

A Place to Pray:
Conversations on the Lord's Prayer

#3410

Roberta C. Bondi

Study Guide

Introduction

The Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6:9-13 and Luke 11:1-4) is a passage of scripture most of us know by heart. We certainly have prayed it many times in church with the rest of the congregation and its words are so familiar we can repeat them automatically.

This series invites us to think about the meaning of those words and phrases – about the ones that are sometimes problems for us, the ones we don't understand, and, most importantly, about how the meaning of what we are praying intersects our lives.

Given by Jesus when his disciples asked him to teach them to pray, the prayer became a basic teaching text in the early church. Early Christians considered it so precious that no one was allowed to say it until they had nearly completed the three years of training that preceded baptism.

The Leader

Dr. Robert Bondi teaches early church history at Candler School of Theology at Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia. She is a graduate of Oxford University in England, where she became a student of the monastic movement in North Africa during the first few centuries of the early church. She has written extensively about the thinking of those men and women who went into the desert to devote their lives to loving God and all of God's creation.

She has also written and lectured about the ways experiences influence our view of God and affect our prayers and our relationships with God and neighbor. She is in demand, on college and university campuses and in churches, where she often reads from her most recent book. *A Place to Pray: Reflections on the Lord's Prayer*, Abingdon Press, Nashville, TN, 1998.

She has written several other quite popular books that deal with prayer: *In Ordinary Time* (1996), *Memories of God* (1995), and *To Pray and To Love* (1991). Available from Cokesbury.

About the Videos

This seven-part series explores many of the ideas in Roberta's book. The videos were produced by conducting an on-camera interview with Roberta. The interview was edited to create two provocative commentaries about each of the seven phrases of the Lord's Prayer. (Viewers neither see nor hear the interviewer; the focus is on Roberta and her ideas.) These pieces were then viewed by a discussion group that included Roberta and four other Christians – Angela, Linda, Ray and Walter. The five of them then engaged in a discussion of the issues.

Each Video is organized in two sections:

- Roberta's comments on the first theme followed by discussion.
- Roberta's comments on the second theme followed by discussion.

When using the programs with a group, you may choose to stop at the end of the first discussion so viewers can talk about it, or view the entire program before talking about it. Or you may choose to spread each program over two sessions to provide more discussion time on each theme.

About the Guide

The purpose of this guide is to help you group continue the discussion of the Lord's Prayer started on tape. Page 4 contains an overview of the seven programs. You may want to copy and hand this out at the start of the series. Beginning on page 5 are outlines of each program, including main points from Roberta's commentary and key words to remind viewers of who said what in the discussions. You may want to copy and had these out for reference during your group's discussion.

About Using the Videos

If you are using the series with a group, the following suggestions may help.

1. Preview each video before showing it.
2. Try out the VCR and the TV to be sure they're in working order and cue up the tape to the opening.
3. Be prepared to share your own reaction as a way of beginning the discussion.

As you have seen, the members of the onscreen discussion group have shared not only their reactions to Roberta's thoughts, but personal experiences that shape their view of God and of prayer. Hopefully, members of the viewing group will also be able to share their stories.

Some questions to help start discussion are included at the end of this guide (page 12). Use them when they're helpful but don't let them interfere with your group's sharing of their own stories.

In addition to use by groups, the series has been used successfully for devotion and reflection by individuals and families in the home.

Overview

I. *Our Father*

Who is God to you? According to Roberta Bondi, popular author, teacher, and early church scholar, a lot of learning to pray is finding out who God is, that God is safe to be around.

1. *How We Think About God*
2. *The “Ourness” of Our Father*

II. *Hallowed Be Your Name*

Have you ever wondered what in the world it means to say hallowed or holy in God’s name? Roberta Bondi talks about God’s holiness being in God’s presence, and God’s presence being in God’s gifts.

1. *God’s Holiness*
2. *God’s Holiness in Our Stories*

III. *Your Kingdom Come*

What is this kingdom? Roberta talks about the kingdom in terms of completion and healing, rather than judgment; a time when the wounds that keep us from loving God and neighbor will be no more.

1. *Our Woundedness*
2. *Living in New Awareness*

IV. *Give Us This Day*

What is it okay to ask God for? Roberta says we can ask for whatever we need and one of the works of prayer is to figure out what that is.

1. *More Blessed to Receive*
2. *God as Our Daily Bread*

V. *Forgive Us as We Forgive*

How can we learn to forgive? Roberta shows us that forgiveness involved giving up any desire for revenge and, finally, learning that we ourselves are injuring people.

1. *What is Forgiveness?*
2. *More Like Than Unlike*

VI. *Lead Us Not Into Temptation*

Wouldn’t it be better just to get beyond temptation? Not according to Roberta. She says to be without temptation is to be dead.

1. *The Value of Temptation*
2. *God Leads Us Into Temptation?*

VII. *Glory Forever*

Why does God need praise? Roberta claims God made all of creation to give and receive praise so that both God and creation will be delighted.

1. *Made for Praise*
2. *Showing Up*

I. Our Father

1. How We Think About God

Roberta's Comments

- God is someone I live my life in the presence of, like my husband, someone who loves me in a special way.
- A 5th-century Christian writer likened God's love to a mother's love.
- We frequently talk about God as though what God is most interested in is our sin. But if we think of God as a loving parent, we see how unlikely that is.
- However we relate to our parents is how we're going to relate to God. I had a perfectionistic, authoritarian father who was loving but of whom I was afraid. One of my adult jobs was learning that God the father is not the way my earthly father was.
- The way we pray and the way we see God are so intimately connected, it's hard to separate them out. A lot of learning to pray is learning who God is, that God is present and that God is safe to be around.

Discussion

Walter: God, the being we sacrificed lambs for.

Roberta: Brought up to think God doesn't need anything. Jesus clearly has needs.

Ray: My father emphasized the rules.

Roberta: Heard a lot about love but what they experience were the rules.

Ray: Someone you had to bargain with.

Linda: Knew God loved unconditionally, but parents emotionally unavailable.

Roberta: We're told that God loves us but experience tells us to be cautious.

Roberta: If see God as watching for us to do something wrong, how can this not affect our prayers?

Angela: Need element of judgment.

Roberta: A God of balance both loves us and holds us accountable.

2. The "Ourness" of Our Father

Roberta's Comments

- "Our" both a public and private word. In early church, it meant the congregation.
- Learning to pray. "Our Father," is something I still work on.
- My father and the father of Jane Ann...not standing against but with her.

Discussion

Ray: What does it mean to pray alongside of people I don't care about?

Roberta: Should pray, "Lord by the prayers of my brother, save me;" I am responsible for them and they are responsible for me in ways I don't understand.

Ray: Can no longer pray for this person and hold some of the harsh judgments.

Roberta: We think our option is to separate from people; for Christians it may not be an option.

Angela: Can't include people who hate me.

Roberta: Work of Christian life is learning how to do that.

II. Hallowed Be Your Name

1. God's Holiness

Roberta's Comments

- Story of broken vase.
- Broken bottle... holiness as beauty.

Discussion

Linda: Felling not wanted and not welcomed and staying anyway.

Angela: God is always with me even when I don't pray.

Ray: Children a special gift because of their eagerness to love; yearn for that quality of innocence.

Roberta: Same God revealed in nature is incarnate in Jesus.

Ray: What's another word for holiness?

Roberta: Emmanuel – God with us.

Ray: Life is a sign from God if we'd read.

Roberta: About being able to include more and more of who we are in our prayer.

2. God's Holiness in Our Stories

Roberta's Comments

- Experience of hearing stories of others, telling my story, and coming to be glad I was me. Sensed presence of God in my life as never before.
- Realized that stories of women in my mother's family bore same imprint of holiness all those other stories bore.
- It's in our stories we become aware of God's presence in our lives and that's where God's holiness is.

Discussion

Roberta: Rebelliousness preserved my spirit

Ray: My path is wandering.

Roberta: We make a mistake when we give impression that life for Christians is supposed to be easy.

Walter: High school not a good fit for me; but we had the neighborhood church. Sometimes okay not to fit in because you search for more; life happens to you.

Roberta: Tricked into notion of "normal" life.

Angela: Culture says it better be straight.

Roberta: Don't have trouble with your children

Angela: Need to keep this placid image that everything is okay.

Linda: Only in last few years I've looked at my own story.

Roberta: Hard to grow in love of God and neighbor unless we can confront the places where we're not up to the job.

Ray: Situation with my son...had to tell him things I'd never told him before.

Walter: In my family if we weren't perfect, just devastating.

Roberta: When deny the hard things, also a denial of things that are not so hard.

Ray: If I could embrace in me what is not attractive, easy for me to embrace stories of other people.

III. Your Kingdom Come

1. Our Woundedness

Roberta's Comments

- Early church fathers talked less about sin than about woundedness that keeps us from loving God and neighbor.
- Repenting doesn't help if we are dealing with wounds and need healing.
- Story of flute.

Discussion

Linda: Seeing it as a wound gives me room to work with it; we're responsible for the healing.

Angela: Repentance says it's wrong.

Roberta: Do not mean to suggest that repentance has no place.

Angela: Thinking particularly of incest.

Roberta: Wonderful example; has need for repentance and has woundedness; not helpful for victim to identify it as a sin they committed.

Walter: A victim when I was five; punished my brother.

Ray: Things that call for repentance grow out of my wounds.

Roberta: We've all committed atrocities.

Ray: When I could accept my potential for wounding my children, I could accept and love my father in a new way.

Roberta: Sin and wounds are really interpenetrated.

2. Living in New Awareness

Roberta's Comments

- Kingdom is not about judgment but about the healing of all things and is a promise not only for the future but in the present.
- Melissa facing cancer has taught me about the kingdom because she is able to live fully in the present.
- Easy to see what's wrong in life but see the kingdom as God's promise that finally all will be healed.

Discussion

Linda: I live in my "to do" list.

Ray: Learning to live out of optimism.

Roberta: People talk as though the will of God is the explanation for all the bad.

Walter: Where is God when those things are happening?

Roberta: Think God is there with us, mourning those things?

Walter: God didn't prevent something awful, but can move mountains?

Linda: Maybe God tried to move uncle's heart; that's where our freedom comes in.

Roberta: Accustomed to thinking of God as having no limits.

Angela: "Thy will be done" sets up a confrontation with power.

Walter: But does it take away the loss if they're punished?

Roberta: More happy with "in the kingdom all things are healed."

Linda: Part of being healed is acknowledging what we've done to others.

IV. Give Us This Day

1. More Blessed to Receive

Roberta's Comments

- We all have trouble asking other for help.
- “More blessed to give” emphasizes generosity; “more blessed to receive” emphasizes humility.
- Praying for daily bread when I have a broken ankle is good for me.

Discussion

Ray: Many of us thought we should have no wants and never ask.

Roberta: Jesus explicitly has us say, “give us;” hard to defend position that we ought not need anything and pray this prayer.

Ray: Why goodness defined only by giving?

Roberta: Jesus trying to rid us of a false self made up of social expectations.

Angela: We do not agree that all people have a right under God for food.

Roberta: This prayer not just for ourselves but for the homeless.

Roberta: Perhaps job of the church is to pray “our” and mean the larger human community.

Linda: I have an issue of trust.

Roberta: We find God is trustworthy by taking the risk.

Ray: Think of myself as a person who has never been given anything. I’m in charge.

Linda: So vulnerable to depend on others.

Roberta: All have to be in that place eventually: 4:15 I was independent, 4:45 I was in the emergency room.

2. God As Our Daily Bread

Roberta's Comments

- Think of “bread” as the necessities of life.
- One of the works of prayer is to figure out what we need to pray for.
- God not a giant vending machine.
- Understand prayer as a relationship with God.

Discussion

Angela: To “glom” [friendship] onto God makes me think of prayer differently.

Roberta: When it comes to prayer, take risks; relationships, too.

Ray: You can open up to a friend.

Ray: I can say those things and God doesn’t pull away from me.

Roberta: We’re working against the wounds of our childhood.

Linda: Can I say I’m feeling needy?

Ray: To be able to express those things, in a journal or silently or out loud.

Roberta: A friend needs to know what we most long for.

Ray: A friend doesn’t put us down.

Walter: Move away from right or wrong.

Linda: Shouldn’t I say, “what do I need?”

Roberta: God’s will again.

Angela: I’ve been so disappointed when I asked for things from God.

Roberta: Sometimes I understand why and sometimes I don’t.

V. Forgive Us as We Forgive

1. What Is Forgiveness?

Roberta's Comments

- Story of the broken crayons. Forgiveness is not saying it's all right but getting to the point that we're able not to seek revenge and able to pray for the well-being of the person who wounded us.

Discussion

Roberta: Story illustrates our expectation that forgiveness ought to be easy.

Ray: Story of his brother's murder

Roberta: To say "I forgive" does not mean it's all right.

Ray: I don't wish her ill.

Linda: Not passing the pain along.

Roberta: Praying for the other person may mean praying for their radical repentance.

Angela: I have a reservoir of anger.

Roberta: Can give up revenge without giving us anger.

Angela: This forgiveness stuff is complicated. If you're on the bottom there's complicated. If you're on the bottom there's no room for the anger to be processed.

Roberta: Speaking our minds with God helps us speak with everybody else.

Ray: When church gives people a voice in prayer, that voice begins to have expression in society.

Linda: Maybe start with: "I'm angry and I feel hopeless about getting past anger."

Angela: I want folk squashed.

Roberta: You're doing much more than you're giving yourself credit for.

Ray: When I forgive, I expect anger to go.

Roberta: Different ways of being motivated.

Ray: Might want to disarm person's power.

Roberta: That's a source of your energy.

Angela: But it's your anger too.

Linda: Sit with them, hear their anger.

Walter: Jesus...Kept changing people.

Roberta: Poverty and racism is all of our problem.

Ray: There is anger which is maybe holy.

2. More Like Than Unlike.

Roberta's Comments

- Abba Evagrius warns that to forget or ignore anger is a temptation of Christians.
- Story of Richard's vocational change and Benjamin's room.
- When we can realize we are more like than unlike the person who has wounded us, we've overcome a barrier, opened the way for forgiveness.

Discussion

Roberta: Closer we get to God, the more we see we are injurers.

Linda: Oppressors whether we want to be or not.

Roberta: Important to claim our ability to be injuring people.

Ray: Thought it was just this little prayer but you've expanded it to connect with all these issues.

V. Lead Us Not Into Temptation

1. *The Value of Temptation*

Roberta's Comments

- “Without temptation nobody can be saved.”
- Story of broken ankle and temptation to irritability and impatience.

Discussion

Roberta: If you didn't have temptations, it would be because you were doing it.

Ray: Temptations grow out of our woundedness.

Walter: What if you had yelled, talked about your frustration?

Roberta: Was talking about picking a fight.

Angela: In Philadelphia, tempted to sleep with married man.

Roberta: As we get older, temptations change.

2. *God Leads Us Into Temptation?*

Roberta's Comments

- Jesus must have been thinking that God leads us into temptation (otherwise, why ask God not to?)
- Melissa's cancer: my fear of loss and the temptation to withdraw.
- To follow God, to follow Jesus, is to go into danger; the temptation is not to follow but to give in to our fear.
- I'm reminded that I'm pretty good to people who are good to me. Story about George.

Discussion

Linda: Temptation is to lose me, my voice.

Roberta: Can also say, “God I don't want to be in this situation.”

Ray: Why would God lead me there to begin with?

Roberta: It's God who goes ahead of us.

Walter: Think about God holding and lifting.

Ray: God will be with us both for the journey and the arrival.

Roberta: Last words of Jesus not comforting.

Ray: There's no promise it'll be easy.

Roberta: Ultimately we're promised the kingdom.

Ray: This is a really hard point in this prayer.

Roberta: Alternative is worse.

Walter: We think “*if I pull out I won't feel the pain.*”

Roberta: Worry about not going all the way into life.

Walter: It's what I haven't done.

Roberta: If only life easier for Christians.

Angela: Another side of Christianity: certainty. I live on side with more questions than answers.

Roberta: Promised that every tear will be wiped.

VII. Glory Forever

1. Made for Praise

Roberta's Comments

- Most brought up to think that praise is not something we should want, so how can God want praise?
- People offering praise are giving a gift.
- Augustine says God made us for Godself and praise is a fundamental attitude of heart, the opposite of cynicism.

Discussion

Roberta: Entire creation made for praise.

Walter: As hard to accept praise as it is to be yelled at.

Roberta: Only things I have trouble with are praise, blame and indifference.

Ray: Person offered to carry luggage.

Roberta: To accept praise is to receive the person.

Angela: Spouses and bosses withhold praise.

Roberta: Inability to praise connected to inability to receive praise?

Linda: All about an open heart.

Roberta: One kind of woundedness.

Ray: Cynicism in society is a problem.

Roberta: Turn my back on goodness because I don't want to look like a fool?

Linda: Doesn't mean I'm a fool.

Roberta: Paul talks about being fools for Christ.

Angela: Praise also looks for good.

2. Showing Up

Roberta's Comments

- Most important thing about the Lord's Prayer is how I can use it as a tool for the formation of love [of God and neighbor].
- The important thing is simply to show up – to have a time every day.
- Everyone can benefit from: a little scripture, a little conversation when we speak our minds about our lives, and just sitting silently in God's presence.

Discussion

Linda: love idea of prayer as a time when we just show up.

Roberta: Like showing up for dinner.

Linda: I pray least when overburdened.

Roberta: Concentration is not being called for; it's being present.

Ray: Struck by people who are trying to teach us certain formulas.

Roberta: God comes according to need.

Ray: Find the ways that connect us to God that make sense to us and affirm that.

Roberta: Needs are going to be where our wounds are; spend five minutes in God's presence, Thank you, God, that was nice.

Walter: Being in a relationship with God a whole different way of looking at it.

Roberta: It's safe to be in God's presence.

Angela: Organizers want a report; when I get it done, I really grow.

Roberta: Like prayer. What do I bring of myself to meet the words of this prayer?

Questions for Discussion

I. Our Father

1. What ideas are new for you?
2. How do you think about God? More like a loving parent or more like a judge? As both male and female.

II. Hallowed Be Your Name

1. What does the word “holy” convey?
2. Did you ever think of God as scary?
3. Roberta redefines “holiness” as God’s presence among us. How do you respond?
4. What experiences have shaped your notion of hallowed or holy?

III. Your Kingdom Come

1. Is the distinction between “woundedness” and “sin” meaningful?
2. Do you agree with Roberta that the kingdom of God is more about healing than about judgment?
3. Do you live in your “to do” list?
4. What would it mean for you to live fully in the present?
5. Is everything that happens God’s will? What are your thoughts about God’s limits?

IV. Give Us This Day

1. What do you think it’s okay to ask God for? Are there things we shouldn’t ask for?
2. When you pray, “our daily bread,” who is included? Excluded? Would hunger be eradicated if that prayer were answered?
3. If you really believed it was okay to ask God for anything, what would you ask for?

V. Forgive Us As We Forgive

1. Have you had experiences like Roberta’s with the crayons?
2. Are there things that should not be forgiven?
3. What injustices upset you?
4. Have you thought before that the Lord’s Prayer has anything to do with poverty and racism?

VI. Lead Us Not Into Temptation

1. Had you ever thought of temptation as valuable?
2. What temptation might God lead you into?
3. Do you believe in evil? What evil would you ask to be delivered from?

VII. Glory Forever

1. Is it hard for you to accept or give praise?
2. What for you is the most valuable thing about the Lord’s prayer?
3. Does the idea of “showing up” as Roberta describes it, appeal to you?

This video series, **A Place to Pray: Conversations on the Lord's Prayer**, explores many of the ideas in Roberta C. Bondi's book, **A Place to Pray: Reflections on the Lord's Prayer**, and they can be used together.

To order the book: **A Place to Pray: Reflections on the Lord's Prayer** by Roberta C. Bondi (hardcover, 1998, \$19) Order #RB8-025745 visit you local Cokesbury bookstore or call Cokesbury at (800) 672-1789.

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