

Luke 11:1-4

Once Jesus was in a certain place praying. As he finished, one of his disciples came to him and said, "Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples."

Jesus said, "This is how you should pray:

"Father, may your name be kept holy.

May your Kingdom come soon.

Give us each day the food we need,
and forgive us our sins,

as we forgive those who sin against us.

And don't let us yield to temptation.

During our week of prayer, we are going to learn how to pray according to the model Jesus provided in response to His disciples' request, "Lord, teach us to pray."

Christian tradition has labeled this prayer "The Lord's Prayer". Luke provides us with a somewhat abbreviated form of the same model prayer which we find in Matt. 6:9-13. The contexts in which the prayer is found in Matthew and Luke are different, so it is likely that Jesus taught His disciples to pray in this manner on two separate occasions. Because the context is different and the expanded version that Matthew was inspired by the Holy Spirit to record for us adds some extra insight, I will use both versions to highlight some key points today. We begin with how Jesus taught his followers to address God:

A. "Our Father"

The first thing we need to establish about the nature of prayer is that prayer is a child's communication with his/her father. Matthew tells us that before Jesus taught his disciples how they ought to pray, he first told them how not to pray. Jesus' concern was not with the method of prayer but with the motivation of prayer. Jesus made two main points about how not to pray: He said don't pray like hypocrites or like pagans.

1. Don't Pray to Gain Attention and Approval from People. (Matt. 6: 5-6)

Jesus first concern was with prayers that were prayed to gain human attention, rather divine attention. Jesus called them hypocrites because they acted like they directing their words to God when really they were directing them to people. Their words were addressed to God but expressed to people. Jesus point: Do not use prayer as a performance to gain praise from people. I

would add: Don't use prayer as a platform to preach to people. This happens often in corporate prayer, so we need to remember: Prayer is the act of speaking to God.

2. Don't Use Prayer as a Strategy to Manipulate God. (Matt. 6: 7-8)

People devise all types of schemes or systems for how to pray so that God answers them according to their desire. This same problem has corrupted the spiritual discipline of giving as well. Prayer and giving have both been perverted by some preachers and turned into strategies to enrich or promote oneself. They were meant to serve as heartfelt expressions of love for God and others. When prayer and giving are turned into strategies, they cease to be responses that flow from a personal relationship with a God who is our Father and teach us to relate to God impersonally as if he were an investment banker or Santa Claus.

In pagan religions, prayer was treated as a mystical exercise where words, if spoken correctly, with the right rituals in place, compel the "gods" to act on behalf of the person praying. This is a far cry from what Christian prayer ought to be. It is sadly ironic, that so many people have done with this very prayer is the very thing Jesus warned against; reciting it as a mere ritual to curry God's favor.

Christian prayer is first and foremost the consequence of an ongoing relationship, a lifelong conversation with our Everlasting Father. It is not an exercise geared at controlling God but knowing God and learning to trust in God. The hypocrites and pagans did not relate to God as Father.

Jesus DID NOT prescribe prayers for His disciples to recite. He provided them with guidance as to the nature and substance of what they should express to their heavenly Father when they talked to him.

KEY POINT: The Lord's Prayer is a model to guide us, NOT a mandated ritual to be recited by us.

Now let's look at our first piece of guidance regarding what we should express to our Father when we speak to Him in prayer.

B. "May Your name be kept Holy"

The literal rendering is "Holy be your name." It is an expression not just of what "is" but what should "be". God's name (i.e. person) is holy (i.e. set apart

as superior to all others). This is true, but the NLT does a good job of translating the essence of the phrase; an expression that acknowledges the responsibility of man to honor, rather than tarnish God's name by living in a manner that reflects His goodness. One version translates the phrase; "May you name be honored." Another way of expressing this is:

"Because you are a perfect God, help those of us who call you "our God" to live in such a way as to bring honor to you."

In worship we express that God is worthy of honor and praise. We worship God by acting in a manner that brings honor rather than disgrace.

This phrase is first a declaration of worship as it is an expression that God is worthy of being honored above all. This phrase is also a profession on our part that we recognize that we have the responsibility to act and behave in a manner that brings honor rather than disgrace to God's name.

C. "Your Kingdom come". "Your will be done"

Another way to express this is, "God, reign over us. Be our King." Jesus is teaching us to pray – to express our desire – for God's agenda to be fulfilled. In order for us to ask for God's kingdom to come; His will to be done; His agenda to be implemented; we must first want that. There is an assumption behind these words of Jesus; the assumption that the desires of Jesus' followers will be aligned with Jesus desires. They want what He wants!

There is a second assumption that lies behind these words. Since Jesus was not spoon feeding his disciples a specific prayer to be recited word for word, but providing them with a model for how they should pray, there is an assumption that Jesus' disciples will know what it means for people and systems to be operating according to God's will. This assumption is based on the fact that followers of Jesus are those who are LEARNING, LIVING, and SHARING the good news about Jesus.

Praying for God's will to be done requires that we do some reading and study to discover just what His will is. We are fooling ourselves if we assume that everybody knows what is God's will, His purposes and priorities. I could cite many examples but I will offer just one. Several years ago I read a quote by a celebrity in the music industry that would be comical if it wasn't so sad since the celebrity professed to be a Christian. Here is what she confidently declared to be the will of God:

"My God is a God who wants me to have things. He wants me to bling. He wants me to be the hottest thing on the block. I don't know what kind of God y'all are serving, but the God I serve says, "_____, you need to be the hottest thing this year, and I'm gonna make sure you're doing that."

According to this quote, God's will for this individual is that she become rich and famous. But not just famous, God wants her to be **more** famous than everyone else. What is most troubling about statements like this, is the number of Christians who "Amen" them, failing to recognize the distorted picture of God which it paints.

There are two simple reasons for aligning our prayer requests with God's will and God's agenda:

1. God's will and His agenda are of primary importance. If we have already confessed our belief that God's name deserves to be honored and that we want him to be honored, then it logically follows that we ought to prioritize prayer requests that reflect his will being done. Do we want God to be honored? That only happens when his will is done and his kingdom rule is extended.
2. A heart that desires God to be honored by His will being accomplished results in the habit of praying for His will to be done. But it is also true that when we make it a habit to focus our petitions and requests on the growth of the kingdom so that God's name will be glorified in all the earth, our heart will develop a deeper devotion to God's honor and God's will.

KEY POINT: In short, the affections of our heart influence our habits AND our habits influence the affections of our heart.

Your devotion to God's will and His kingdom purposes will grow as you pray accordingly. For example, I guarantee that if you develop the habit of praying for missions you will find yourself more interested and more committed to missions. When you pray for those around you who don't know Christ, you will find yourself motivated to do more to share the gospel with those who are far from God. I tell people, -and myself – that when we have unforgiveness or bitterness towards someone, praying for them goes a long way towards softening our heart towards them.

As you read God's word and discover that His will is that the orphan and widow are not left destitute but are cared for; and then you begin to pray for God's will to be done in that respect; you will then find yourself develop a

heart to care for those who are uncared for. As you discover that Jesus taught that God established marriage to be a life long covenant of self-giving love between one man and one woman and that God's intention is that these unions would provide the proper environment for the birth and nurturing of children, then you will begin to pray for marriage to be honored among all people. You will pray for spouses to remain faithful rather than divorce their spouse or cheat on their spouse. You will pray for God's intention for marriage and sexual expression to be practiced. As you do, you will find yourself more committed to conforming your life with God's divine intentions for marriage, sexual expression and child-rearing.

KEY POINT: What we pray FOR, we develop an attachment TO.

This same truth applies to the warning to avoid praying for the wrong things. If our prayers are for wealth we will find ourselves becoming more attached to wealth. If we pray only and always for our own wants and desires, we will find ourselves becoming very much consumed with our wants and desires.

D. "Give us each day the food we need"

Once we have prioritized praying for things that bring honor to God and blessings to others, we are not just invited to ask God to provide for our own needs, but encouraged by Jesus to do so. I see three basic needs fitting into this time of personal petition:

1. Prayers for financial provision.

Ask God to provide you with a job that will enable you to provide for your needs. But don't expect divine favor without applying personal responsibility. Pray for a job door to open while you go knocking. Don't pray and expect the job to come looking for you.

Pray for favor when going for a job interview or applying for a scholarship. If you can't work or are out of work against your own will, pray that God will provide through the generosity of others...and don't be too timid to let your need be known.

2. Pray for wisdom.

One of our greatest needs living in a society with such an abundance of resources, is the need for wisdom. We should pray that God gives us knowledge and understanding as we seek to educate and train ourselves to work and make an income. We should be praying constantly for wisdom to be productive and effective at the jobs we do now and for wisdom to know how to apply our skills and knowledge to an even greater degree so we can

be even more productive economically. We also need wisdom to manage the resources God has provided us with. Many times our financial problems are due to spending problems rather than income problems.

3. Pray for health.

Our physical health is another personal need which we have some control over but certainly not complete control. Jesus encourages us to pray for healing. Thank God for doctors, but doctors are not "gods". They are limited in their capacity to treat and cure illness. We need to go to Jesus, our great physician. God is a father that loves and provides for his children!

E. "Forgive us as we forgive"

Some teachers have suggested that Christians who have already confessed their sin to God, trusting in Jesus atoning work on the cross as the provision for the forgiveness of their sins, no longer need to ask God for forgiveness. That is not true. We do not need to ask God to save us every time we sin, but that does not mean that confession of sins is no longer an important part of the Christian's prayer life. 1 John 1:8, which was written to Christians reads, "If we claim we have no sin, we are only fooling ourselves and not living in the truth. But if we confess our sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all wickedness".

If my sons sinned against me or my wife, would it be important for them to ask our forgiveness? Of course! Even if they did something we didn't know about. They didn't need to ask forgiveness because we kicked them out of the house every time they sinned. They needed to ask forgiveness because it is the right thing to do when you have wronged someone! If I sin against my wife and I don't ask for her forgiveness, I have failed to love her like I ought.

KEY POINT: Sin damages the relationship even if it doesn't sever it. Love seeks to restore the damage it has done.

F. "And don't let us yield to temptation. Deliver us from evil."

This aspect of prayer is closely associated with confession of sin. This statement is an expression of our need for spiritual power and grace. It is what one ought to pray for once they asked for and have received forgiveness. Now that God has forgiven us we need his help so that we don't repeat the offense but overcome the next time we face temptation. The Christian doesn't just want forgiveness; he wants new life, new power. He wants to live in a manner that honors God in all things.

My challenge to you as we get ready to begin a new year is to begin - or renew - your practice of applying Jesus teaching on prayer to your life. If you used this prayer as a guide you will find prayer is not that difficult. Often we fail to pray because we don't know what to say. Utilizing Jesus model solves that problem. Make an effort to set aside a time each day and pray according to this outline. During our week of prayer, we will be practicing each element as we gather.

Every thing I have said to this point has been focused on how to pray. In closing I need to stress to you're the importance of prayer. It is the divinely appointed means God has given us to know him and enjoy His presence. It is also the divinely appointed means God has established for his power to operate in the lives of his people. We have not because we ask not. Demonic forces are defeated through prayer. Healing comes through prayer. Wisdom comes through prayer. Nothing could be clearer in the NT than the direct relationship between prayer and the fullness and power of the Spirit! Without prayer all we have is a form or appearance of godliness but without any true power!

SO LET US PRAY!

