

Learning to Pray  
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Last week, we just learned that a necessary posture, a necessary act of faith, to be Jesus' disciples is listening and learning from Jesus our Lord. Mary gave us that example; she tuned out the distractions of life to sit at his feet, as vs. 39 says, to listen to him teach. Luke, the author of this gospel, he's a smart dude. Right after he shows us Mary's example, he writes about an incident where the disciples ask Jesus to teach them. Do you get it? It's a not-so-subtle call on you and me to learn along with the disciples and follow Mary's example.

The very first topic that Luke writes about is Jesus' instruction on prayer, which I find interesting for a couple of reasons. First of all, Luke bringing this up first among all the topics that could be taught right after giving us Mary's example of being a humble learner tells me that prayer is pretty important in following Jesus. Prayer doesn't seem to be an "oh, by the way" activity of faith. It seems to be something that's more fundamental than that. And Jesus gives us a great example of this. This discussion about prayer started because the disciples saw Jesus praying. Let's turn in our Bibles to Luke 11; just look at vs. 1, "Now Jesus was praying in a certain place, and when he finished, one of his disciples said to him, 'Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples.'" Prayer being a significant aspect of Jesus' life was a clue to the disciples, "Prayer should be a part of my life, too."

Secondly, I find it interesting that the disciples wanted teaching on prayer; like, they knew it was something they needed help with. Do you know what that tells us? Prayer is not something you are born knowing how to do. Even being born again doesn't automatically make you an expert on prayer. That was an important revelation for me: I need to humbly learn how to pray. I need to be taught by God on how to pray. I can stop thinking I'm supposed to be able to just know how to do this. I can stop feeling so stupid and so useless because I'm struggling to know what to pray and how to pray. I know some of you feel that way. You don't pray on your own because you really don't know if you're doing it right; you certainly don't feel comfortable praying in public and when you do you're more concerned about how you come across than how God receives it. And this struggle only makes you feel worse about your relationship with God. I think the Evil One loves preying on these feelings of discouragement.

Prayer is something we must learn. And to give you some really great news, you can learn it. You are no different than the disciples. They needed to learn it, too. Think of it: Jesus picked followers who needed to learn how to pray; he didn't pick men and women who had it all figured out. They are the same people who eventually turned the world upside down for Jesus. Imagine what God might do in our own families, in our communities if we'll be humble learners like the disciples and the women who followed Jesus.

We have to stop thinking that everything about faith is supposed to come naturally or easily. The promise of being born again isn't that life and faith come easily without any effort or

focus; no, the promise of the new birth is that God's Holy Spirit will grow us more and more in our faith in the face of overwhelming odds. Let me show those odds: 1) Satan is our enemy, our adversary, who prowls around like a roaring lion looking to devour God's children. 2) The world that we live in, this present age, is bent towards evil and destruction. The wheels and cogs of this world grind in the opposite direction of the Kingdom of God; that means we wake up every single day and swim against spiritual current looking to drag us back into bondage and sin. And, in addition to these challenges, we have an enemy that lives inside of us. 3) Our own flesh, the earthly, dead part of you and me still wants to live the old way and not according to the ways of the kingdom.

You tell me: does it sound like our steps of faith will come easily? I don't think so. But let me tell you a promise from God that should set you singing. We will prevail! Nothing can separate us from the love of God found in Christ Jesus our Lord. Thankfully, with the power of the Holy Spirit, armed with the word of God, and all of us, brothers and sisters, willing to carry each other across the finish line, we will make it! Paul said in Phil 1:6, "And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. But only a few chapters later in Phil 3 he said there is a constant straining forward, there's a consistent pressing on to win the prize that characterizes the Christian life. It's not a pressing forward in my own strength; it's a straining to die more and more to my earthly desires and temptations and to be filled more and more with the Holy Spirit as I adopt the one-thing-is-necessary kind of life we talked about last week.

Prayer fits into this category, friends. Prayer is an act of faith that must be learned and applied. And guess what, friends? Jesus, your glorious Master and Savior who died for you on the cross is going to be your teacher. Rejoice! This is great news!

Jesus' instruction about prayer that is found in the first half of Luke 11 can be divided into three sections. The first section (vs. 1-4) focus on the content of our prayers; what should we actually pray for when we pray? The second section (vs. 5-10) address the need to be bold in prayer; that faithful prayer is almost presumptuous. Lastly, vs. 11-13 focus on the character of our God in answering prayer. This is where our confidence in prayer comes from. It comes from remembering who our great God is and when we do, we will be motivated to pray. Today, we are going to study vs. 1-4 and what our prayers should consist of (READ vs. 1-4).

I could probably stretch out these 4 verses into 5 or 6 sermons if I really wanted to dig deeply into the significance of the various components Jesus highlights here. But I am going to cover all these various components this morning hoping that I can provide enough info to help you understand, but also encouragement to apply. I want to try and help you connect the *what* to the *how* so that we actually pray this week differently. At the end of the message, I want to invite you to join me this week in putting Jesus' teaching into practice. So, let's do this.

The first teaching point is that we are to address God as *Father*. This isn't so much for God's benefit (like he needs this or it's some magic word that makes our prayers more

effective), but it's for our benefit. In fact, that's true for a lot of what we learn about prayer. Jesus says in Matthew 6 that God knows what we need before we even ask. So, it's not like our prayers to God are somehow informing him of something he doesn't already know. Prayer is me aligning my life and heart with God in such a way that makes me ready to receive the good God has for me as much as it is anything. So, us praying to God as our Father is more for us. So, how does this help you and me in our prayers? It reminds us who we are asking for help from. He's my father. He's not some stranger who's unaware. He's not some busy administrator who sees people as numbers. He's not an enemy looking to hurt me. He's my father; and my father cares deeply for my well being; he's my father who takes personal and invested care in who I am; he's my father who wants to help me and not hurt me. We're going to talk more about this one in two weeks, but the first lesson of prayer is to see God and address God as your father when you pray.

The 2nd and 3rd components of Jesus' instruction are interesting in that they are both statements. *Hallowed be your name* and *your kingdom come*; those really aren't requests like the ones that follow. But they not just statements of fact either; they are that, but they are calls on our lives. So, let's look first at *hallowed be your name*. On October 31 the world will remember and celebrate All Hallow's Eve or what children know to be Halloween. And it's truly become *hallowed*. That word, *hallow*, means to honor as holy. And by the decorations many put on their homes for Halloween and the amount of money spent on candy and gifts, it truly has become holy to many. That's what Jesus means when he says *hallowed be your name*. He's saying we should remember and recognize that God is holy in our prayers; that his name (the representation of his character) is to be honored as special. Now, here's the deal: God's name is hallowed, it is holy, whether we acknowledge it or not in our prayers or in our lives. But by making it a part of our prayers, it calls us to live in light of it; at least, that's what is supposed to happen. We shouldn't be able to pray with a clear conscience, "Father, holy and honored is your name" when we profane it everyday by what we do and what we say. And that's how it works for me. So, for example, when I pray something like, "Father, you are holy; your name is above all names" what happens is I'm automatically humbled by his perfection and my imperfection. And it creates this longing and desire in me to rightly worship God and walk in light of his holiness.

So, there's this balance that we need to take in our prayers and in our Christians lives. God is both our loving Father and the most hallowed in all the earth; he's is both the tender, caring Father looking out for his children and the holy and honored Majestic who the 24 heavenly elders fall face down before in worship crying "Worthy!" He's both. Remembering both of these keeps us living and praying in the right balance.

The 3rd component is a statement, too, and it's simply *your kingdom come*. Again, God's kingdom will come whether we pray for it or not. But we are to pray for this to happen and align ourselves with this coming kingdom. I see this is the first request we are to make to God in our prayers. "God, before I ask you for my daily needs, before I ask you to help me in my relationships, before I ask you to help me with my temptations, I'm asking you to usher your kingdom into my life and into this world." Bring your perfect and glorious wisdom to bear in my

world. Align myself and my community to your excellent word. Establish, my great God, your way in every part of my day. Father, your kingdom come.

Praying “Your kingdom come” transforms me. It stops me from being primarily concerned with my world, problems, and my life. Now look, God wants us to bring every request, every concern to him. He cares for us. So, when you need a different car, pray to God that he provides one. When you’re hopeful for a happy birthday, ask him. But here’s the deal: there’s something more fundamental, more pressing than our individual concerns and needs. It’s God’s desires, God’s wisdom, and God’s way being implemented in this world. Make that your first request.

Don’t miss this, my good friends. This really is an important way prayer to God changes us. How can you pray *your kingdom come* without wondering and asking, “Well, God, what is your will? What is your way? What do you value?” So, as you truly care about God’s kingdom you’re transformed into a seeker of his kingdom. Move this component of prayer to the top of your prayer request list.

The 4th component is found in vs. 3; “Give us this day our daily bread.” Pretty straightforward; let’s not make this too complicated. Our daily bread is a reference to the sustenance and strength we need. So, make it a point to pray to God for this. At least for me, I presume this too much. As a rather self-sufficient man, I forget that I am dependent on God for my daily needs. Regardless of what my freezers are filled with, regardless of how much money I have in the bank, I need God every single day for the most basic of needs.

And don’t miss the *daily* part. This shouldn’t surprise us too much from Jesus since he also said, “Don’t worry about tomorrow for today has enough trouble of it’s own.” Take it day by day, my friends, always asking God for what we need.

The 5th component says from vs. 4, “and forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone who is indebted to us.” Living in a right relationship with God and others will include forgiveness. We will fail others and others will fail us. Isn’t it noteworthy to see that the call God gives us is to forgive. It’s not to correct; it’s not to scold; it’s not to get revenge. It’s to be like Jesus and forgive. Now, if you’re paying attention to what it means to be human and you truly desire to be in a right relationship with God and others, you acutely recognize your need for God’s help to do this; forgiveness, quite frankly, is impossible without God. Relationships are so very important to our lives. Make asking for God’s help to forgive others a regular part of your prayers. How can forgiven sinners like you and me withhold forgiveness towards others?

The 6th and final component is found in this phrase, “And lead us not into temptation.” What I find really helpful about this request is that it rightly identifies our biggest problem - our own sin or temptation to sin. That’s our biggest problem, friends. Our biggest problem is not an unfair boss or teacher, but the temptation to sin against an unfair boss or teacher. Our biggest problem is not lacking enough money to pay the bills, but the temptation to steal from others

when the money is tight. Our biggest problem is not the stressful situation with family, but our sinful temptation to turn away from Jesus as our refuge and strength. We need help staying faithful. And if we need help with it, then make sure you include it in your prayer.

So, based off of this information I'm going to try something this week and I want to invite you to join me. We've been a Mary this morning, learning from the Master, but let's be doers of the word and not merely hearers. Every day this week, I'm going to get back to the basics with my prayer time. When I pray I'm going to include all these components. I'd like you to practice this with me. In your bulletin is a resource Beth has so wonderfully produced. It's meant to help you organize your thoughts in prayer. Here's how you can use it: before you pray, review this card and the components of prayer that Jesus is teaching us to include. As you work through each of these the components make notes (either in your head or on paper). Then, go pray like Jesus taught us. Refer back to the card whenever you need to.

Jesus gave us some instructions; let me give you a few more.

- Don't worry about how long you pray; nowhere does Jesus tell us our prayers need to be a certain length. Now, in time as we gain a greater understanding of our need for God and his kindness towards us our prayers will lengthen. But there's no need to artificially lengthen our prayers thinking that's somehow a sign of greater spirituality.
- Don't worry about covering every base; what I mean by that is there is always more that you can pray about. As you review the card, maybe the Lord will bring certain people or situations to your mind. Great! Focus on those. You don't need to pray for everything every time you pray.
- Do put things in your own words. You don't need to use the word *hallowed* in your prayer. Maybe for you it comes up like this, "Father, you are truly great; you created this world and you saved me from my sins. No doubt, nobody compares with you." That's you *hallowing* the name of God. Be yourself while eagerly hoping God keeps changing you.
- Finally, don't measure success by how you feel when you're done. No, instead, rejoice that you put into practice Jesus' teaching. Rejoice that you obeyed him in faith. And expect to grow in this as you keep doing it. That's how we grow, right? By doing things over and over again. And the more we practice the path Jesus lays out for us in faith, the more we will slowly align ourselves with his way.

Key vs. Luke 11:2

#### Questions for the week

- Do you wish your prayer time was more effective? What do you think could make it better?
- What does learning that we need to be taught how to pray do for you? Does it help you in any way? How so?
- Name 1 way you will think differently and act differently based on what you heard today?