

“Lord, Teach Us to Pray”

Luke 11:1-4 and Matthew 6:5-13

I'll be with you in a minute OK? I just have to make a quick call.

Hi Mr Magic Man in the sky. I only have a minute so can you grab a pen and take notes. Can you help me with what to get the in-laws for Christmas; and John is not feeling well today; and the credit card is near its limit again so I need a good Christmas bonus this year; and the car is making some expensive sounding noises so can you sort that out for us too. In Jesus name, amen.

Let's be honest, sometimes our prayers can sound a little bit like that don't they? Today we are going to look at how Jesus taught us to pray.

When I was in Jerusalem earlier this year I discovered that there is a church on the Mt of Olives dedicated to the Lord's Prayer. They have the Lord's Prayer in many languages and I found it in Maori.

Prayer is mentioned over 500 times in the Bible so it must be an important topic for us to understand. In Ephesians chapter 6 we have the famous passage about the 'armour of God'. There are the defensive pieces of armour like the Helmet of Salvation, the Shield of Faith and the Breastplate of Righteousness. There is also the Sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God. A sword is used for both offence and defence. I believe the next verse describes the 7th piece of the Armour of God which many people overlook, and that is Prayer. In the analogy of the Armour of God, prayer is a long-range offensive weapon like an arrow or spear. Arrows are most effective when precisely targeted rather than fired in the general direction of the enemy.

As we read through the Gospels we notice that Jesus was always going off to a quiet place to pray. The disciples also noticed this and in Luke 11 we read that they asked Him to teach them how to pray.

“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; as John also taught his disciples.’ So He said to them, “When you pray, say:

Our Father in heaven,

Hallowed be Your name.

Your kingdom come.

Your will be done On earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread.

And forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us.

And do not lead us into temptation,

But deliver us from the evil one.”

Luke 11:1-4

Jesus couldn't pray this prayer because He had no sins to ask forgiveness for. Jesus gave it as a model or outline for the disciples. There is no further mention of the Lord's Prayer in the Book of Acts or any of the epistles. For an example of a prayer that Jesus prayed himself, take a look at His prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane in John 17. In that prayer you see how intimate His relationship is with the Father and also how he submits His will to the Fathers' will.

The Lord’s Prayer was not given to us to be recited as a ritual. Jesus said not to use meaningless repetition when we pray (Mat 6:7 NASB). The Lord’s Prayer is given to us as a model or example of how to pray, not what to pray.

1. A New Relationship - “Our Father”

The prayer begins with, “Our Father in Heaven.” Jesus is emphasising the importance of praying with the awareness that we have a very special relationship with God in that He is our Father. He doesn’t start with ‘My Father’ He starts with ‘Our Father’. The word ‘our’ reminds us that it is not just about us individually, we are part of a family.

Most people who believe in some kind of God, including many Christians, have a business style of relationship with their God rather than a family relationship. The differences between these two types of relationships are summarised in this table:

Business Relationship	Family Relationship
I have something to exchange: time, skills etc exchanged for wages.	I am something to you – I’m a son or daughter.
Based on continued good performance Or you get fired.	Based on commitment. <u>Always</u> a son or daughter. E.g. Prodigal Son.
Conditional – as long as you perform	Unconditional commitment
Based on doing. - works	Based on being. - grace
If you do good works you are accepted.	Because you are loved and accepted you desire to do good works.

As Christians we have been adopted as sons and daughters of God so we have this unique privilege of speaking to God as our Father.

“But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name” - John 1:12 and

“Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! ...” – 1 John 3:1

All of Jesus’ prayers addressed God as “Father” except once when He was on the cross dying in our place. No one had ever prayed like Jesus calling God ‘Father’. Jesus has transformed our relationship with God from a distant and formal business-like relationship to one that is close and intimate, between a Father and a child.

Many of us have had earthly fathers who were unable or unwilling to have a loving, intimate relationship with us. If this is true for you then you may have had, or may still have difficulty relating to God in the way He really wants to be known. For example, if your earthly father was a difficult-to-please authoritarian you may subconsciously perceive God to be a difficult-to-please authoritarian too.

One way to overcome this is to think of God as being everything you ever wished for in a father. God can become for you everything you ever wished your earthly father was. Effective prayer begins with a right relationship with God. We need to experience God as having a perfect father's heart, a perfect father's love, a perfect father's knowledge of what is best for His children.

It is impossible to approach God as our Father unless we are born into his family, through faith in Jesus. When we address our prayers to, "Our Father in heaven," we begin to pray based on an intimate relationship with God. God is not an angry judge looking for a reason to punish us. He is not far away and too busy to hear us. He is our loving Father and can be approached on an intimate, personal basis.

2. Appropriate Respect – "Hallowed be your Name"

"Hallowed" means "to treat as holy". Saying this phrase is an act of worship. It is an acknowledgement of God's status as holy and worthy of our reverence and awe. In following Jesus' model we have approached God on the basis of the right kind of relationship then we show the right kind of respect for who He is; His holiness, His wisdom and power etc. When we worship God before bringing our requests it helps us to see our needs in the right perspective. I believe that prayer is more about aligning our desires with God's plan and purpose, than it is about asking for His help with our needs.

3. A New Priority – "Your Kingdom Come"

When we pray "your Kingdom come" we are asking for something that we don't fully have yet. We have the kingdom now in a sense in that we are citizens of the kingdom (Philippians 3:20 and Ephesians 2:19) and Christ rules in our lives but we currently live as resident foreigners within Satan's kingdom (see 1 Peter 2:11).

The traditional view of this kingdom we pray for is that it is the ever expanding rule and reign of Christ on earth through His followers. The idea is that Jesus rules from heaven through our influence in the world. It is certainly true that we are the hands and feet of Jesus doing the work He has called us to do but what we have now is a mere shadow of what is to come.

Most who teach the traditional view say that there will not be a literal 1000 year reign of Christ on earth so the view is referred to as an 'amillennial' view meaning 'no millennium'. Teachers of this view say that most of the 2100 verses about the kingdom and events associated with it have either been fulfilled already or are mere allegory. The allegorical interpretation began with Origen of Alexandria in the 3rd century. Origen taught that the verses don't mean what they appear to mean but rather they have some other symbolic meaning.

In the 1800s another view began being taught that is based on a plain reading of the text. This view holds that when the Bible says Jesus will rule for 1000 years it means 1000 years on earth, not just a long time in the hearts of men from heaven. When Gabriel told Mary that her son would rule from His ancestor David's throne this is taken to be a physical earthly throne in Jerusalem not just a figurative rule in our hearts.

The church adopted Origen's allegorical interpretation method when Christianity became the state religion of Rome. It was no longer politically correct to teach that

Jesus was going to return to overthrow the earth's evil rulers when those evil rulers were paying your salary.

I have been researching what the church believed about the second coming of Jesus in the first few centuries before becoming the state religion of Rome. The people who knew the apostles personally and those who came shortly after them are best qualified to tell us what the apostles taught about the kingdom to come.

The Epistle of Barnabas, written around 100 A.D., anticipated the coming of the Antichrist and the return of Christ. Epistle of Barnabas Chapter 4

Papias (a friend of John) writes that there will be a millennium after the resurrection of the dead when the personal reign of Christ will be established on the earth. Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History, Book 3, Chapter 39

Justin Martyr who lived from 110 to 165 A.D. writes: "But I and others, ...are assured that there will be a resurrection of the dead, and a thousand years in Jerusalem, which will then be built, adorned and enlarged, as the prophets Ezekiel and Isaiah and others declare". Dialogue with Trypho, Chapter 80

Ireneus wrote in the second century A.D that those who heard Jesus teach testified that Jesus taught a future literal millennial reign on the earth, a time when the earth will yield a richness unimagined. He said that the coming of Christ will be preceded by the Antichrist reigning 3 and 1/2 years in Jerusalem, setting Himself up as God Himself.

These are just a few examples. Others include Clement of Rome who wrote about 90AD and Polycarp who was a student of the apostle John. I think we can safely set aside the allegorical interpretation that was politically correct in the 4th and 5th centuries and embrace the plain reading of the Bible to mean what it says it means: That there will be a bodily return of Christ to earth to rule a kingdom for 1000 years. This is what I believe Jesus is asking us to pray for when we say 'thy kingdom come'.

4. A New Submission – “Your Will be Done On Earth As It Is In Heaven.”

For the last 2000 years millions of people have recited the words “your will be done” without finding out what God's will is for their life or allowing His will to direct their life. Prayer is not about pleading with God to change His will to fit with our will. Prayer is about us aligning our will with His will and being part of His glorious plan. This is an act of submission on our part as we accept His perfect knowledge of what is best in every situation.

Don't copy the behaviour and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect. - Romans 12:2

Much of the frustration and disappointments many Christians experience comes from trying to get God to conform to our will instead of seeking His will.

The first three parts of the Lord's Prayer get us focused on our right relationship with God, who He is and what His plan and purpose is. When we have this right perspective then our needs take on their proper perspective.

5. A New Dependence- "Give us this day our daily bread."

We have an abundance of food in this country. Our relative prosperity largely hides how truly dependant we are on God's provision. We tend to assume tomorrow will be much like today but circumstances can change quickly. Many of us have, or will at some time, face dramatic changes such as redundancy, sickness, death of loved ones, broken relationships and so on. One of the amazing things about God is how much He cares about our simple day-to-day needs and He loves us to trust Him every day with these things.

The phrase, "this day" reminds us that we need to seek God every day. We often get stressed and anxious worrying about the problems of tomorrow today. Jesus said:

"Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For after all these things the heathen seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble." Matthew 6:31-34.

Worry is very destructive to our health and is really a lack of trust in the goodness and character of God. We are told to work diligently, to plan ahead, plant seed etc but not to worry about the future.

6. God's Forgiveness - "Forgive Us Our Sins"

This request is not only a prayer for forgiveness, "forgive us our sins," but also a request for a forgiving spirit, "for we also forgive everyone who is indebted to us." Some people think that because their sins were forgiven when they became Christians that they no longer need to ask for forgiveness. 1 John 1:8-9 tells us:

"If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." - 1 John 1:8-9

The sins we commit after becoming Christians hinder our relationship with our holy God. Although we receive forgiveness when we became Christians we will never be able to fully enjoy purity in our Christian life unless we are ready to extend forgiveness freely to those who offend us. It is always a battle to maintain a forgiving spirit toward others but if we remember how undeserving we were of God's abundant forgiveness then we can surely extend a little forgiveness to others. When we do not forgive we create a barrier to God hearing our prayers.

7. God's Protection - "And do not Lead Us Into Temptation"

By teaching us to pray for God to "not lead us into temptation", Jesus is not suggesting that God is the one who tempts us. James states that God "does not tempt anyone" (James 1:13). What we are asking for is help in our weakness so we can overcome temptation.

If we are to win in the battle against temptation we must realize the reality of Spiritual warfare. We cannot be victorious over that which we do not understand. Being ignorant of the great spiritual battle being fought in our world does not make that battle go away.

“For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.” - Ephesians 6:12

We also need to acknowledge our inability to handle temptation on our own. We need to remember, everyone is vulnerable to temptation, and usually in an area we think we are strong. Although the strength of certain temptations may diminish somewhat with age, we are never totally free from temptation as long as we live in these mortal bodies.

When we pray for God’s protection from temptation we are agreeing with the High priestly prayer of Jesus when He prayed,

“I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one.” John 17:15

The second part of the prayer for God’s protection is found in the request, “Deliver us from the evil one”, referring of course to Satan.

When you use the phrase “deliver us from the evil one” we are admitting that this life is a struggle with an enemy that opposes us. Because we do not know what dangers we will face each day, we need God’s protection to cover us. Although Satan may be the ruler of this present evil world, though he may be the prince of the power of the air, though he may have cohorts of evil spirits at his command, he has no claim over the children of God for ‘He that is within us is greater than he that is in the world’. We learn from the story of Job that Satan does not have any power to tempt us except what the Father allows. God promises us that we will not be tempted beyond what we can bear if we are relying on the Holy Spirit and not just our own strength.

“No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.”

- 1 Corinthians 10:13

Conclusion

To really learn about prayer you must pray. It is not an academic exercise; you learn this best by doing it. Jesus gave us the outline for prayer, so use it that way. You don’t have to stick to it rigidly but learn from the principles He has taught us.

Begin by praying, “Our father in heaven,” or something similar that helps to focus on what it means to talk to the creator of the Universe as Father. Then pray about his priorities - “Your kingdom come,” his purposes - “your will be done on earth as it is in heaven,” and consciously align your priorities with His priorities. Seek His will and guidance for your life. Take time to listen to what God wants to say.

When you have His perspective then ask for your needs and the needs of others - “give us today our daily bread” – ask for his forgiveness – “forgive us our sins” and flesh it out with specific details of things you are asking forgiveness for. Ask for His help with being able to forgive others - “as we forgive everyone who is indebted to us”, and pray for his protection – “and do not lead us into trials but deliver us from the evil one.” The kingdom, the power and glory do indeed belong to God forever and ever.

Let's celebrate the blessing we have in the Lord's Prayer by standing and singing
"The Millennium Prayer" By Cliff Richard. The tune is 'Auld Lang Syne'.

Our Father who art in heaven,
Hallowed be thy name.
Thy Kingdom come. Thy will be done
On earth as in heaven.
Give us Today our daily bread.
And forgive our sins,
As we forgive each one of those
Who sins against us,
And lead us not to the time of trial,
But deliver us from evil.
For Thine is the kingdom,
The power and the glory.

Our Father who art in heaven,
Hallowed be thy name.
Thy Kingdom come. Thy will be done
On earth as in heaven.
Give us Today our daily bread.
And forgive our sins,
As we forgive each one of those
Who sins against us,

Lead us not to the time of trial,
Keep us from evil
For Thine is the kingdom,
The power and the glory.

Let all the people say Amen,
In every tribe and tongue.
Let every heart's desire be joined,
To see the kingdom come.
Let every hope and dream,
Be born in love again.
Let all the world sing with one voice,
Let the people say Amen.

Let all the people say Amen,
In every tribe and tongue.
Let every heart's desire be joined,
To see the kingdom come.

Let every hope and every dream,
Be born in love
Yeah
Let all the world sing with one voice,
Let the people say Amen.

Amen amen amen
Amen amen amen
Amen amen amen
Amen amen amen