

Learning to Pray From Jesus

This morning we are going to begin with an informal survey. We're going to start over here on the left and work our way around the room and answer the question "How is your prayer life?"

That could really put some of us on the spot, couldn't it? So we won't do that. Instead, let me be the first to admit something this morning. For me, prayer is sometimes a very difficult thing.

Why that is, I don't know- maybe it has to do with the fact that I am talking to someone that I can't see. I know God is real, powerful, and all knowing but I can't see Him.

Maybe it's just that like so many of us I have a hard time depending on some one outside of myself, even if that person is God. Probably self-sufficiency is our greatest enemy.

Well I have to tell you, I take comfort somehow in the fact that I'm not alone. Max Lucado, the popular Christian author and pastor confesses that prayer is the weakest area of his spiritual walk and the hardest for him. Philip Yancey, another popular Christian author, confesses that he has times when his prayers seem more of a struggle than a relationship.

Prayer can be tough. But when we go to the Word of God we find that prayer is vitally important. Prayer is the way we really connect with God. And the thing that really confirms the importance of prayer is the fact that Jesus consistently prayed while He was on earth.

Listen to these verses, just from the Gospel of Luke:

Luke 3:21 When all the people were baptized, it came to pass that Jesus also was baptized; and while He prayed, the heaven was opened.

Luke 5:16 So He Himself often withdrew into the wilderness and prayed.

Luke 6:12 Now it came to pass in those days that He went out to the mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God.

Luke 9:18 And it happened, as He was alone praying, that His disciples joined Him...

Luke 9:28 Now it came to pass, about eight days after these sayings, that He took Peter, John, and James and went up on the mountain to pray.

Luke 11:1 Now it came to pass, as He was praying in a certain place, when He ceased, that one of His disciples said to Him, "Lord, teach us to pray..."

Luke 22:32 "But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren."

Luke 22:41 And He was withdrawn from them about a stone's throw, and He knelt down and prayed...and being in agony, He prayed more earnestly. Then His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground.

Isn't that amazing? The one who was Immanuel, God with us, The Word who was God, the one who called Himself "I Am" prayed. Why?

Remember that in the incarnation Jesus took on true humanity. In the Gospels Jesus is called "The Son of Man" eighty four times. It was His favorite title to describe Himself.

Jesus walked this earth as a human being. He had a nature like ours except for one difference. He was sinless.

He came to die as the perfect sacrifice for our sins, but He came for something else too. He came to show us what it would be like for a human being to be totally dependent on the Father in heaven.

We can pick up the Gospels, look at the life of Christ, and say this is my pattern for living. This is what God wants from me.

If I have received Christ and His death for my forgiveness, then this is how God wants me to live as His child.

That brings us to our passage for today, **Luke chapter 11 pg 1005**

We're going to see 4 things about prayer this morning. The first is found in verse 1 and it's the Importance of Prayer **Read vs 1**

You have to remember now these guys knew how to pray. They knew the basics.

Jewish boys learned their prayers at home and in the synagogue. They had special formalized prayers they would say. But Jesus prayed so often and so meaningfully that I believe that their question was for more than just a description of a prayer--an outline. They wanted to know how to make the connection with God. How do you make prayer meaningful?

Notice, they didn't say, "Teach us to preach" or "Teach us to do more miracles." They said teach us to pray. Even though they have travelled with Jesus for over two years. Even though they knew their Jewish memorized prayers, they saw how their prayer life was still lacking. They saw how vitally important prayer is.

So they said, "Lord, teach us to pray... Teach us to really communicate with the Father. Teach us to reproduce what we see in Your life."

Verses 2 through 13 are Jesus' answer to their question.

The importance of prayer was something they all recognized. So Jesus gives them an outline. He gives them *A Model for Prayer*

He says, verse 2, **(Read 2a)** "*When you pray, say: Our Father in heaven, Hallowed be Your name.*"

It is a great irony that in the age of email and cell phones, our generation is perhaps the worst in history at really communicating with one another. What Jesus lays out here is a pattern for communication.

That starts with a recognition of who we're addressing.

We're addressing "*Our Father in heaven.*"

In all of Jewish literature, not once was God addressed as "Father." Yet, here, for the first time in the disciples' lives they heard Yahweh, the holy God of heaven, called Our Father.

The Psalms have to be some of the most personal and intimate prayers in the OT. All through the Psalms David never addresses God as Father.

But see prayer is to be viewed as communication between a child and his father.

We call the prayer here in chapter eleven, the Lord's Prayer, because it's the prayer

that the Lord taught. The Catholic Church calls it the Our Father, or in Latin, *Paternoster*, and that may be a better name for it than Lord's Prayer. It's not really the Lord's prayer at all. Jesus didn't pray this particular prayer himself. He was sinless, and didn't need to ask forgiveness. It is not His prayer, but it's our prayer, which he composed for us.

This is for believers. You might call it the Believer's Prayer. This is for believers who have received God's forgiveness through faith in Jesus Christ. That's why it starts off with this intimate phrase, Our Father.

Now, for some of us this morning, the memories of our Father are good ones. For others, the memory of Father may be of someone who mistreated us. For still others, Father may be someone who wasn't around at all.

There's all kinds of emotions generated by the word "father."

The Bible wants us to understand that God is unlike any human father who ever lived. He is our Father in the perfect sense of the word. Everything He does He does with our good in mind. He is the perfect Father. That's the "*Father*" we're addressing in prayer.

Not only is He our Father though, He's our Father who's name is hallowed.

The NKJV translators have stuck with the old term, hallowed, probably because it's what people are so used to when they pray the Lord's Prayer.

The only other time we use the word *hallowed* these days is in Halloween, and its meaning there has changed to be exactly the opposite of what it originally meant. Halloween is short for Hallowed Eve. It used to be an important date in the church calendar as the feast of all saints, when all Christian believers who had died and gone to heaven were remembered.

Hallowed simply means Holy. Holy means Otherness, Uniqueness, Separation, and Purity.

When we say that God's name is holy, we are talking about His uniqueness, His purity.

It's crucial that we have first in our mind that God is close to us as Father. But we must get equally in our mind that he is also far above us.

For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,' declares the Lord. 'As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.' " - Isaiah 55:8,9

To pray to the true God we must pray knowing both his nearness as our Father, and his otherness as Holy.

If we acknowledge that God is Holy - that he is separate from his creation, that he dwells in unapproachable light, that he is pure goodness which burns up anything evil in his presence, then we will be led to consider how unholy, weak, and dependent upon him are we.

He is holy, but we are by nature unholy, impure, and lowly. Unlike him, we are part of creation. Unlike him we are sinful. If we really meditate on that, then we will learn to be totally dependent on God for his provision of all our needs in this life, and we'll be eternally grateful for his provision of Jesus Christ to die for sins and to give us eternal life.

The pattern continues in verse 2 (**Read 2b**): *Your kingdom come. Your will be done On earth as it is in heaven.*

Warren Wiersbe writes: True prayer involves responsibilities: honoring God's kingdom and doing God's will.

It has been well said that the purpose of prayer is not to get man's will done in heaven, but to get God's will done on earth.

Prayer isn't telling God what we want so we can be selfish. Prayer is asking God to use us to accomplish what He wants so that name is glorified, His kingdom is expanded, And His will done. I must test all of my personal requests by these overruling concerns if I expect God to hear and answer my prayers.

Ralph Wilson adds: When we pray, "Your kingdom come," we are asking God to manifest the power and glory of his kingdom in us, and throughout our world. What a prayer! We are praying that Christ might reign over all. We are also asking the Father to hasten the return of Jesus Christ to this earth. Amen!

I really believe Jesus' main point here is when it comes to prayer the focus doesn't begin with us. It begins with God. We'll never get this thing called prayer right, this

communication with God if we don't start with Him instead of us.

Now, once we were focused on God then we can turn to our own needs. **Read vs 3**

When's the last time you prayed anything like that? Maybe some of us have at some time in our life, but praying for our daily food in this country isn't something most of us do. We go down to Super Fresh, pull some cash out of our pocket and buy our bread don't we?

Don't ever assume that your hard work and your cash is where you need to put your trust. Hard work is important, but in reality it's only the secondary cause of wealth, and prosperity. Or even of making ends meet.

If you truly believe that all you have; your health, your abilities, your education, your intelligence and strength, even the breath you take, are gifts from God, then you won't be proud and self-sufficient. You'll thank God and you'll continually ask that He graciously provide you with the necessities of this life.

Again, I believe Jesus is showing us, even when we pray for ourselves it's designed to keep us aware of our absolute dependence on God.

We are to ask for our own needs, but our needs aren't just physical. **Read 4a (Through us) And forgive us our sins, For we also forgive everyone who is indebted to us.**

In this pattern for our prayers I see Jesus directing us to deal with anything that might hinder our relationship with our heavenly Father. We receive forgiveness from God and God expects us to turn around and show that same forgiveness to others.

We don't forgive others in order to be forgiven. Instead we pray that God will so transform our character that we will become like Him in our attitudes and actions.

That's why verse 4 finishes (**Read 4b**) *And do not lead us into temptation, But deliver us from the evil one.*

A lot of people read this and wonder why we should ask God not to lead us into temptation when God never tempts anyone with sin. Why ask God not to do something He's not going to do anyway?

We do believe that God guides our steps. This is a prayer that God would protect us against temptation. That's why He said, "deliver us from the evil one." In this prayer Jesus is teaching us to be dependent upon God to help us in times of temptation, when the temptation seems especially strong. "Don't lead us into places where we can be tempted, we pray, but lead us in places where you are, and where we can be free."

Sometimes we flirt with temptation. We don't exactly seek temptation, but we are attracted to sinful things. And so we sort of wink at them. Our resistance is low; we are being "dragged away and enticed" by our "own evil desire," as James put it.

This prayer, "and lead us not into temptation," shows us how absolutely important it is for us to stop flirting with sin and to actively flee and resist it. That is to be part of the content of our prayers.

Now, at this point you might be thinking, "But if God knew what I really thought about, or wanted to do, he wouldn't have anything to do with me." Listen, there is nothing we have done or said or thought that can surprise our Father. The miracle of the cross is that he cares about us in spite of our rebelliousness.

This part of the Lord's Prayer reminds us to call upon the Father for strength when we are tempted. We are not to fight some secret war against sin; God wants to be our continual partner. He knows your weakness, and He knows mine. He wants to free us and make us whole. What a wonderful Father we have! What wonderful grace He shows us.

I hope you've seen a theme here so far. What keeps us from prayer? Self sufficiency. Self dependence. What has every aspect of this prayer taught us? God's sufficiency. God dependence.

The more we pray, the more we depend on God. The more we depend on God, the more we pray.

We're given The Importance of Prayer
We're given The Model for Prayer
And now we see The Persistence of Prayer **Read vs 5-8**

Remember, Jesus is still answering the disciples request: "*Lord, teach us to pray...*"

Now he uses a parable to encourage us in our prayers.

We go to our neighbor at midnight to borrow some bread. We have an out of town guest, the supermarket is closed, and we need something to feed our visitor. So we wake the guy up and ask him for food.

Jesus says, Even though the guy's in bed and his whole family is asleep he'll still get up and give you what you ask for.

Here in the US we're all concerned about all of our family members having their own bedrooms. We even have laws that say a rental must have a certain number of bedrooms if you have a certain number of children.

The vast majority of people in the world don't live that way at all. Pastor Augusto Garcia in Nicaragua has 6 children and a two room house. Not a two bedroom house. A two room house.

In Jesus day the same would have been true. Your friend doesn't want to get up because he'll disturb the whole family. His children are in bed with him and a few animals might have been in the room too.

But Jesus says he gets up anyway because of your *persistence*.

Here's the point: If persistence finally paid off as a man beat on the door of a reluctant friend, how much more would persistence bring blessing as we pray to a loving heavenly Father. In fact if you really wanted to press the parable, we're the children in the house with him.

But even more significant is the word translated *persistence* or *boldness* as NIV translates it. The Greek word *anaideia* literally means "without downcast eyes." In other words it means "without shame."

It can refer to the man at the door who wasn't ashamed to wake up his neighbor at midnight, or it can refer to the friend in the house. He was without shame.

See, in an Eastern culture, to not show hospitality was a shameful thing. The man in the house didn't want to shame his family name by not being hospitable, so he got up and got answered the request.

Why does our Father in heaven answer prayer? Not just to meet the needs of His children. That's secondary. He answers prayer to bring glory to His name.

As one commentator said, "When God's people pray, God's reputation is at stake. The way He takes care of His children is a witness to the world that He can be trusted. Persistence in prayer is not an attempt to change God's mind but to get ourselves to the place where He can trust us with the answer."

Prayer is Vitally Important

Jesus Himself Gives us a Model for Prayer

Persistence of Prayer Pays off as God is Glorified

Then finally, Jesus completes His response to the disciples by giving them some great Prayer promises. **Read 9-10**

Each of these verbs is present tense in Greek. Greek tenses don't show time so much as type of action. Present tense shows continual action. Keep on asking...keep on seeking...keep on knocking. In other words, don't come to God only in the midnight emergencies, but keep in constant communion with your Father.

Could you imagine not speaking to your earthly father for weeks on end and then having an emergency and suddenly calling on him for help? Unfortunately that's the way some people try to live in relationship to God. Then they wonder why their prayers seem so forced and unnatural.

Here's the way the relationship is supposed to be: **Read 11-13**

In the first story, Jesus used the example of one friend, who gave another what he wanted, even though it was inconvenient, because of his persistence. In the second story, Jesus leaves the imagery of a friend and moves to that of a father. If friends can be expected to give us what we ask for when we persist, what can we expect of a father, better yet, of our Heavenly Father?

Jesus started off by telling His disciples to pray to God as their Father. Now He picks up on the theme of God as Father. Earthly fathers who love their children delight in giving good gifts to them. Human fathers don't give their children "bad" things when they've asked for something good.

To put a little differently, earthly fathers don't give their children gifts which will harm them when they are asked for those things which will help them. Fish and eggs are both helpful.

Snakes and scorpions are both harmful. God, as a Heavenly Father, doesn't give us those things which will be harmful to us when we have asked for those things which are good for us.

Now here's the rub. To often we ask God for snakes and scorpions, rather than for fish and eggs. How many of us pray, "God, do what ever it takes to produce Christ-like character in me. God, if it means me loosing my health, or my money, whatever, give me what's best?"

To us health, finances, life going smoothly those are the fish and egg requests. But in the plan of God at times they may do more harm to us spiritually than good.

So, I may ask for a snake, but God gives me a fish. I may wish for a scorpion, but God gives me eggs. God doesn't give us evil gifts when we ask for the good, He gives us good gifts even when we seek those which are harmful to us.

Because God is a good God, a loving Father, He not only can be expected to answer our prayers, but to do it in a way that's for our highest good.

From our Jesus' first story we learn that God answers our prayers. From the second, we learn that His answers are good ones.

And the example Jesus uses is the gift of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit was the ultimate good gift that God gave in the Book of Acts to His people as they asked.

Prayer can be hard. Its part of a spiritual battle and we have an enemy in Satan who will do anything he can to divert us from prayer.

We began this morning by asking the question, "How is your prayer life?" Maybe after reading Jesus words here you say, "I guess it's not so good after all. I'm glad we didn't go around the room and all have to answer that question."

It could be that your prayer life is empty because God the Father is not really your father. If that's the case the Bible says you need to be born into God's family. In fact, Jesus said in John 3, *"Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."*

And then He went on to explain how to have that new birth. He said, *For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.*

When we realize our sin and trust Christ for forgiveness, the Bible says we were born into God's family. We have a new life. Eternal life in Him.

But then maybe you have trusted Christ as Savior. You have been born into God's family, but your prayer life still seems powerless. Could it be that you're really not a disciple of the Lord.

A Christian is one who is saved through faith in the shed blood of Jesus Christ. A disciple is a Christian who takes following Christ seriously. There can be a big difference between mere Christians and true disciples.

I believe that Jesus' words here in John 11 tell us that one difference is to be found in our prayers.

The disciples asked Jesus, "*Lord, teach us to pray...*" have you learned from His answer this morning? Jesus said, "*When you pray, say these words...*"

Join me as we read them together: *Our Father in heaven, Hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done On earth as it is in heaven. Give us day by day our daily bread. And forgive us our sins, For we also forgive everyone who is indebted to us. And do not lead us into temptation, But deliver us from the evil one.*