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LORD, TEACH US TO PRAY!

Luke 11:1-4

By

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Luke Lesson 53

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Luke 11:1-4

Joanne Shetler, a Wycliffe Bible Translator in the Philippines, noticed that the new believers in the tribe she was working with did not pray as they should. So she prayed, "Lord, do whatever it takes to teach these people to pray." About a month later, she was in a helicopter crash there and almost died. That event prompted the people to pray fervently, "Lord, don't let her die because our book isn't done." From then on, the people prayed. Having heard that story, do you dare to join this unnamed disciple in his request, "Lord, teach us to pray"? It could be dangerous!

Prayer is the acknowledgement that our need is not partial; it is total. So if we ask the Lord to teach us to pray, He may put us in situations where we are so overwhelmed that we recognize that we have no choice but to pray! So, if you dare, you can with fear and trembling say, "Lord, teach us to pray."

It was after watching Jesus pray that this disciple was prompted to request instruction in prayer. If the Lord Jesus prayed often, what does that say about our desperate need for prayer! Jesus modeled for us a life of total dependence on the Father. His prayer life and His instruction on prayer are foundational as we struggle to grow in our prayer life. And I do struggle with prayer! The fact that prayer can be taught means that it can be learned, which gives me hope, although I'm a slow learner. If you also struggle to pray as you ought, then our Lord's instruction here should be of great help and encouragement.

In our last study, we saw that sitting at Jesus' feet and listening to His word is the one thing necessary in life. But sitting at Jesus' feet implies not only listening to His word, but also communing with Him in prayer. Thus Luke 11:1-13 deals with the theme of prayer. Today we will look at Jesus' model prayer, often called "The Lord's Prayer" (11:1-4), although technically it should be called "the disciples' prayer," since Jesus never needed to pray for forgiveness. The Lord gave this same model prayer (in a bit fuller form) in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 6:9-13). Bible scholars

debate whether Matthew and Luke are using the same or different sources, and why each writer put the prayer in different contexts. If this was a model prayer, it is likely that Jesus used it more than once to give instruction on this crucial matter. It would be natural for Him not to use the exact words on different occasions, even though the outline and basic content are the same.

The KJV and New KJV follow many of the later Greek manuscripts of Luke where copyists added the fuller version of the prayer from Matthew to make the two prayers identical. It is easier to explain how copyists would want to make the two prayers identical than it is to explain how some of the phrases could have been accidentally omitted. Thus the shorter version in Luke (as in the NASB and NIV) is probably the original reading here.

The variation in wording between the two accounts shows that Jesus did not intend for us primarily to repeat the prayer verbatim, but to follow the outline and basic content as a pattern for prayer. In Matthew, Jesus precedes the prayer by warning against praying with meaningless repetition (Matt. 6:7). There is nothing wrong with repeating the Lord's Prayer in our corporate or private worship. But we always need to be careful not to fall into empty repetition. The main reason Jesus gave the prayer was for us to use it as a pattern. We can boil Jesus' instruction down to this:

When we pray, we should focus on the Father's purpose and we should focus on the family's needs.

After the initial address, the prayer falls into two sections: First, *the Father's purpose*, that His name be set apart and that His kingdom come; then, *the family's needs*, for provision, for pardon, and for protection from sin. In the second section, the pronouns are all plural. This shows that our prayers must go beyond our personal needs to the needs of others. These two sections coincide with the summary of the law given by Jesus, to love God and to love our neighbor, which is also reflected in the two tables of the Ten Commandments. By praying for God's glory and kingdom, I learn to love Him first and foremost. By praying for others' needs, I learn to love them as I love myself.

1. When we pray, we should focus on the Father's purpose (11:2).

A. The address: "Father!"

In order to pray rightly, we must be able sincerely to address God as our Father. There is a general sense in which God is the Father of all people, since they are His offspring as Creator (Acts 17:26-28). But since the human race fell into sin, we enter life alienated from God. In fact, Jesus told the Jews that they were of their father, the devil (John 8:44). It is only when a person is born spiritually by God's will and power that he becomes a child of God in the true sense (John 1:12-13) and thus can address the Almighty Creator personally as Father. Thus the first requirement if you want to pray rightly is to repent of your sins and put your trust in Jesus Christ as your Savior. Then and only then can you have access through Christ in the Holy Spirit to the Father (Eph. 2:18).

- "Father" implies the *intimacy and love of a personal relationship*.

In the Old Testament, God was known as the Father of His people, Israel (Ps. 89:26; Isa. 63:16; Jer. 31:9). But, as Philip Keller points out (*A Layman Looks at the Lord's Prayer* [Moody Press], pp. 11-12), in all of the Old Testament God is referred to as Father fewer than seven times, except indirectly and rather remotely. Yet in the Gospels, Jesus speaks of God as Father more than 70 times. Jesus used this title in all of His prayers, except for the prayer on the cross as He bore our sin, where He quoted Psalm 22:1, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?"

The term "Father" implies the intimacy and love of a personal relationship with the Sovereign Creator of the universe! It should encourage us to draw near to God and expect to find mercy and compassion. As John Calvin comments (*The Institutes* [3:20:37]), "For [God] is not only a father but by far the best and kindest of all fathers" He always welcomes His children in His presence.

I have a busy schedule with deadlines that I have to meet each week, so I have my secretary, Patti, screen my calls. Sometimes a salesman will call and want to speak to the pastor. He's trying to get me to buy the latest video series on how to build a mega-church. Usually, I don't ever talk to these guys, because Patti says, "He's not available."

But there's one call that almost always makes it through instantly: "Can I talk to my dad?" My kids have access to me because they're *my* children. I love them and I make myself available to them to meet their needs. If you know God as Father through faith in His Son Jesus Christ, you can always have access and know that He will hear your need and respond as a loving, kind Father.

- "Father" implies the *respect* and *authority* of a *submissive relationship*.

The Jews of Jesus' day tended to view God as so awesome and holy that they dared not be too intimate with Him. If someone got a glimpse of God, he thought that he would die. They dared not utter the name of God, because it was too sacred. They kept their proper distance in the temple, because if they touched any of the sacred objects, they would drop dead. They needed to learn that they could approach God as a kind and loving Father.

In our day, it seems that the reverse is true. Most American Christians think of God as their Good Buddy in the Sky. We don't worry about His consuming holiness and His blinding splendor. We don't fear His chastening hand. We're more like the children who call their permissive fathers by their first names. We're too casual about the Holy One.

But the term "Father" should not only encourage us to draw near to a kind and loving God. It should also cause us to respect His authority and to submit to Him in fear. As the author of Hebrews puts it, "we had earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them; shall we not much rather be subject to the Father of spirits, and live?" (Heb. 12:9). Thus while we can draw near to the Father as His beloved children, we must always do so with reverence, respect, and submission to His sovereign authority.

B. The focus: The Father's purpose.

Our first focus in prayer should not be our needs, but rather the Father's glory and purpose. In fact, the glory of God is the main purpose and end of prayer. Prayer isn't to get our will done in heaven, but to get God's will done on earth. Thus our prayers should begin by focusing on two aspects of God's glory: that His name be hallowed and that His kingdom come.

- The Father's purpose is that His name be hallowed.

The word "hallowed" means to be set apart as sacred or holy. God's name refers not only to how men address God, but to the whole person of God. It refers to all of His attributes and actions as revealed in Scripture. Thus our prayers should be that the living and true God would be treated as holy and exalted by people everywhere. We should want God to have the honor and glory He alone deserves as the Sovereign of the universe. It is a prayer that all sin and irreverence be judged so that all men bow in worship before God's holy throne.

This focus on God's glory was the constant focus of the Lord Jesus Christ. In His high priestly prayer, Jesus declared, "Father, the hour has come; glorify Your Son, that the Son may glorify You, ... I have glorified You on the earth, ... I manifested Your name to the men whom You gave Me" (John 17:1, 4, 6). All of Jesus' life fulfilled this prayer to hallow the Father's name.

This prayer has hardly been fulfilled in the church, let alone in the world! I often hear Christians take God's name in vain! In the world, God is not set apart as holy and revered. People often use God's holy name as a swear word, putting God on the same level as human excrement! As Paul cites the psalmist, "There is no fear of God before their eyes" (Rom. 3:18; Ps. 36:1).

Setting God's name apart as sacred or hallowed begins in our hearts. We must submit every thought to Him as the Holy Lord. Everything we say and do must take the Holy God into account. So as we draw near to God in prayer, we must first make sure that *we* reverence Him as holy. Then, we must pray for His church to set apart God as holy in their hearts. And, we must pray that His name would be hallowed in all the earth, as people from every tongue and tribe and nation come to bow before Him.

- The Father's purpose is that His kingdom come.

The second petition is a logical extension of the first. It points to that future day when Jesus Christ will return in power and glory to set up His kingdom on this earth and rule the nations with a rod of iron. Every child of God longs for that day when God will put down every enemy, when righteousness shall reign on this earth.

But it can also be applied to God's ruling in my own and in every other human heart in the interim before that coming day of His outward reign. This request acknowledges God's right to reign over my sinful heart. Before I can rightly pray, "Hallowed be Your name, Your kingdom come," I must be in submission to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. I cannot pray about even the most basic matters until first I have yielded my own stubborn self-will to the rightful reign of the Father in my heart. So when I come to God in prayer, the first order of business is to submit my heart to Him in humble adoration and obedience.

Then I should pray that God's kingdom would come in the hearts of *my family*. Each of them should set the Lord apart as holy and should daily submit their hearts to Him. Beyond my family, I should pray for others in *the family of God*, the church, that they would live out His kingdom and glory in a practical way. This especially includes *church leaders*, since if they fall into sin or rebellion, it has a greater impact than for others. Beyond that, I should pray for God to be glorified by His kingdom coming in our *city*, our *state*, and our *nation*, including the leaders in those spheres. Finally, I should pray for His kingdom to come around *the world*, through the spread of the gospel and through the holiness of His people, the church, in every land.

This kind of kingdom praying will affect our whole outlook on life. It should be clear that we are engaged in spiritual warfare. We should pray that the devil be overthrown and the rightful Lord of the universe be enthroned as King. John Piper points out that in wartime such as our nation experienced in World War II, people think and act differently than in peacetime. The papers carry stories about how the troops are doing. Families get together and talk about their sons and daughters on the front lines. They pray often for them and their safety. There's an austerity and simplicity of life, since the whole nation is focused on the war effort.

Then Piper applies this to prayer. He says, "So what is prayer for? *For war and wartime, not for civilian life*. The primary reason prayer malfunctions in the hands of believers is their insistence on trying to take a wartime walkie-talkie and turn it into a domestic intercom. A tool made for tanks and trenches won't work when

you install it in your yacht or the lake cabin or the second, third, or fourth car" (*Mission Frontiers* [June/July, 1989], p. 16).

So when we pray, our first focus should be on the Father's purpose, for His name to be hallowed and for His kingdom to come. Only after this are we permitted to focus on our needs.

2. When we pray, we should focus on the family's needs (11:3-4).

There is a link between the two sections of this prayer. Our prayers for our needs for provision, for pardon, and for protection from sin ought to be so that we can work toward the accomplishment of the Father's purpose, that He be glorified in all the earth. The goal of these personal requests is not our own happiness but, rather, to supply what we need to fulfill the Father's purposes.

A. We should pray for the family's need for provision.

Daily bread is a figure of speech that refers to our basic physical needs. It recalls the manna that God provided each day for Israel in the wilderness. He gave them enough to supply their need for that day, but not enough to stockpile for the next day, except on the day before the Sabbath. This reminds us that we are to live simply in dependence on God, not trusting in our own resources.

Most of us have been blessed with far more than today's necessities. We have plenty for weeks or months to come. But we dare not forget that it all could be taken away in an instant, even as the people in Central America have recently experienced with the hurricane and the earthquake. When we give thanks for our food, it should be with the recognition that we are dependent on God not only for this meal, but even for our next breath. And we should remember that the reason we ask God for provision is not so that we can be happy, but so that we can seek first His kingdom.

B. We should pray for the family's need for pardon.

Just as bread is our basic need for our bodies, so pardon is our basic need for the soul, because we all have sinned. As believers in Christ, we have the assurance that His blood has once for all cleansed us from every sin (Heb. 10:10, 14). And yet we need daily to apply that blood to our hearts so that we can come before God

with a clear conscience. It's not a matter of my eternal standing before God; it's a matter of my present relationship with Him.

I'm my dad's son because I was born into his family. I'll always be his son, even if I wrong him. But he and I can only enjoy a close relationship if, when I wrong him, I confess it and ask him to forgive me. In the same way, we will drift in our relationship with the heavenly Father if we are not sensitive to our sin by coming to Him for forgiveness as we need it.

Jesus ties in our forgiveness before God with our forgiving those who have wronged us ("indebted" refers to someone who has sinned against us). God's forgiveness is granted only on the basis of His grace, not our works. The idea here is that if we, who are sinful, can forgive others, then surely God, who is perfect, will forgive us if we come to Him. But there is also the notion that the true mark of one who has been forgiven by God is that he will forgive others. I cannot honestly pray, "Father, forgive my sins," if I refuse to forgive someone who has sinned against me.

This means that your relationship with God is inextricably linked with your relationships with your fellow man, especially with those in your family and in the church. You can't just walk away from a strained relationship as if it doesn't matter. If you're bitter, you can't pray rightly until you choose to forgive. And, the rest of us must pray for those in the church who are hurt and bitter, that they would forgive those who have wronged them.

C. We should pray for the family's need for protection from sin.

The final petition is, "Lead us not into temptation." This is difficult to interpret because James 1:13-14 tells us that God does not tempt anyone to sin, but that we are tempted by our own lusts. And James 1:2 instructs us to count it all joy when we encounter various trials ("trials" and "temptations" translate same word in Greek). Why would Jesus tell us to pray that God would not do what He cannot do? And, if the sense is "trials," why should we pray that God would spare us from that which is for our good?

Jesus seems to be using the word in the sense of avoidance of temptation to sin. "Lead us not into temptation" is probably a figure of speech that expresses something by negating the contrary

(D. A. Carson, *The Sermon on the Mount* [Baker], p. 70). For example, “not a few” means “many.” Jesus means that we should cultivate the attitude of fleeing from every situation where we might fall into sin. The idea is that, far from leading us into temptation (which He cannot do), God would lead us into His ways of righteousness where we will be kept from sin.

So the prayer, “Lead us not into temptation,” is an acknowledgement of the weakness and sinfulness of our hearts. It is an admission that if God were to withdraw His gracious hand, we would fall into sin immediately. It is an attitude that flees temptation rather than sees how close to the brink we can come. It has been paraphrased as, “Lord, if the occasion of sinning presents itself, grant that the desire may not be found in me; if the desire is there, grant that the occasion may not present itself” (cited by Gotet, *Luke* [I. K. Funk & Co., 1881], p. 317, footnote).

Conclusion

During the Iranian hostage crisis in 1979, Greg Livingstone was asked to give a “missions minute” at a large evangelical church. Since he had only one minute to speak, he decided to ask them only two questions. The first one was, “How many of you are praying for the 52 American hostages being held in Iran?” Four thousand hands went up. “Praise the Lord,” he said. “Now, put your hands down and let me ask another question: How many of you are praying for the 42 million Iranians being held hostage to Islam?” Four hands went up. Livingstone said, “What are you guys—Americans first and Christians second? I thought this was a Bible-believing church!” (*Missions Frontiers* [May/June, 1994]).

If we learn to pray as Jesus instructs us, we will focus on the Father’s purpose, that His name be hallowed and that His kingdom come in all the earth. And, we will focus on His family’s needs for provision, for pardon, and for protection from sin, not so that the family will be cozy and happy, but so that the family will have what they need to carry out the Father’s purpose. “Lord, so teach us to pray!”

Discussion Questions

1. Are we guilty of using a wartime walkie-talkie for a domestic intercom? What are the implications of this?
2. How would implementing Jesus' pattern of prayer change your prayer life?
3. How does Jesus' pattern prayer undercut much of our praying? Is it ever legitimate to pray for selfish purposes?
4. Why are human relationships and our relationship with God inextricably linked? How can a wounded person truly forgive?

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