). This useful method anchors prayer in the catechism. Also see Harold L. Senkbeil, *Engaging Our Culture Faithfully, Concordia Journal*, Vol. 40 no. 4, (Fall 2014), 292-313, especially page 312.

So, while prayer is not entirely passive and learning to pray takes intentional effort (as mentioned already), the main thrust of prayer is resting in the Lord — letting God speak to us. Kleinig so eloquently puts it like this:

Generally speaking, prayer moves from complexity to increasing simplicity. We move from speaking to listening, from thinking to looking, from giving to receiving, from doing to being. With that comes a growing reliance on Jesus and a clearer sense of direction through the Holy Spirit.⁴²

The reason we rest in prayer is because we rely so heavily on the listening so as to hear how the Lord would guide our prayers. Above the sanctuary door at Christ Lutheran, Platte Woods, Mo., where I serve, are the words from Ps. 46:10, “Be still and know that I am God.” Such marvelous, divinely inspired words set the tone for how our Lord meets His people and what we are to be doing — “Be still!” And, since our prayers are liturgical, even our private prayers are thus so, finding its roots in the larger praying community — being still and resting in God’s Word forms our initial posture.

What is foundational for corporate prayer in the Divine Service is foundational for personal prayer as well. Senkbeil says that, “when we define personal prayer as liturgical prayer, we begin to knock down all barriers to genuine community, whether self-chosen or imposed. For when we learn to pray as Jesus taught, we learn that all prayer is corporate prayer, whether in church or by ourselves.”⁴³ Never are we alone in our prayers. The same foundation that binds the community of believers together, binds together our personal prayers as well.⁴⁴ “Never think that you are kneeling or standing alone, rather think that the whole of Christendom, all devout Christians, are standing there beside you and you are standing among them in a com-

mon, united petition which God cannot disdain.”⁴⁵

All well and good are our prayers that begin in the Psalter. With the prayers that have already been written for us by the Almighty Himself, we cannot go wrong. For within these words we have no doubt. In these words are not just words about Jesus but also words from Jesus. When we pray the psalms, we can be confident that these are the same words Jesus prayed. The liturgy of the Church has always included the psalms and, therefore, has always prayed the psalms together. So, these are the building blocks of our personal prayers — from the ancient of days unto forevermore.⁴⁶ And since various psalms are appointed throughout the liturgical year, the rhythm of our song in prayer will ebb and flow from lips to ears to minds to hearts and then back again with the season. Not only will we be able to touch on our own needs in praying the Psalter, but even more the plenteousness and variety in these ancient liturgical hymns bring before us the needs of the whole Church. We are not only praying with the church but for the church. God showers us with eloquent poetic words, each rich with meaning, and invites us to chew on those words, to turn them over in our mouth, and savor them again and again. How rich are the words that first come to us.⁴⁷

For the sake of our personal prayers, much has been written already by Luther and many others on the “how to” of praying. I have a few prayer suggestions for personal and congregational use attached at the conclusion of this paper in the appendix. Please take a look, also, at the Works Cited list for more beneficial reading on the topic of prayer. To conclude this particular section, I will add one more general thought on personal prayer — praying out loud.

In ore/in corde — “in mouth/in heart”
— links our heart, tongue and eardrums
together as one. Verbal prayer, even

*Yet, even with
movement from
God to us and
then us
answering God,
prayer, with all
its work, is all
about rest.*

⁴² John W. Kleinig, *Grace Upon Grace: Spirituality for Today*, 178.

⁴³ Harold L. Senkbeil, *Dying to Live: The Power of Forgiveness*, 145. Eugene Peterson likes to make the distinction between private prayer and prayer in solitude. He says correctly that, strictly speaking, prayer is never private. Prayer may be done in solitude, without the company of others, but never privately — without the church. For further reading on this, see Eugene H. Peterson, *Where Your Treasure Is: Psalms that Summon You from Self to Community*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1993), 6.

⁴⁴ Parsch says, “In praying the Breviary, it is not so much I who pray, but the church, the bride of Christ, who prays for the vast needs of the kingdom of God on earth. In praying the Breviary I am a member of a great community, a leaf on the tree that is Christ’s Church, in whose life and growth I have a definite part. Pius Parsch, *The Breviary Explained*, 7.

⁴⁵ AE 43:198.

⁴⁶ “The ancients have a saying for it — it sounds especially nice in their native tongue: semper in ore psalmus, semper in corde Christus. “Always a Psalm in the mouth, always Christ in the heart.” Harold L. Senkbeil, *Dying to Live: The Power of Forgiveness*, 153.

⁴⁷ Harold L. Senkbeil, *Meditatio: On the Making of The Pastor*, 3.
<http://www.doxology.us/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/meditatio.pdf>.

when we are praying alone, will perhaps have the effect of slowing us down to meditate on each individual word, especially when praying the poetry of the psalms. Edgar Allan Poe once said that text is a more fitting vehicle to communicate instruction than poetry. The aim, however, of poetry is to lift the soul to lofty heights.⁴⁸ So, with poetry, each word matters. Peterson notes that Hermann Gunkel, who he calls the pioneer psalms scholar, always insisted that the text be read aloud in order that the reader might better discern its movement and direction, its rhythms and assonance, its key words and accents. Peterson says that Gunkel indeed knew how to listen to the text.⁴⁹ Of course, listening first is the way to go, as James will have us remember: “Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger ...” (James 1:19 ESV). I’m a golfer, and when I practice, I’m aware of many different things. I’m aware of where my body is, where my hands are, and the position of my head. I feel these things. I also listen when I practice. I listen to hear what sound the ball makes off the club face. It’s interesting because I can feel good contact as well as hear it. And then I look. I look to see if my ball is going straight and far. If I put all those things together, I had at least one successful swing that day.

Beloved, so it is with our prayers. All things are connected in our prayer. It’s a full body, all sensory experience. But perhaps as Peterson puts it, as Christians throughout the centuries have matured in prayer, it’s important to just do it. “The praying itself is deliberate and leisurely, letting the motions of heart come into harmony with the movements of the lips.”⁵⁰

Conclusion

I didn’t spend much time fleshing out the Lord’s Prayer in this paper except with allusions primarily in the introduction. In the appendix I have included various

⁴⁸ R.C. Sproul, *Effective Prayer*, (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1986), 46.

⁴⁹ Eugene H. Peterson, *Answering God: The Psalms as Tools for Prayer*, 60.

⁵⁰ Eugene H. Peterson, *Answering God: The Psalms as Tools for Prayer*, 7.

helps for prayer based on the prayer our Lord Jesus taught us to pray. Note especially the outline based on the petitions of the Lord’s Prayer formulated by Pastor Bryan Wolfmueller. I found the specific petitions he uses in his personal prayer life to be helpful for my own. His suggestions wrapped around each petition can be tailored to fit anyone’s needs.

And while most of the talk about the formulation of our prayers with the use of blessings was wrapped around the psalms, this is not to say that our prayers cannot derive from the Lord’s words through the many and various prayers that are spread throughout all the Scriptures. I especially appreciate Harry Huxhold’s *Great Prayers* devotional book. There is one devotional in particular that sums up Abraham’s prayer for the doomed city of Sodom that shows us how, even in the worst of situations, the Lord gives us an avenue of reassurance through our future prayers. Take a look at this excerpt:

The story of Abraham’s intercession is given us as an encouragement. We can intercede for our cities and our communities. The faithful can be the hope for the salvation of the city. We never despair, wondering if our prayers are effective. God’s grace is universal. He desires to spare all men, and He waits for men to call upon His name that He may be known as the Savior. In our loneliness and isolation we can call upon Him for all our neighbors. We need not fear it is a presumption on our part to intercede for the city and town. Our gracious God waits to answer our prayer for the city.⁵¹

“Daddy, fix it!” **With all boldness and confidence** we approach our dear heavenly Father. Why? Because He tells us to ... because we can ... because He loves us and He promises to answer our prayers ... because we actually are His dear children. So, shove that broken toy under the nose of your Father. Be bold

⁵¹ Harry N. Huxhold, *Great Prayers: Devotions on Prayers in the Bible* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1968), 12.

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and be confident. Don't be afraid. I will be bold with you. We have access to God through Jesus Christ. As Luther said, "He who will pray and give thanks shall come to God, for there is no other like Him upon the earth. But where shall one find Him? Previously it was in Jerusalem, but now in the Lord Jesus Christ, through whom God has presented Himself to all people in all places."⁵² Now we have Jesus interceding for us and blessing us. The Father recognizes us for who we are, His beloved children, through the blood of His Son. And now, we are blessed by God Himself as He pours out for us exactly what we need when we need it. His/our prayer and His/our blessing are beautifully connected in and with the life of the Christian. So, beloved, we are blessed to pray and sing these words together ...

Let each day begin with prayer,
Praise, and adoration.
On the Lord cast every care;
He is your salvation.
All your trust and hope repose
In the mighty Master,
Save you from the tempters might,
With His presence cheer you.⁵³



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⁵² Martin Luther, *Devotions and Prayers of Martin Luther*, Selected and Translated by Andrew Kosten (Grand Rapids: Baker Books House, 1965), 74.

⁵³ LSB 869:2

Appendix

"I certainly don't bind myself to these exact words and syllables; rather today I say my prayers one way, and tomorrow in some other way. It all depends on the mood I am in and how I am moved and ready to pray. But I do stick as close as I can to these kinds of thoughts and the meanings of each petition in The Lord's Prayer."⁵⁴

The following is a daily prayer list devised by The Rev. C. Bryan Wolfmuel-ler — senior pastor at Hope Lutheran Church, Aurora, Colo. It includes daily prayers along with various topics relating to each petition of the Lord's Prayer. For more in depth analysis of the Lord's Prayer see Luther's Personal Prayer Book⁵⁵ and Theology and Practice of Prayer: A Lutheran View.⁵⁶ For more prayers based on these petitions see also, O Lord, Teach Me to Pray by Richard F. Bansemmer.⁵⁷

Daily (according to vocation):

- Family
- Church (members, delinquents, persecuted church, workers for the harvest)
- Nation (any disasters)
- For the Holy Spirit
- What are today's plans?
- What am I worried/anxious about?
- Big petitions

I also have index cards that I use as markers with lists of people who are sick, troubled, or who have asked for prayers.

Sunday, Hallowed be Thy name

- Thanks for baptism
- For godchildren
- For catechumens
- For the preaching of the Word

Monday, Thy Kingdom Come

- Hope Lutheran Church (by name)
 - Elders
 - Council
 - Seminarians
 - Missionaries
- LCMS
 - President Harrison
 - President Anderson (Rocky Mountain District President)
 - Visitor Murphy
- Circuit (by name, pastor and congregations)

⁵⁴ Martin Luther, *A Simple Way to Pray*, Trans. Matthew C. Harrison, 12.

⁵⁵ AE 43:29-40.

⁵⁶ CTCR Report, November 2011, 36-61.

⁵⁷ Richard F. Bansemmer, *O Lord, Teach Me to Pray: A Catechetical Prayer Book for Personal Use* (Delhi: The American Lutheran Publicity Bureau, 1995), 49-69.

THE ROLE OF PRAYER WITH BLESSING IN PASTORAL CARE

Tuesday, Thy Will be Done

- Major projects (book, radio, devotions, etc.)
- Children's teachers (by name)
- Doxology Collegium
- Wounded pastors

Wednesday, Give us this day our daily bread

- Pregnant women
- Three estates, godly vocations
- Government (from President Obama to city council persons, by name)

Thursday, Forgive us our trespasses

- For my neighbors (i.e. the people who live in the houses next to ours, by name)
- For forgiveness (including self-examination according to the Ten Commandments)
 - Here are the quick one-question diagnostic questions:
 - What am I afraid of?
 - How are my prayers?
 - What is my attitude toward worship?
 - What is my attitude to authority?
 - Am I angry?
 - Am I content with my vocation of husband/wife/chastity?
 - Am I lazy? Am I selfish?
 - Am I bitter?
 - Am I happy?
- For a clean conscience
- For my enemies
 - Am I angry?
 - Are others angry with me?

Friday, Lead me not into temptation

- For those in spiritual distress (by name)
- For unbelievers (by name)

Saturday, Deliver us from evil

- For the chronically sick and dying
- For the mourning
- For the Second Coming (quickly, and enduring faithfulness)

Occasionally

- Friends, old friends, extended family

**A BRIEF DEVOTION FOR THOSE
WHO LEAD GOD'S PEOPLE IN
WORSHIP BEFORE THE SERVICE
BEGINS**

Pastor:

In the Name of The Father and of
The Son and of The Holy Ghost,

Elders, Acolytes, Others:
Amen.

Pastor:

I was glad when they said unto me:

Elders, Acolytes, Others:
**Let us Go unto the House of
the Lord.**

All:

Almighty God and Father, be
with us and bless us as we
prepare to enter your chancel,
there to lead your people in true
and holy worship of you. Bless us,
that we, also, might offer you
acceptable worship. Give unto us,
especially in this sacred hour,

willing ears,
strong voices,
obedient bodies,
and joyful minds. Use us to
add unto the worship of your
people and strengthen us so that
we never cause your people to be
distracted from you and your
word. In Jesus' name we ask this.
Amen.

Pastor:

The Lord preserve our coming in
and our going out:

Elders, Acolytes, Others:

**From this day forth and even
forevermore.**

Pastor:

Glory be to The Father and to The
Son and to The Holy Ghost

Elders, Acolytes, Others:

**As it was in the beginning, is
now, and ever shall be, world
without end. Amen.⁵⁸**

⁵⁸ Written by The Rev. R. Robert Krueger, Pastor Emeritus -
Christ Lutheran, Platte Woods, MO.

THE ROLE OF PRAYER WITH BLESSING IN PASTORAL CARE

A Conversation with Eugene Peterson – May 19th, 2015 Kalispell, Mont.

“Prayer begins in silence. It doesn’t have to be verbal. Sometimes I feel like a dog running around, wagging its tail. But now I have learned to sit. I have committed to memory seven Psalms, one for each day of the week, for my personal prayers ...”

Psalm 92 – Sunday

Psalm 68 – Monday

Psalm 18 – Tuesday

Psalm 103 Wednesday

Psalm 118 – Thursday

Psalm 22 – Friday – the Psalm our Lord prayed on the cross

Psalm 145 – Saturday – an acrostic prayer, which includes everything, to make sure I don’t forget anything.

A Prayer During the Rite of Holy Matrimony

(After the Pronouncement of Marriage)

Lord, bless _____, her husband that he might share his love, strength, and protection with his beloved. Grant that she might find in him a Christ-like character with patience, understanding, and faithfulness.

Lord, bless _____, his wife; give her tenderness and an inner beauty of soul that never fades. Give her grace to hold fast to those God-like qualities that make marriage rich and beautiful.

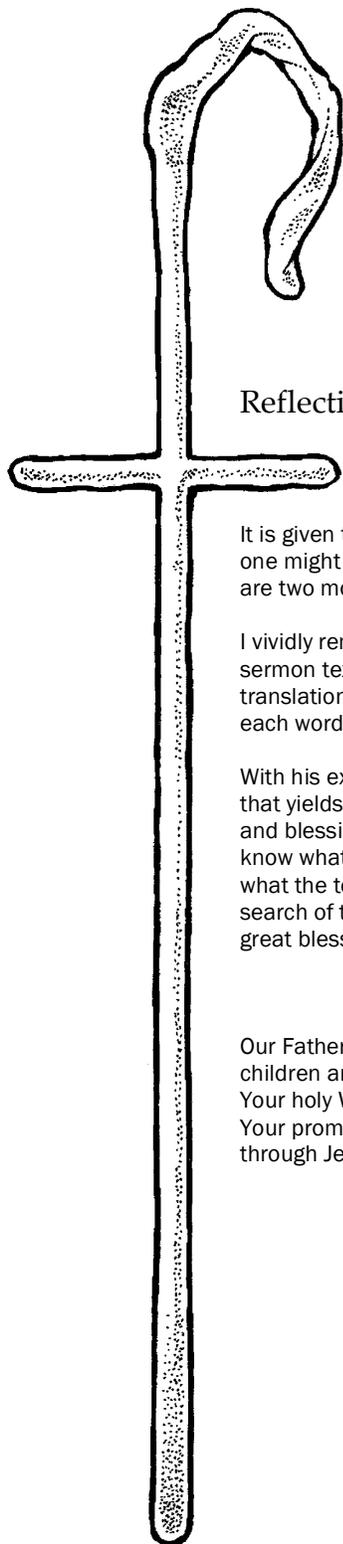
Teach them, Lord, to live not only for each other but also for you and for those around them. Give them a strong faith in Jesus Christ and a continual loyalty to your Word and to your Church.

Allow them enough tears to keep them tender, enough hurts to keep them human, enough failure to keep their hands firmly gripped in yours, and enough success to give them confidence that they belong to you, O Lord.

Almighty God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit keep them in your light and truth and love now and forever. Amen

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Reflection

It is given to the *Seelsorger* to be “a called and ordained servant of the Word,” and while one might associate this most closely with Absolution and preaching, prayer and blessing are two more expressions of the Word that God gives to pastor and people.

I vividly remember my first, patient Greek professor advising that we should translate every sermon text from the original language. In part, it was to double-check the English translation, but also because the act of translating slows us down, forces us to examine each word and disciplines us better to know what the text says.

With his exploration of prayer and blessing, Pastor Arnold prods us toward another exercise that yields immense benefit. Once we know what the text says, we can search it for prayer and blessing. In other words, once we know what the Lord is saying to us, we can then know what to pray to Him and speak to others. This takes pastors beyond telling hearers what the text says, and on to telling them what the text says *to them* and *for them*. Such a search of the Scriptures, as well as the prayers and blessings that follow, will serve as a great blessing to both pastor and people.

✠

Our Father in heaven, thanks be to You that, for the sake of Jesus, You call us beloved children and delight to hear our prayers. Give to all of Your baptized people ears that hear Your holy Word, and grant that they might receive it with repentance and joy, prayerfully rub Your promises into Your ears, and declare Your blessings and praise to all who will hear; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

- *Pastor Tim Pauls*