

The Lord's Prayer Part 2

Teach Us To Pray

In this culture driven world that we live in today, it seems that within the arrogant minds of many of the people, perhaps most of them, they have elevated themselves and the significance of their "self" to a level of importance where there is literally no one above them. Even the elected officials who serve within high positions in our government are considered by many to be subservient to them, with their only purpose for being is for that of anticipating and meeting our every personal need.

And sadly, for the many people who don't really know God, it seems that they also think much the same about God, that God is there in the heavens much for the same purpose as are our government officials, to "stand at the ready" and to meet our needs when and if we call on Him.

Perhaps those words might seem to be a bit overstated for your thinking, but are they really overstated?

While yes, for those of us who have truly put our trust in the Lord Jesus to be the Savior and Lord of our life, God truly has promised to "stand at the ready" to meet our needs. Jesus said those words in John chapter 16, verse 23, when He said,

²³ . . . Truly, truly, I say to you, whatever you ask of the Father in my name, he will give it to you. (John 16:23)

And yes, God is also gracious beyond measure to all people. He blesses everyone on the earth in ways that they never even stop to think about. Through the "common graces" showered upon all mankind, God the Father blesses all people, regardless of whether or not they even believe that He exists.

But here within this special prayer that Jesus taught His disciples to pray, something else is being spoken about. Here, we are able to see that beyond the "common graces" that God the Father showers upon all the people of the earth, there is another form of "grace" that can come from Him. But this "grace" is not usually available to everyone, but only to those that God calls "His sons", "His children". That is why this prayer starts with the words, "Our Father".

The disciples first heard those words when they listened to the Lord Jesus praying. They heard Jesus calling God, "Father". and those were strange words to their ears and to their understanding.

Let's listen again to the words of our scripture passage given here in Luke chapter 11,

¹And it came to pass, that, as he was praying in a certain place, when he had ceased praying, one of his disciples said unto him, Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples.

²And he said unto them, When ye pray, say, Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, as in heaven, so in earth. ³Give us day by day our daily bread. ⁴And forgive us our sins; for we also forgive every one that is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil. (Luke 11:1-4)

May I take a moment here and mention that over the weeks ahead, I intend to say some of my words over and over again several times. And that will be intentional, because it's important to have some of these thoughts and these concepts about prayer to sink deeply into our understanding.

And the first understanding that I would like for us to have is that our times of prayer must never be simply the occasion of our going through our "checklist". Yes, as the words of this prayer that Jesus taught His disciples to pray, there really are certain important matters that need to be prayed about.

But folks, more than anything else, our prayers must be a simple conversation between us and God our loving father. And all of the thoughts and the words that take place should simply be that.

And I am confident that if you and I could have been present in those days and could have heard Jesus praying, we would probably have been surprised at the utter simplicity of His conversation with God the Father.

And yes, this answer and these instructions that Jesus gave to His disciples have some specific matters that are very important and very needful of being at the forefront of our prayer time with God, but I do believe that the structure of the words in this prayer are intended to be used as a guide rather than a prescribed order of recitation. That these words are simply the foundational understandings

that we need to keep at the forefront of our minds as we engage ourselves in an intimate conversation with our loving Father.

And may I say again that all throughout these gospels, we are encouraged to not only have knowledge about who God is, but to also truly get to “know” Him personally and intimately, as a “son” knows His “Father”, in a very relational way.

By that I mean, as we would make some of these petitions mentioned here, it is not as if we are to be as obedient servants making petitions to a reluctant master. It is, in every sense, that of a loving son asking his beloved Father for things that the Father is already desirous of giving to His son.

Folks yes, as we have said, this One to whom we are to pray really is God, the One, the Only Almighty God, creator of the heavens and the earth! And He is Holy and He is righteous, fully deserving to be as unapproachable as He was in the days of Moses, when the children of Israel could not even come near to touch the mountain of God. But here, within the covenant relationship that we now have with the Lord Jesus, He is telling us that God the Father now desires for us to come near to Him just as He, the Lord Jesus does, as a childlike son would come boldly to his adoring Father.

In Hebrews 4:16 we are told,

¹⁶ Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need. (Hebrews 4:16)

This is such an important part of what I would like to call “our side” of this equation of prayer. Yes, God Himself is the object and recipient of our prayers, but here, Jesus is encouraging us to be respectful yes, but also “bold” as we engage with God our Father during prayer.

That we are to give ourselves over to real prayer, humbly allowing our spirits to get lifted up and out from a religion that too often is bogged down by lifeless routines of beliefs and principles. And we are to allow our spirits to be transported up into an altogether different realm, a realm of a personal loving relationship, a relationship in which a true son or daughter can speak intimately and confidently to their loving Father. A relationship in which you and I can open up our hearts and minds and share the most intimate of concerns and hurts and needs.

The prayer that Jesus wants us to pray removes the “distance” that so often separates us from God, and it brings God as close to us as a whisper, and as intimate as an embrace.

But how do we really know all of this to be true? How do we know that God really loves us, and wants to come near to us and wants only the best for us?

We know it to be true because He has proven His love over and over again. But above all else, He has proven His love in that He, God, came in human form as the Lord Jesus, to live among us, to be one of us, to suffer our sufferings, and then to sacrifice Himself for us.

And as if that were not enough proof of His love for us, He went another step forward and gave us His blessed Holy Spirit to live within us, to comfort us and to guide us through all the troublesome days that we live through on this earth.

And in this matter of prayer, God's Holy Spirit is the one who actually shows us how we are even to begin to know how to pray. Listen to those words in Romans chapter 8, verse 26,

²⁶In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. ²⁷And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will. (Romans 8:26-27)

What a treasure you and I have in God! And how much more convenient and uncomplicated could God possibly make it for us? All that remains for you and for me to do is to come to Him with a humble, broken and contrite heart, a heart that admits that we can't handle the matters of this life on our own, that we need His help, and then to pray.

And as we do pray, we have the assurance that He surely will hear and answer our prayers. That promise is given in 1 John 5,

¹⁴Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. ¹⁵And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him. (1 John 5:14-15)

Note those words carefully that I just read folks, that whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him, not that we “will have”, but that we already do have them, that before we even ask, He will have already given us the thing that we have prayed for. The simple truth is that God knows our needs before we ask, but He does want us to pray and to ask anyway.

For us to have all that God promises to us, all that we have to do is get alone, in a quiet place, then humbly allow Him to lift us up out of our old ideas about religion, up into a simple, loving relationship with Him. It's then that all of life begins to take on a whole new meaning. That is prayer, and that is what prayer is to be all about.

And as we read these particular words here in our scripture text, we are also reminded of how especially generous God is to us to help us in our mysterious journey of prayer.

He knows that it is not usually our initial response to reach first to Him for our help. We most often reach first to our self, or to others, but usually finding very little help from either.

But mysteriously, that too is part of the loving provision that God makes to us. As we have said on other occasions, God will use the frustrations that we encounter each day as a means to lovingly draw us nearer to Him and to His solutions for our struggles.

As we consider this passage of scripture, I believe that we can assume that these disciples of Jesus were probably very much like us in their daily habits, a different time and circumstance, yes, but still very much like us.

So, we can assume that they also struggled with their own set of frustrations, and especially with the frustration of trying to reconcile themselves to their religion as they understood it to be.

And as we said in an earlier message, in this matter of prayer, they were especially seeing and hearing a very different approach to God than they had ever witnessed before, especially involving the “intimacy in prayer”, both as they witnessed Jesus' prayers, and also as they witnessed the prayers of John the Baptist and his disciples.

How do we know that? We know that from the “veiled” question that the disciples asked Jesus when they said, “Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples.”

Hidden within these words is a “whole world of difference” in prayer from the manner that these disciples were accustomed to praying.

The usual manner of prayer for the Jews was often to have a priest standing between them and God the priest being their intercessor and mediator. And always, at the same time maintaining a distant “separation” between them and God.

But these disciples knew that John had made some changes to those old rules of prayer, and they could also hear those same changes being voiced in Jesus’ prayers.

John had been teaching his disciples to pray directly to God, repenting of their sins directly to God and no longer needing a synagogue priest and the sacrifice of animals to intercede for them.

And John was also teaching his disciples to make private petitions and supplications to God.

To Jesus’ disciples, these were strange and wonderful changes. “Intimacy in prayer” with God was so much better than anything they had known before and they really wanted it for themselves.

Picture for a moment, all that was taking place here in these words. First of all, that these disciples were standing near to Jesus as He prayed was by no means, an accident. This was the loving providence of God taking place. It was God’s way of drawing these men into the next step of their relationship with Him.

Remember the words of Jesus when He said, “No one comes to me except my Father draw them.” These disciples were there with Jesus, watching Him and listening to Him pray, simply and only because God the Father had drawn them to that place at that moment.

In His great wisdom, God knows that men most often learn best from the things that they observe. Yes, words will explain, but actions reveal the heart and the passion behind spoken words.

And so, here as He prayed, Jesus intentionally allowed His disciples to observe and to hear Him in prayer. And yes, we read that He would also often seclude Himself away from the crowds, but not so far that His disciples could not see and hear Him.

Jesus wanted them to see and to hear, and they did. And the things they saw and heard caused them to want to do the same things that He did. And so here, after waiting patiently for Jesus to finish praying, we find them asking Him, "Lord, won't you teach us to pray also".

One other thought on this matter of Jesus' disciples asking Him to teach them to pray as John taught his disciples to pray. Jesus' disciples had still not yet fully grasped exactly who Jesus was. Yes, they knew that He was special and very different from anyone they had ever known before, that He had miraculous powers and abilities from God. But they still did not yet fully comprehend that Jesus was actually God in the flesh, the very one that they wanted to pray to.

And folks, this is also a special instruction for you and me. Yes, we might like to pray in the same way that we have heard other people pray, but notice here that Jesus, very quickly moved the attention away from John the Baptist on directly to God the Father.

God wants your and my prayer to be simply between us and Him. Yes, Jesus is our intercessor, the one through whom our prayers must flow. But Jesus also wants our relationship to be one-on-one with God the Father, personal and intimate.

We know that because, when we read all that took place as Jesus later died there on the cross, we see that by His death, the "veil" that once separated us from the presence of God the Father, was rent, torn in half, to allow us direct and personal entrance into the presence of God the Father.

All of the barriers that once stood between God and us have been removed. In Christ, we each have full access to come boldly before His throne of grace to receive mercy in our time of need.

And at the risk of sounding arrogant, let me say that we now do have a right to enter boldly into His presence, into His majestic courts. Why? Because in our salvation, we have become true "sons of God", and have received the inheritance that only a true son or daughter can enjoy.

. . . Let me close with one other instruction that God intends for us to take from this passage, one that I mentioned to us last week.

This request that the disciples made, "Lord teach us to pray", arose out from both John the Baptist and the Lord Jesus making sure that the disciples saw and heard them in their times of prayer.

And God intends the same for you and me. While again, yes, there are many times when we need to seclude ourselves away and pray privately to the Lord. But it is also very important for you and me to intentionally allow our loved ones to see and to hear our prayers.

Men, our wives and our children will be guided by the relationship that they see us have with our Lord. If our relationship with Him is open and trusting, then theirs will be also. But if our relationship with Him is hidden and obscure, then most likely, theirs will be the same.

We are the spiritual leaders in our families. And in one way or the other, rightly or wrongly, we will lead them. So then, I beseech each one of us to intentionally allow our family members to see and to hear our prayers, and also, to involve them personally in our prayers. If we are faithful to do that, then God will take our witness and make it fruitful in their lives beyond any measure we could ever hope for.

Listen again to the words of 1 John 5 as we close.

¹⁴Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. ¹⁵And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him. (John 5:14-15)

Let's Pray.