

READING AND DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR

The Greatest Prayer:

Rediscovering the Revolutionary Message of the Lord's Prayer

PROLOGUE

1. Before you began *The Greatest Prayer*, what were your impressions of the Lord's Prayer? What did you think it was about?
2. Crossan reveals the poetic parallelism of the prayer. How does its literary structure change how you approach and interpret the prayer?
3. At the end of the prologue, Crossan states that this is not just Christianity's greatest prayer, but that it "speaks to all the world." How can a prayer by the central character of a particular religion be universal?

CHAPTER 1: PRAY THEN IN THIS WAY

1. Crossan maintains that the earliest form of the Lord's Prayer was simply the phrase "*Abba*, the Father." What does this simple phrase mean, as a prayer, to you? What if this was the entire prayer—would it be effective? Why or why not?
2. Do you agree that a "mature prayer life" means moving from request and gratitude to empowerment? How have you worked towards this in your own life?
3. Crossan states that this prayer and a commitment to distributive justice are inseparable—like two sides of a coin. He argues that Jesus, like Paul, teaches that we are "heirs of God"—that is, we have a co-responsibility to help run God's world and make sure everyone/thing has enough. How does this outlook change how you view the world and your role in it? Is this responsibility empowering? Intimidating?

CHAPTER 2: OUR FATHER IN HEAVEN

1. If you pray the Lord's Prayer, has the male-dominated language tripped you up in the past? Why or why not? Does Crossan's explanation of the inclusive nature of the word "Father" help you?
2. Crossan says that the best way to think of what the biblical writers meant by "Our Father in Heaven" is as "Householder of the Earth"—he who takes care of the

earth and everything on it. How does this change your conception of God? How does this change how you understand God's role in the world?

3. On page 49, Crossan says, "What happens to God and what happens to us are interactive, reciprocal, and collaborative." How do you feel about this? Is it presumptuous or empowering to say that God can't, or won't, effect change without us?

CHAPTER 3: HALLOWED BE YOUR NAME

1. Crossan argues that God is holy because he seeks justice for all. How does this change how we might "make holy" God's name?

CHAPTER 4: YOUR KINGDOM COME

1. When you have prayed "Your kingdom come" in the past—what did you mean? Were you thinking God's kingdom here on earth, or a heavenly kingdom in the future? Does Crossan's interpretation of how Jesus might have meant "kingdom" as a nonviolent, present, and collaborative state, change the way in which you will pray these words?
2. Read again Desmond Tutu's quote on page 94: "God without us, will not; as we, without God, cannot." What role, then, do humans play in God's work according to Tutu's prayer? Do you think God works collaboratively

with us? How does this change our conception of how we live?

CHAPTER 5: YOUR WILL BE DONE ON EARTH

1. Crossan argues that what is wrong with the world (sin) is the natural “consequence” of injustice rather than being a violation that needs to be atoned for in order to escape divine “punishment.” Can you think of ways in which sin and its punishment works as “consequence”?
2. If God is not seen primarily as the judge and punisher of sin and more as the restorer of justice and harmony, how might this change how and where we see God being active in the world? What do you think you might be asking for when you pray for God’s will to be done “on earth as it is in heaven”?

CHAPTER 6: GIVE US OUR DAILY BREAD

1. In Chapter 6, Crossan argues that “daily bread” calls up all the bread and fish stories scattered throughout the Gospels—the feeding of the five thousand, Jesus directing fishermen where to fish, the Last Supper—all emphasizing that God’s plan is for a just distribution of food so that no one has to worry about hunger, today and including all tomorrows. How does this change where you look for answers when you pray “give us this day our

daily bread”? What does “food” or “bread” symbolize for you? How do you connect God and “our daily bread”?

CHAPTER 7: FORGIVE US OUR DEBTS

1. The biblical notion of “debt” is tied closely to “slavery” and the hope of redemption and freedom. Crossan argues that Jesus’s call for the forgiveness of “debts” should be taken literally. God’s justice, as embodied in his redemption of Israel’s enslavement in Egypt, calls for the forgiveness of our debts and our pledge to forgive the debts of others. When you imagine yourself free from all your debts, what comes to mind? Why is being forgiven our debts connected to forgiving the debts of others? What would it look like in your life to live by this prayer more fully?

CHAPTER 8: LEAD US NOT INTO TEMPTATION

1. Most people think of temptation as an immoral inclination to do an evil act. But Crossan argues that “temptation” has a precise meaning, in this context, of using violence—even if your goal is a good and noble one. In that light, how does this portion of the prayer change its meaning for you? Likewise, what does it mean for you to ask to be “rescued from the evil one”? What does a commitment to nonviolence mean to you?

EPILOGUE

1. How has your view of the Lord's Prayer changed after reading this book? How has it changed what you believe you are praying for when you recite these ancient words?
2. Crossan calls the Lord's Prayer "a hymn of hope" and a "revolutionary manifesto." What does each phrase mean to you? Do you agree with those descriptions? Why or why not?