

Easter candy is everywhere in stores so let's talk about Peeps. What is your opinion about them? Do you love them or do they make you gag? Do you prefer the traditional color yellow, or the newer colors blue, lavender, green, pink and white? Do you buy the Christmas or Halloween shapes? Do you like them fresh or a bit stale? Did you know they now come in seventeen flavors like wild berry & hot cinnamon? You might be wondering about now how in the world Peeps connect to the Lord's Prayer (L's P)? I'll bury the lede here & return to that question later on.

First, what did Jesus say about this most important prayer? The L's P is found in Matthew Ch. 6 and Luke Ch. 11. In Luke as they travel from town to town the disciples notice how often Jesus withdraws to pray and what strength he gains from prayer. They ask him to teach them how to pray better like John the Baptist taught his followers. During the Sermon on the Mount as recounted in Matthew Jesus gives the crowd several dos and don'ts about praying. He holds up the L's P as an example, a pattern, of how to pray. I see six parts to the pattern regardless of the translation or version: Adoration; Recognition of God's Will; Request for our daily needs; Giving & receiving forgiveness; Protection from evil & the tempter; Concluding exultation or doxology.

When I was young growing up in the Lutheran church there was only one way to pray the L's P and, truth be told, some of the words and phrases bothered me: the thys, arts, trespasses, daily bread. And the biggie: Lead us not into temptation. Why would God take us —somewhere— to be tempted? But I dutifully kept reciting it weekly thinking I'd be doomed to hell if I questioned or changed any of the wording, even silently in my mind. Fast forward a few...decades, and with spiritual practice and scriptural study as well as prayerful experiences the L's P is more personal and flexible; therefore, more meaningful to me. Seeing the pattern of the L's P in other versions and translations, especially the modern one on p. 364 has helped dispel the mundane, routine, stale way I was reciting. Allow me to share some of my insights.

*First, Adoration; we bless God.*

"Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your Name"—the word for father in Jesus's native Aramaic tongue is *`abba*, an affectionate family word, like "Dad" or "Daddy." Not so distant, more personal. But "Hallowed" reminds us that though we pray to our "Abba, Daddy," we are not buddies with God, or his equals. The Father is holy. Jesus teaches us to revere him.

*Then, Recognition of God's kingdom and God's will.*

"Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven."—. If God works through us, we are to embody the Kingdom *on earth*. We need to connect faith not only with going to heaven when we die, but also to bring the Kingdom down here among people in our community. We're not to recite the words by rote, unthinking. We're to act out the words with our lives, by our motives and intentions in service to others. A slight change in spelling makes this even clearer for me. Some popular religious writers drop the "g" from "kingdom" and talk about God's KIN-dom, "kin" as in one's family or relatives. If we are connected by that divine spark in all of us, aren't we "kin," the family of God...God's Kin-dom?

*The third part of the L's P's pattern is to pray for our daily needs.*

"Give us today our daily bread."—As a child I took "bread" literally, Wonder Bread white to be exact! Now I see the word as a broader metaphor for sustenance of all kinds, the basic needs of food, shelter, clothing. "Daily" though implies one day at a time. Don't worry about the future. Focus on what we need specifically for today.

*Four; Giving and receiving forgiveness.*

“And forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.”—As we can see the original scripture uses the words “debts” or “trespass.” I much prefer the word “sin” which is any thought or action that separates us from God. Much clearer and to the point. The English teacher me also noticed the little conjunction “as” which makes the two parts of the sentence more potent-or problematic perhaps. Jesus teaches us to ask God to forgive us "as" we forgive others. Jesus clarifies this point a few verses later: "For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins." (6:14-15) Hmmm, really? It's uncomfortable to realize that Jesus is saying here that we must forgive to be forgiven. Makes me all the more thankful for Jesus's resurrection and God's grace. To know and understand God, we must love. We must know and understand forgiveness. To be free we must let go of our enslavement to sin and forgive if we want to receive something better.

*The fifth part is asking for protection from evil, from the tempter or satan.*

“Save us from the time of trial, and deliver us from evil.”—Yes, as I mentioned at the beginning today, I very much prefer “And save us from the time of trial.” we are attracted to sinful things as St. Paul famously writes about himself in Romans Ch. 7: “I do not understand what I do; for I don't do what I would like to do, but instead I do what I hate.” Here we are asking for help to resist sinning when our willpower fails to. We are asking to be saved from “time of trial” or testing. *Does God test us?* I believe he allows circumstances that stretch and try us so our faith grows and strengthens. When we ask he saves us from evil, the devil and from the trials that could destroy us spiritually. Jesus and scripture is clear; Evil is real & Satan exists. By ourselves, we are no match for the Devil. God's desire is to help us escape evil. So we call out to God for rescue, for deliverance, for salvation from our enemy.

*Though not found in scripture our L's P ends with an added doxology or short verse that exalts the glory of God.*

“For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours, now and forever. Amen”—Old Testament prayers often ended with a doxology. Some churches during Roman times added it; some did not. Zip over the centuries to Elizabeth I's reign. She wanted to rid the Church of England of anything Roman Catholic so she reinstated the doxology which remains the standard for Protestants today. I especially like the substitution of “now” for one of the original “forevers.” The kingdom of God is here, NOW, not only “forever & forever” into some mystical future. This concept circles back to “your kin-dom come,” heaven on earth NOW.

Granted, thinking of Peeps as a metaphor for the L's P is a bit of a stretch; however, perhaps it's thought-provoking nonetheless. Both have an original version—yellow chicks and Jesus's teaching in Matthew & Luke. Both also come in non traditional versions—Peeps in different colors and shapes and various versions of the L's P that adhere loosely or strictly to a pattern. We have individual opinions about Peeps—enjoying them soft & squishy or stale & chewy. We have individual preferences for the L's P. Perhaps we are comforted by the traditional version, or we need to pay more attention to different wordings. We may feel nudged to recite the Roman Catholic “Our Father” without the doxology one day and the New Zealand prayer book version the next.

As we grow in faith we discover that prayer is more than simply asking God for things, but an act of submission to Him, with the understanding that God's answers are wiser than our prayers. It is an opportunity to commune with God. For many people, the L's P is simply a prayer to recite. But we can find this model prayer to be a life-changing experience when we pay attention to what each part means. Jesus taught that true prayer is a gift of God. Prayer is grace. If we are followers of Christ and we want to learn to pray better, He stands ready to teach us. and the L's P is a great place to start.

