

Daily Bread, Forgiveness, and Deliverance

Leann Williams for Spokane Friends July 5, 2026

For the past two months I have been exploring the Lord's Prayer through the lens of the Aramaic text. For me, it has expanded that passage and given me a new way to understand what is being taught by Jesus as a model for prayer. We have discussed the complexities of language and translation and the usefulness of looking at a biblical passage from a historic and cultural context.

For some, it may seem that this process brings into question the validity of any translation and confusion over which translations to trust. Before we consider the remainder of the Lord's Prayer, I'd like to review a Quaker way of understanding the Bible.

George Fox, the founding father of Quakerism, wrote in his journal, "I was to direct people to the Spirit that gave forth the Scriptures, by which they might be led into all Truth, and so up to Christ and God, as they had been who gave them forth." In other words, the same Spirit that inspired the original writers of scripture is available to lead us to the truth found in scripture for our lives at any time. It is not the printed words on the page in any language that speaks truth; it is the Spirit that inspired them that continues to open the meanings for us.

My intention in this series is not to give you the precise meaning of every phrase of the Lord's Prayer, but to open up the text to another possibility, a deeper way of hearing the words. To appreciate the complexity of language and translation helps me understand that no one can hold a definitive interpretation of a certain passage. It frees me to hear from the Spirit how a scripture applies to my life and can direct my paths toward the values that Jesus lived.

Jesus said that all the Law and the Prophets can be summarized in the commands to Love God and to love your neighbor as yourself. Augustine said, "Whoever therefore thinks that he understands the Holy Scriptures, or any part of them, but puts such an interpretation upon them as does not tend to build up this twofold love of God and our neighbor does not yet understand them as he ought.

Quakers tend to read the bible personally and empathetically. I have heard it said, don't just read the bible, let it read you. It's the process of entering a story and imagining what the characters might have felt, how their relationships might have been affected by the events in the story. It's taking the time to consider which character you most relate to, what you might learn from their experience.

Tim Gee, General Secretary of Friends World Committee for Consultation, stated in an article entitled *How to Read the Bible like a Quaker*, "Through the study of scripture, I've found my way to a deepened connection with the Divine, through accounts of other people's encounters with the same Spirit." In the same article he reasons, "On the basis that each

person has access to a measure of the Light, the Light may illuminate different aspects for each person. If God is infinite, then God's word too could have infinite depth of meaning."

To summarize a historic Quaker perspective of the Bible I'd like to quote from the *Richmond Declaration of Faith* written in 1877. I do not support all the positions in that piece of writing, but I find these words helpful. "The great inspirer of scripture is ever its true Interpreter. He performs this office in love, not by superseding our understandings, but by renewing and enlightening them... Where Christ presides, idle speculation is hushed; His doctrine is learned in the doing of His will, and all knowledge repens into a deeper and richer experience of His truth and love."

With that in mind, let's finish considering the Aramaic translation of the Lord's Prayer. So far, I have given you my translation as follows:

Oh, creator who gave birth to us, source of all we see and hear, and forces and possibilities unknown to us, in the ongoing dynamic processes of creation let us clear our hearts and minds from all that disconnects us from the values, intentions, and desires for a life set apart for sacred use to let your name be holy in us. Our deepest desire is to be united by your counsel guiding us to harmony with all of your created realm. Let it be our passion and intention to join with you in action on earth as all the created realm moves in rhythm with you.

The next lines in traditional English texts are: Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.

In the first part of the Lord's prayer, we acknowledge the one source of all we know and are and align ourselves with the purposes of the Divine. This last section is where the intentions and desires are worked out in practice. Daily bread, forgiveness, and temptation are three basic elements or areas of our lives to consider if we are seeking to live out the values of Jesus.

Give us this day our daily bread.

In Aramaic, the first word, *hawvlan*, can mean to give, generate, or produce with life and soul. This makes me think of giving your heart to a person or cause. *Hawvlan* can also mean "to animate with fruit". For me, this meaning touches on God guiding my massage work, bringing my training and experience in a specific moment to animate my work for the care of my client. *Lachma* means both bread and understanding. Its root word relates to the divine feminine, a generative power. A related word is *hochma* which is translated "holy wisdom" in the proverbs. So, in these first two words we pray, Bring forth, generate for us both bread and wisdom. *Suncqanan* refers to need and includes a discerned or measured amount. It could be translated according to our need. *Yaomana* is translated "this day". It holds the concept of the present moment.

In this verse we are instructed by Jesus to pray for just what we need to do the holy work we are called to in this world as it unfolds each day. We may need bread to feed the hungry,

wisdom to address structural injustices, courage to speak truth, or clarity for the next steps in life. We are looking to the Divine to bring forth whatever is needed to meet the needs of ourselves and others.

The next verse in English is, “forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. “The Aramaic word *washboqlan* is translated “forgive”. The Aramaic picture of forgiveness is to untie knots or untangle threads of guilt. It can mean to return to its original state. The word translated “debts” or “offenses” is from Greek texts. In Aramaic, Matthew and Luke use two different but related words. Luke’s word, *khtahayn* has multiple meanings including mistakes, faults, sins, or failures. Matthew’s word, *khaubayn* means hidden past, secret debt, or stolen property. This is a prayer to mend our tangled relationships and untie the knots in life that we all have created. We are asking for forgiveness for ourselves and extending forgiveness to others. The word *aykanna* is used. We saw this word earlier in the Lord’s Prayer in the phrase, “your will be done on earth **just as** it is in heaven. We are to forgive, to untie the knots and untangle the threads of actions taken against us, **just as** we are forgiven or released from the entanglements of our own making. This is the primary work of peacemaking.

The final verse of the Lord’s Prayer is, “And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil (or in some translations, the evil one.)” In contrast to the words translated from Greek, in the Aramaic version no one leads us into temptation. The phrase *wela tahlán* could be translated, “don’t let us enter, or don’t let us be seduced by the appearance of”. The Aramaic word *nesyuna* is translated “temptation”. It carries the idea of something distracting us from our purpose, diverting our attention, inner agitation, or forgetfulness. It’s the things, people, situations, that pull us off center and cause us to be distracted and unable to stay focused. Sounds like modern life to me, but perhaps it has always been the human condition to be easily distracted. So, we are praying don’t let us be caught up in things that keep us from doing what we are called to do.

But deliver us from evil. The Aramaic word *patzan* could be translated deliver, “loosen the hold of”, “give liberty from”, or “break the seal that binds us to”. *Bisha* means evil or error, and can also mean “mistakes”, “disharmony”, or “pulled out of alignment”. Both the Hebrew and Aramaic meanings carry the idea of unripeness or inappropriate action. When taken as the second part of the whole verse, “Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil,” I think it could be a prayer for deliverance from the shame we feel over the foolish choices and actions in our past that keeps us from moving forward. A crude translation could be: Break the chains of our shame over our own stupidity so that we can move forward.

My translation of these last verses is:

Bring forth what is necessary for us to do the work you have called us to each day.

Release us from the tangles and knots we’ve made in life just as we work to untie and release the threads of others’ offenses toward us.

Don't let us be diverted from our true purpose and free us from the shame over our past choices that keeps us from taking right action today.

English versions add: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen.

Biblical scholars do not agree on whether this line is part of Jesus' prayer or not. It does fit with the pattern of other Jewish prayers. The Aramaic words *malkutha* (kingdom) and *wahayla* (power) could be translated: In you we find the guiding counsel, the desire for unity, and the energy that produces and sustains all of creation. The word translated "glory" *watesbukhta* has all to do with breaking out in song. It could be translated: In harmony with you all the created realm breaks out in song, a glorious harmony of divine light and sound.

In closing, I will be reading an abbreviated version of the first two sections of the Lord's Prayer as I have translated it together with the final sections we covered today which will lead us into silent worship. I do have a few copies of both versions for anyone interested.

Oh, creator who gave birth to us, source of all we see and hear let us clear our hearts and minds for a life set apart to let your name be holy in us.

Our deepest desire is to be united by your counsel to join you in action on earth as all the created realm moves in rhythm with you.

Bring forth what is necessary for us to do the work you have called us to each day.

Release us from the tangles and knots we've made in life just as we work to untie and release the threads of others' offenses toward us.

Don't let us be diverted from our true purpose and free us from the shame over our past choices that keeps us from taking right action today.

In you we find the guiding counsel, the desire for unity, and the energy that produces and sustains all of creation. In harmony with you all the created realm breaks out in song, a glorious harmony of divine light and sound.

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