

Collects from the Book of Common Prayer

A Collect (accent on the first syllable) is a short prayer that asks “for one thing only” (Fortescue). They are rooted in Latin prayers that were written for the church by three famous Bishops of Rome: Leo I (440-461), Gelasius (492-496), and Gregory the Great (590-604). The collects we are most familiar with today come from Thomas Cranmer, the writer of the original Episcopal *Book of Common Prayer*. The “collects” that Cranmer wrote were brief but extremely ‘packed’ little prayers that tied together the doctrine of the day to a particular way of living. They were prayed by the minister on behalf of the people, or prayed in unison by the whole congregation.

Cranmer’s collects consist of 5 parts:

1. The address - a name of God
2. The doctrine - a truth about God’s nature that is the basis for the prayer
3. The petition - what is being asked for
4. The aspiration - what good result will come if the request is granted
5. In Jesus’ name - this remembers the mediatorial role of Jesus

See this structure in Cranmer’s famous collect for the service of Holy Communion:

1. *Almighty God*
2. *unto whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid,*
3. *cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of thy Holy Spirit,*
4. *that we may perfectly love thee, and worthily magnify thy holy name,*
5. *through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.*

See how the prayer moves from a doctrinal basis (why we can ask for it) to the petition (what we want) to the aspiration (what we will do with it if we get it.) It is remarkable how this combines solid theology with deep aspirations of the heart and concrete goals for our daily life.

Notice the same structure followed in the following collects from the Book of Common Prayer. This same outline can be followed in our public and private prayers.

Blessed Lord, who has caused all holy Scripture to be written for our learning; grant that we may so hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them; that by patience and comfort of thy holy word we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of eternal life, which thou hast given us in our savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Almighty God, who dost make the minds of all faithful men to be of one will; grant unto thy people, that they may love the thing which thou commandest, and desire that which thou dost promise, that among the sundry and manifold changes of the world, our hearts may be surely fixed where true joys are to be found, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

God, which hast prepared to them that love thee such good things as pass all man's understanding; Pour into our hearts such love toward thee, that we loving thee in all things, may obtain thy promises, which exceed all that we can desire; through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Almighty and everlasting God, who art always more ready to hear than we to pray, and art wont to give more than either we desire or deserve, pour down upon us the abundance of thy mercy, forgiving us those things whereof our conscience is afraid and giving unto us that which our prayer dare not presume to ask; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Almighty and everlasting God, give unto us the increase of faith, hope, and charity, that we may obtain that which thou dost promise, make us to love that which thou does command; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

This article was adapted from *The Collects of Thomas Cranmer* by C. Frederick Barbee and Paul F. M. Zahl and *How to Pray Better in Public and Private, Too* by Tim Keller.