

# TEACH US

## THE LESSON: HEBREWS 4

Most of our prayer book services include what is called a “collect”, a name that comes from the Latin “collecta”. It refers to the idea of gathering together the people – and their individual prayers – into one united prayer. “Collects” occur throughout the Book of Common Prayer, for example at the beginning of the service of Holy Communion.

Collects usually follow a structure, which can be helpful to make note of so that when we are putting together our own prayers, we can consider using this format:

- an invocation or address to God,
- an acknowledgment of who is he and why it is that we are coming to him,
- a request, and what we hope will arise from his granting our request, and
- a conclusion that recognizes the mediation of Jesus Christ (our sympathetic High Priest!).

The opening prayer from 622 doesn’t really follow the classic collect structure, but does call us together into a common prayer. It also serves to point out a few unique things. First of all, prayer is not automatic: we need God’s help. The words, “Lord, teach us to pray”, are taken right out of Luke 11:1, where the disciples say those very words to Jesus. They recognize that he is the expert on prayer and they want to learn from him. This is a good place to start!

Next, we recognize our particular weaknesses and failings. We have a hard time keeping our thoughts from wandering. Like the disciples in Gethsemane, we find ourselves getting sleepy instead of staying alert to pray with Jesus.

Then we ask for a clean heart so that we can worship in “spirit” and in “truth”. This is another phrase taken from scripture (John 4:24), and points us away from an emphasis on the physical building where worship happens to a proper state of heart and mind. We are often cluttered with mixed motivations and none of this is hidden from God. So we acknowledge it and ask him to assist us to pray in a way that is focused and honest.

The New Testament letter to the Hebrews offers some encouragement for us as we begin to think about prayer.

## AT-HOME CHALLENGE

At home, find a quiet space and spend some time reflecting on the words of the 622 collect. You may even decide to write your own using the structure in the lesson’s notes as a guide.

Lord, teach us to pray.

Lord, keep our thoughts from wandering.

Lord, cleanse our hearts that we may worship thee in spirit and in truth;

Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Then put aside your distractions and speak to him.

- AND/OR -

Take some time to pray through this prayer, pausing to reflect after each phrase.

*O Heavenly Father, in whom we live and move and have our being: We humbly pray thee so to guide and govern us by thy Holy Spirit that in all the cares and occupations of our daily life we may never forget thee, but remember that we are ever walking in thy sight; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

(PRAYER FOR THE REMEMBRANCE OF GOD’S PRESENCE, BCP PAGE 732)

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## HEBREWS 4: **OUR SYMPATHETIC HIGH PRIEST**

<sup>12</sup>The word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. <sup>13</sup>And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account. <sup>14</sup>Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. <sup>15</sup>For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. <sup>16</sup>Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.