

A disciple asked Jesus, "Teach us to pray as John taught his disciples."
Jesus responded, "When you pray, say:
Father, hallowed be your name.
Your kingdom come.
Give us each day our daily bread.
And forgive us our sins,
for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us.
And do not bring us to the time of trial."

This happened in the first century near Jerusalem. What is happening in our day and in our time around prayer?

There was an article in the Wall Street Journal last week that caught my attention. Here is the title: *Etsy Witches Charge for Jobs* (WSJ 7.15.25 by Chavie Lieber). If you were confused by that title, so was I. Here's what I found out when I read the article. First, Etsy is an online platform, like amazon.com or ebay; they specialize in selling hand made craft items, instructions on how to knit and designs on how to make craft items in your home. And, as you can read from the title, there are apparently witches on Etsy that charge for jobs. Witchcraft and spellwork have become an online cottage industry. The most common spells, or witch jobs, that are purchased have to do with getting an ex-lover back, tax refunds (or not being audited), and revenge.

From the article: *most customers say Etsy is their go-to. The shop MariahSpells has over 4,000 sales on Etsy and 4.9 stars and sells a permanent protection spell for about \$200. Another shop, Spells by Carlton, has over 44,000 sales and lists a "bring your ex-lover back" spell for about \$7.*

I imagine you are like me and had no idea this was going on. Yet, there is enough of these sales that it made it into the Wall Street Journal. If I can rewind just a bit, I wrote a Reflection to you about my new favorite person from the New Testament era; his name: Epaphras (*Ep-uh-fras*). He was a church planter and started the Colossian church (modern day western Turkey). There were societal beliefs that affected his church. As a result, he traveled 1,200 miles to visit the Apostle Paul in prison in Rome to seek advice. Paul wrote the Letter to the Colossians because of this visit. That letter gave everyone in the 1st century, and today, hope when we read it. Back in Epaphras's day, there was a mixture of beliefs in society – worship of angelic beings, paganism, Greek gods, and all sorts of spells and other rituals. The Letter to the Colossians reminds the readers (the Church of Colossae back then, and us today) to live our lives rooted in Christ, built on Christ in faith, and to be abounding in thanksgiving. Our best lives are living in the fullness of Christ who is in charge over every authority. And to remember that in our baptism, we were buried with Christ in his death, and that we are also raised with him, through faith, in the power of God Almighty.

When the disciple asked Jesus to teach him how to pray, please know that all sorts of rituals and what we would call spells, were out and around in society back then.

Jesus then said, pray this way:

Call God your father; like your earthly father, the one who knows you, who raised you; call God your heavenly Father.

Pray with praise – “hallowed is God’s name.”

Pray that God’s Kingdom is on earth as it is in Heaven.

Pray in dependence upon God and God’s Kingdom on earth for everything you need daily.

And pray for the forgiveness of our sins as we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us.

Pray not to be brought to the time of trial.

There is no magic spell, or incantation, or script to follow with this prayer. One main difference between praying as Jesus taught us and casting a spell is that with a spell, we are attempting to place our will onto something else – an ex-lover, an enemy, or a tax return. In prayer, however, we are placing our will into God’s Kingdom. We pray that our will bend to God’s will and that God’s Kingdom is on earth as it is in heaven. We pray not for dependence upon ourselves and what sort of spell we can incant but rather that we depend on God for everything, including our daily bread. Prayer motivates us to forgive others as we have been forgiven. Prayer keeps us from the time of trial (which is a whole separate sermon so I’m not going to go into it today).

When I was reading the article, I had it at more than a proverbial arms-distance away. And then I read this: Taylor Hamm, 35, called herself a reformed skeptic of witchcraft after she bought a \$25 Etsy “road opener” spell that led to a boyfriend and a tax refund. “I pray a good amount, I grew up Episcopalian,” the New Yorker said. “But it’s definitely the witch. The timing is too suspect.”

An Episcopalian?! Oh no. Taylor Hamm brought this article, and the reality of spirituality in our community, home for me. For my sister in Christ Taylor, I am reminded of what the Apostle Paul wrote – *to live our lives rooted in Christ, built on Christ in faith, and to be abounding in thanksgiving. Our best lives are living in the fullness of Christ who is in charge over every authority.* I get that the timing of getting a boyfriend, and a tax return, is too suspect, but remember our shared faith tradition. It is Christ, who is love, who in charge of it all.

If I could chat with Taylor, I’d also remind her of the prayer she was taught; called the Lord’s Prayer or the Our Father; it is the most popular, well known, and recited prayer in the world. For me, that timing is too suspect. A theologian once wrote, time is the great revealer of secrets and time is also the great detector of forgeries. We’ve had nearly 2,000 years with the prayer and it is still the number one source of peace, of placing our will with God’s will, and seeking forgiveness. We say this prayer at every baptism, at weddings, at funerals and for many many people, it is the last prayer I ever prayed with them (when doing Last Rites). Time is the great detector of forgeries. This is no spell that passes over time, this is no forgery, time has shown us it is the real thing. Let us root ourselves in that prayer to the One we are invited to call Father.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.