

How many of you pray the Lord's Prayer regularly? Once a week? Once a day? Twice a day? The Lord's Prayer is by far the most commonly said prayer in all of Christianity. It's so common that for most of the church's history, it didn't even need a name. You simply referred to it by the first two words of the prayer – it was the “Our Father” – and people knew exactly what you were talking about.

Why is it so common? Well, I think that's pretty obvious. For one, it's just a beautiful prayer. As Luther himself writes in the Large Catechism: “There is no nobler prayer to be found upon earth than the Lord's Prayer... We ought not to surrender it for all the riches of the world.” It is an outline of everything God expects us to ask of Him. And it is an example of exactly how He expects us to ask it.

In fact, the most important reason why we should pray the Lord's Prayer is found right in its name. It is the Lord's Prayer. He gave it to us. He commanded us to pray it. He hands it to us with the words: *“This then is how you should pray.”*

We take a command like that seriously, as we should. But what you may not realize is that this isn't the only time in Scripture that Jesus commands us to pray in a specific way. He actually gives us another prayer. A second Lord's Prayer, in its own way. Although to call it that might get a little confusing.

But this prayer goes overlooked time and time again. By Christians individually and by the Church as a whole. And it appears in our Gospel lesson today.

“After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them on ahead of him, two by two, into every town and place where he himself was about to go. And he said to them, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.”

Pray earnestly. It's not just a suggestion. It's a command. Just like the Lord's Prayer. “This then is how you should pray: Lord, send out laborers into your harvest.”

How many of you pray that regularly? As often as you pray the Lord's Prayer? How many of you pray that at all? Yet Jesus is pretty emphatic about it. This should be a bread and butter prayer of a Christian's spiritual life. Send workers into the harvest fields.

Send missionaries to foreign lands. To translate the Bible and preach to people who have never heard God's Word. Who have never even had an opportunity to walk into a church.

Send pastors into our own lands. To plant churches. To fill vacancies. To comfort us with God's Word. To strengthen us with the sacraments. To tend God's flock in our own nation.

Send new men, young and old, into the ministry. To attend seminary. To receive training. To learn and grow and, one day, to hear that divine call into the harvest field themselves.

Send all sorts of workers into every kind of harvest field. Whether that's pastors or whether its teachers. Deaconesses. Directors of Christian Education. Chaplains. Whatever the worker is. Wherever the harvest field grows. We are commanded to pray that God would send new workers into the harvest fields.

And that's just as important now as it was back then. Because the truth of the matter is that we're not doing a particularly good job of getting workers into the harvest fields.

One of the things that Terry Ehlers and I heard over and over again at the Missouri District Convention last week is how few new workers there are going into the harvest fields. Every day, more and more church workers retire from ministry. Every day, more and more church workers who were still working in retirement are called home to their heavenly rest. And the number of church workers replacing them isn't even close to sufficient.

You know, we so often lament the number of LCMS congregations that are dying and the number of LCMS schools that are closing. And that is happening and that is lamentable. But what's even worse, in some ways, are the number of churches and schools that are still very much alive and desperate to call a new pastor or teacher and there's simply no one available to answer the call. The harvest is there, but there's no one to labor in the field.

Now, I'm not saying all this to you because I want to squeeze out more money from you to send to our universities or seminaries. Far from it. I have absolutely no ulterior motive in that regard. In fact, we already took an offering of exactly that sort a few weeks ago. It was given to the district at the convention opening worship service. And over \$20,000 was raised for the church worker endowment fund from that offering.

No, I bring this up, precisely because there really is only so much that money can do. Jesus doesn't command his disciples to collect an offering or to tithe. No, he commands them to pray. Which is what we need to be doing. We need to be praying because the one we're praying to is the only one who can fix this situation.

Jesus doesn't call Himself the "Lord of the Harvest" for nothing. He is Lord of heaven and earth. He is the Lord of Life and the Lord of All. And He is the Lord of every worker who is called to the ministry and every soul that is baptized into His kingdom.

And we pray to Him, not because He's our last hope to save the Church, but because He's our only hope. For anything. He is the first place we turn and the last place we turn. The Alpha and Omega. The Beginning and the End.

And as much as we can rightfully beat ourselves up over our failures to fulfill the mission of the church, both personally and collectively, simply guiltting ourselves into giving more isn't going to solve anything. Because you can't simply throw money at this problem.

Yes, money can help in lots of ways, lowering tuition and whatnot. But, eventually, bringing more laborers into the harvest fields just comes down to having more people who are willing to labor in the harvest fields. Which is not easy. Because laboring in the harvest fields is difficult. It's not an attractive task.

Just look at our Gospel reading today. Jesus was capable of gathering huge crowds. Literally thousands. Tens of thousands, in fact. But he doesn't appoint a thousand men. He appoints 72. 72 who were ready to be itinerant preachers. Moving from town to town. Living on the generosity of others. Preaching to people who didn't want to hear their message. Doing spiritual battle with demons. For no reason at all except that Jesus called them to the task.

It is not money that sends out laborers into the harvest field. It is the Lord of the harvest who sends laborers into his fields. And when we see a need for laborers our primary task is to pray. We worship the Lord of the harvest. He will make sure we have the tools to do our job. He always has. He always will.

For the Lord of the harvest is the One who laid down His life for the sins of the world. He is not only the Master of the harvest, but also the Lamb who was slain to redeem that harvest. His death and resurrection guarantee that His kingdom will not fail.

So no matter how great the shortage of workers, no matter how daunting the mission field may seem, Christ has already secured the victory. The harvest is His, and He will accomplish what He has promised. That is why we can pray with boldness and confidence, knowing that our Lord is both willing and able to provide all that is needed for His people.

Some are called to work in the fields. But all are called to pray for the workers. Pray that new workers would be sent out. Pray that the existing workers would be strengthened in their task. Pray for forgiveness for all the times we have failed to support the workers in the fields.

And then we wait for the Lord of the Harvest to answer. Not with idle hands and empty minds. Just because we're waiting doesn't mean we do nothing. We wait with expectation. We wait with hope. We wait actively. Doing what we can to work in the harvest fields. Doing what we can to support those workers in the harvest fields. Doing what we can to encourage more young men and women into the harvest fields.

And watching. Watching for the day when the Lord answers our prayer. Watching for the day when the workers are as plentiful as the harvest. And watching for the day when He Himself returns to gather His harvest home.

On that day, our Lord will bring together all His redeemed people, separating the wheat from the chaff, bringing us into the fullness of His kingdom, where no more laborers will be needed, because the harvest will be complete. Then the great feast will begin, never to end, and we will rejoice forever with our Savior, who has made us part of His eternal harvest. Amen.