

Teach Us to Pray

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[0 : 00] In his foreword to Paul Miller's book, *A Praying Life*, Theologian and Biblical Counselor, David Powlison wrote the following. It's hard to pray. It's hard enough for many of us to make an honest request to a friend we trust for something we truly need.

But when the request gets labeled praying and the friend is termed God, then things get very tangled up. You've heard the contorted syntax, formulaic phrases, meaningless repetition, vague non-requests, pious tones of voice, and air of confusion.

If you talk to your friends and family that way, they'd think you lost your mind. But you've probably talked that way to God.

You've known people who treat prayer like a rabbit's foot for warding off bad luck and bringing goodies. You've known people who feel guilty because the quantity of prayer fails to meet some presumed standard.

Maybe you're one of those people. Dr. David Powlison has gone on to be with the Lord since writing these words.

[1 : 25] But these words still ring true. And they remind us of the gracious man that he was. He was a gracious man because he graciously said, maybe you are one of those persons talking about all the difficulties we face in prayer when he could have accurately said, no doubt, you are one of those persons.

And that's because for I dare say all of us, our prayer lives, are in different ways and to different degrees marked by weakness.

And so I believe that most of us, if not all of us, could identify with Dr. Powlison's words. We wrestle with a guilty feeling about our prayer life.

I've heard it said that if you ever want to humble a proud Christian, ask them about their prayer life. Well, the purpose of this morning's message is not to heap more guilt on us, but instead it is to help us to instead, in faith, learn from the Lord Jesus in how we can pray.

Jesus teaches us how to pray. And I pray that this would be a further building upon the work that the Lord did as we met in prayer and fasting this week.

[3 : 08] So if you have not yet done so, would you turn in your Bible to Luke chapter 13, Luke chapter 11, sorry, and we're going to be reading verses 1 to 13.

Luke chapter 11, beginning in verse 1 and ending in verse 13. Please follow along as I read. Now Jesus was in a certain place.

Now Jesus was praying in a certain place. And when he finished, one of his disciples said to him, Lord, teach us to pray.

As John taught his disciples. And he said to them, when you pray, say, Father, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come.

Give us each day our daily bread. And forgive us our sins. For we ourselves forgive everyone who is indebted to us.

[4 : 12] And lead us not into temptation. And he said to them, which of you who has a friend will go to him at midnight and say to him, friend, lend me three loaves, for a friend of mine has arrived on a journey and I have nothing to set before him.

And he will answer from within, do not bother me. The door is now shut and my children are with me in bed. I cannot get up and give you anything.

I tell you, though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, yet, because of his impudence, he will rise and give him whatever he needs.

And I tell you, ask and it will be given to you. Seek and you will find. Knock and it will be opened to you.

For everyone who asks, receives and the one who seeks, finds and the one who knocks, it will be opened and to the one who knocks, it will be opened.

[5 : 27] What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will instead of a fish give him a serpent or, if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion.

If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him?

Please pray with me. Father, we bow our hearts this morning and Lord, even as we consider this passage, we are reminded that we are called to pray and yet, Lord, we readily admit that we many times fall short.

Lord, you know where each of us is on this particular issue of our lives and I pray that you would meet us. I pray that you would fill our hearts with faith.

I pray that you would make your word clear this morning. Lord, where we need to be convicted, would you convict us? But oh Lord, I pray that the result of our time in your word this morning will be that we will all grow as your disciples in praying to you.

[6 : 58] Lord, and so Father, would you work this morning as only you can, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen. From this passage that we have come to this morning, Luke tells us that Jesus was praying in a certain place and when he was finished, one of his disciples asked him, Lord, teach us to pray.

And what we see is that this unnamed disciple expresses a desire that really is a representative desire.

It's a representative desire of all those who would be disciples of Jesus Christ. It is the desire to pray, the desire to learn to pray.

And certainly it includes how to do it, but it is fundamentally learning to pray, to do it. And as we consider this passage this morning, the lesson I want us to learn from it is this.

Jesus teaches us what we are to pray to God generally and how we are to pray to God relationally.

[8 : 27] He teaches us what we are to pray to God generally and he also teaches us how we are to pray to God relationally. And so in our remaining time this morning, I want us to consider those two aspects of prayer, praying to God generally and praying relationally.

So first, praying generally. when we pray, what should we pray? Well, Jesus tells us in verses two to four.

Notice in verse two, before telling us what to pray, Jesus tells us that we are to address our prayer to God as our father. Now we take this for granted, but in the day of Jesus, it was unheard of, of anyone to address God as their father.

And actually, the word that Jesus uses for father in the Aramaic language is the word Abba. It is like our English word daddy.

It is an informal term to refer to a father. And Jesus tells us that when we approach God as our father, we are not to approach him as some distant cosmic unrelated being, but as our beloved father.

[9 : 57] And then he tells us when we pray to God as our father, there are five general things that we need to pray about. Five aspects of prayer.

First, God's name. Hallowed be your name. Verse two. Second, God's kingdom. Your kingdom come. In verse two again. God's provision.

Give us this day our daily bread. Verse three. God's forgiveness. Forgive us our sins. Verse four. And then God's protection. Lead us not into temptation.

Verse four again. I want us to consider each of these in turn. First of all, God's name. We are to pray about God's name.

In verse two. And this first aspect of prayer brings us face to face with God himself and his holiness. And notice that it is not a petition, but it is a declaration.

[11 : 02] We're not asking God to make his name holy. We are declaring that his name is indeed holy. Hallowed be your name. That's a declaration. God's name represents who he is.

It represents his character. It represents his attributes. I'm sure we've all heard people say something like, oh, he has a good name or he has a bad name.

And what they're speaking about is the person's character or the person's reputation. When we pray, hallowed be your name, we are praying about God's perfect goodness and his integrity.

He's perfect in all of his ways, and his name is to be reverence as holy, set apart above every other name. And here we should see a contrast.

Even though we approach God as our daddy, as our father, we also approach him with amazing reverence.

[12:06] God says, hallowed be your name. We don't have this flippant or casual approach to the Lord because he is unlike us.

He is perfectly holy in and of himself, but we're not. We're only holy as God considers us holy in Jesus Christ.

Christ. And as disciples, our desire is not only to declare God's name as hallowed, but also to resolve by the grace of God that we will live lives that are holy as God's holy people.

And we have to be jealous for God's name. We have to be jealous because his name is his reputation. And then second, we have to pray about God's kingdom.

Verse 2, this too is a declaration, not a petition. We declare your kingdom come. The coming of God's kingdom, its justice, its righteous rule, the making of all things new is to be our priority when we pray as disciples.

[13:20] We remind ourselves about this promise that God has given that one day he is going to usher in his righteous rule. and bring his kingdom on earth in fullness at the return of Jesus Christ.

But this part of the prayer also calls for us thinking about measures of God's kingdom coming now, coming in reality now.

it includes praying for the advance of God's kingdom in the earth. It includes praying for the advance of the gospel.

And whenever we experience justice and we experience forgiveness and healing and righteousness, to whatever degree we are experiencing a taste of heaven, we're experiencing a taste of the age to come, we're experiencing a taste of the kingdom of God here and now.

And so we pray, your kingdom come in our lives and in our world around us. I want us to see that at this point in the prayer, we have not asked the Lord for anything.

[14:36] We have not really petitioned him. We have declared his name is hallowed. We have declared your kingdom come, but we have not yet asked for anything.

But when we make this declaration and we pray, your kingdom come, we should be mindful that we are praying for the kingdom of God to come and for the will of God to be done in the very petitions that we are going to be lifting up to him in a short moment.

And I think that's how Jesus is teaching us to approach God in prayer. So we come to the first petition. The first petition is God's provision in verse 3.

Give us this day our daily bread. Now this petition I think is insightful because the first thing it does is it helps us to see that this prayer that Jesus is teaching us, how he's teaching us to pray generally, that we are to be praying in a daily way.

He says day by day you are to be praying give us this day our daily bread. Give us this day our daily bread.

[15:55] So it means that every day we are to be praying about God's name, we are to be praying about God's kingdom, and we are to be praying about these other aspects of the prayer as well.

This prayer for God's provision is a daily reminder of our dependence on God.

Now I know we have to admit that our praying today, give us this day our daily bread, is a little different from the disciples who would have been hearing these words from Jesus for the first time. In the time of Jesus, the disciples and all those generally in that time, they lived day to day. Most of them were day laborers and they were paid at the end of the day and that's the way they survived and they literally could begin a day with the uncertainty of how they were going to eat.

A laborer might go out and the person who normally hires him might not need anybody for that day. And so he doesn't know how he is going to eat on that day.

They didn't have refrigerators where they could store food up. And so when they prayed for daily bread, they literally were praying for daily provision.

[17:24] I'm sure that all of us at some point in our lives have experienced material constraints and difficulties, but I doubt many of us, if any of us, have been at a place of the kind of desperation that we could imagine that many in Jesus' time actually faced.

Most of us, cupboards are full and freezers are full, and so we don't, in a practical sense, know what it is to pray for daily bread.

God, so how should we make sense of this part of the prayer? I think what we should do is recognize that really our daily provision, our sustenance ultimately comes from the Lord. It doesn't come from the things that we have. And I think of this one thing that the pandemic has taught us. It has taught us how fickle and transient the things that we can depend on to meet our needs really are.

How transient jobs are, how they go away, and how in a moment we can experience things that we have never experienced before.

[18 : 54] Hurricane Dorian also taught it to many people who lost everything in just a matter of hours and found themselves on a line for food. And so when we pray, give us this day our daily bread, when we pray for daily provision, we are to be praying with the awareness, Lord, ultimately all that I need and have will come from you.

Not from my job, not from my business, not from my savings, but from you. This is to bring us to a conviction of daily dependence on the Lord.

Notice also that this particular petition, verse 3, give us this day our daily bread. Notice that it helps us to see that this is a community prayer.

This is not just me or you coming to the Lord and praying for our individual needs. But this is us praying together, praying for brothers and sisters. Even though we might pray alone, we don't pray for ourselves alone.

We are mindful. God has put us in a community and we are mindful of the needs of brothers and sisters and we pray not just for my daily bread, but we pray for our daily bread.

[20 : 16] That God will provide and that he would meet our needs. The next petition, also brings out this community aspect of prayer as well, which is forgiveness.

Still in verse 4, we are to pray for God's forgiveness. Forgive us our sins for we ourselves forgive everyone who is indebted to us.

Again, not just for ourselves, we pray for our brothers and sisters in our church family as well.

Again, since it is clear that this is a daily prayer, it's clear that we are in need of forgiveness every single day because we sin every day.

And we ask our Father for forgiveness as we confess to him that we make it a practice to forgive those who are indebted to us in an ongoing way.

And notice that sin is a debt that has to be dealt with. In verse 4, Jesus refers to the sins of others against us as indebtedness to us.

[21 : 31] And so likewise are our sins against God. They are debts. And the only one who can forgive the debt is the one to whom the debt is owed.

Only God can forgive us our debt. of sin. And those who are indebted to us because they have sinned against us, we are the ones who are to forgive them and vice versa.

And we're reminded that we are people who sin and we are people who have others to sin against us even as we sin against.

others. But here's the reality about what this part of the prayer entails.

We cannot pray with confidence and ask God's forgiveness if we have not truly forgiven others. forgiveness. And the truth is in order to forgive others we ourselves have to be forgiven.

[22 : 45] There is no motivation or desire in our hearts to forgive others if we have not known God's forgiveness. forgiveness. I remember a number of years ago I was we were at the Simpson Penn school and we had a visiting minister for one of our churches in the states and he said something that was very simple but very profound and stays with me to this very day.

He said when you forgive someone from the heart it is a miracle. To truly forgive a person from the heart to truly forgive a person not to mouth it but to truly forgive is a miracle.

We cannot forgive unless we have first received God's forgiveness and in truth even after receiving God's forgiveness we need God's grace to forgive to truly forgive forgive as Jesus said to forgive from the heart.

And I think many of us have experienced this. We have experienced the struggle that we so easily face with unforgiveness and we realize that only God and his grace can help us to forgive.

We cannot truly forgive if we have not been truly forgiven and this is why forgiven people should be forgiving people. And so every day we have to deal with this issue of the reality of sin and our need for forgiveness, our sin against God and his forgiveness to us, our sins against others and their forgiveness towards us and our forgiveness towards those who sin against us.

[24 : 44] And doing this day by day helps us to keep short accounts with God and with others. And then last, Jesus teaches us that we are to pray for God's protection in verse 4.

This is one of the petitions of the Lord's Prayer that's very easy to misunderstand. It's Jesus saying that God, our Father, leads us into temptation so we must pray and ask him not to lead us into temptation.

No, it's not saying that. That would be contrary to Scripture. We read in James 1.13 that God never directly tempts any of us to sin.

However, there are times that he allows each of us to be tested and to be tried in the difficulties that come our way from time to time.

And so this petition deals with difficulties and the trials that come out of those difficulties. I like the way the English Standard Version in its study Bible explains this petition when it says, the meaning here most likely carries the sense, allow us to be spared from difficult circumstances that will tempt us to sin.

[26 : 09] And so this part of the prayer is the sober reminder that we live in a fallen world and that we will face trials and difficulties and some of these trials and difficulties will cause us to fall into sin.

And so we pray to God, we pray to God that those trials, that when they come, that he will keep us in the midst of them so that we do not fall into sin.

That's what we're really praying in this petition. Retired pastor and theologian R. Kent Hughes says it this way in his Gospel of Luke commentary on this verse.

He writes, the operative inequality here is a humble awareness of our weakness. The very best person is at his or her best vulnerable and easily stumbled apart from God's gracious provision of strength.

And we are never so vulnerable as when we think we are past a certain temptation. The strongest believers are sure that they cannot stand apart from the grace of God.

[27 : 30] Those who doubt their ability to withstand temptation, those who plead, let us, lead us not into temptation that is beyond our capacity to withstand.

Brothers and sisters, this is sobering. It is sobering that we recognize that we're not beyond any particular temptation, any particular capacity to a particular sin.

And so we stay close to the Lord, we cry out to the Lord, Lord, would you lead me not into circumstances that will cause me to sin?

Would you keep me in the midst of trials that I may not extend my hand or my feet into sin? God, that's what I said.

We are praying. Now, some of you no doubt have noticed that this account of the Lord's prayer, different from the one in the Sermon on the Mount, two different occasions, in Matthew 6, that this one does not end with the words and deliver us from evil.

[28 : 47] Those words are not here specifically, but they're certainly implied. when we pray and lead us not into temptation, we are recognizing the reality of spiritual warfare, we are recognizing the reality that we have an enemy of our soul, the devil, who sets temptations and sets traps for us to fall in.

And every day the tempter of our soul wants us to sin, and he wants to bring spiritual harm to us.

And so we are aware of that reality. And so we should pray for ourselves and pray for brothers and sisters that the Lord will deliver us from evil and from the evil one.

And so in these opening verses and verses 2 to 4, Jesus teaches us to pray generally. He says every day we are to pray about God's name, we are to pray about God's kingdom for it to come, we are to pray for our needs to be met, we are to pray for our sins to be forgiven, we are to pray for spiritual protection to be extended to us.

Again, not just for ourselves, but for others in our church family as well. And now I come to the second and final point of what Jesus teaches us about prayer in these verses, which is praying relationally.

The first part of the prayer, Jesus teaches us about what we should pray. But now in this second part of his teaching, he is teaching us how we should pray.

[30 : 31] That's what we see in verses 5 to 13. And so in a nutshell, what Jesus is doing is he is concluding and he is saying to us, we are to pray to God remembering that he is our father.

We are to pray to him relationally, remembering that he is our good and gracious father. Because remembering this truth will shape how we approach God and shape how we pray to God.

Now this is a very important truth. It's important because there was only one person who knew the father, and that was Jesus Christ himself. The disciples did not know the father.

They didn't know who he was. They didn't know what he was like, and the same is true with us.

Listen to what Jesus says in Matthew 11, 27.

He says, All things have been handed over to me by my father, and no one knows the father, sorry, and no one knows the son except the father, and no one knows the father except the son, and anyone to whom the son chooses to reveal him.

[31 : 49] We don't automatically know God as father. Jesus was the only one who knew God as father, and God ordained it that Jesus would be the one to reveal God as father to those whom he chose to reveal him as father.

father. I think we all know that the Lord's prayer is typically and regularly and generally prayed in all kinds of settings by all kinds of people.

And it's one thing to address God as father, it is another thing to know him as father. We only know him as father as Jesus reveals him to us. And Jesus is revealing to his disciples, God, the one you pray to, he is your father.

He's now telling us this is how we are to relate to God in prayer. He does this by two illustrations.

The first one is in verses 5 to 8. This illustration is about a desperate situation. A man has a friend who comes to visit him on a long journey, from a long journey, and he does so at night.

[33 : 20] And remember, this is still a time when there are no refrigerators, food was scarce, so this hour of the night, this man had eaten everything, him and his children, there was nothing in the house, nothing in his house.

But although food was scarce, hospitality was important. When people came to your door, you took them in, and you took care of them the best you knew.

And so this person has a friend who shows up, he has nothing to give him. And what does he do?

But his options are he can go to his friend's house and borrow the bread that he needs, or he can stay at home and be embarrassed about not having anything to give to his friend that he's hosting.

And Jesus is saying that no friend would turn away another friend in need like that. But the larger point that he makes is not so much the connection of friendship, but the boldness that this man has in going to his friend.

The shamelessness that he has in going to his friend. That's the point that Jesus is making. This man who's in desperate need, he goes and he makes his bold request at midnight.

[34 : 52] And you can only imagine the scene, the noise he had to make to get his friend up who is in deep sleep, in bed. And Jesus is making the point that God is a gracious father.

And so when we have genuine needs, we can approach him as our father. And we can make our petitions known. And that's why he goes on to say what he says in verses 9 and 10.

That we must ask and we must seek and we must knock boldly, knowing that we are praying to a gracious heavenly father. And our gracious heavenly father is not put off by whenever we pray to him.

And so we should ask him without hesitation for our needs to be met. And I know someone might be thinking, well, I'm going to boldly ask God for a Tesla or something else.

I'm going to boldly ask him for a mansion. Well, if you're thinking like that, that's not what Jesus is teaching here. Jesus is teaching us to pray to God relationally as our father.

[36 : 10] And how out of that relationship we can pray boldly to him for the needs that arise in our lives, especially those that we might be tempted not to pray about.

And so this is the attitude that we are to exhibit in prayer. Boldness because of God being our father.

More than a friend. More than a friend. He is a gracious and generous father to those who are his children, and therefore we can ask boldly.

And then in verses 11 to 13, Jesus illustrates yet another aspect of our heavenly father. And he teaches another relational attitude that we are to have when we pray to him.

He begins by asking a two-part question in verses 11 and 12. What father among you, if his son asks for fish, will instead of a fish give him a serpent? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion?

[37 : 14] And the answer is obvious. No father would do that. No father would do that. And then Jesus drives home his point in verse 13.

If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the father, your heavenly father, give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him?

Here Jesus is teaching us to trust God as our father. He's saying to us, God is good. So trust him fully.

He will give you good gifts, not evil gifts. It's amazing that there are people who literally believe that if you don't ask God for a specific thing, God may just give you something else.

And so you have to be specific and spell it out. No, he's a good father. And he knows good in the true sense of good, in the true meaning of good in our lives.

[38 : 25] And see, this is why there's another side to God's goodness that oftentimes we tend not to think about. Sometimes in our immaturity, sometimes in our humanity, or sometimes in our sinfulness, we ask God for a serpent.

because we don't recognize it's a serpent. Sometimes we ask him for a scorpion because we don't recognize it's a scorpion.

And what he does as a good father is he says, no, I'm going to give you a fish. No, I'm going to give you an egg. And sometimes in our sinfulness, in the moment we complain, and then God in his kindness allow some time to elapse and bring us to the place to help us to see we were asking for a serpent.

We were asking for a scorpion. And in his kindness, he was a good father and he gave us a good gift instead.

Even though we in our limited wisdom and our sinful perspective couldn't see it in the moment.

Jesus is saying that God is absolutely good and we can trust him fully, especially since we can trust our earthly fathers who are capable of doing good but who are evil to do good to us.

[40 : 00] And it's interesting that Jesus in this particular illustration points to the highest and the best gift that we can ask of God which is the Holy Spirit.

And he promises that God will eagerly give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him. And what he's doing is he's making a point moving from the greater to the lesser and he's essentially saying if God will give his best gift, the Holy Spirit, to those who ask him, certainly he will give lesser gifts.

To his children. Lesser good gifts to his children when they ask him. But we don't need to ask for one or the other, we can ask for both.

And for those of us who know Christ, when we ask for the Spirit, we're asking for more of the Spirit to be active in and through our lives. But if you're here and you don't know Christ, if you're listening and you don't know Christ, then you don't have the Spirit.

You don't have the Spirit dwelling in you. But you can ask God to save you and he will. And his Spirit will come to dwell in you.

[41 : 18] And so Jesus teaches us what to pray generally, in accordance with the categories of the prayer that we have already looked at in the Lord's Prayer. And he also teaches us how to pray relationally.

That we are to pray with the awareness that we are praying to our Heavenly Father and that God is gracious. Therefore, we can pray to him and we can ask him boldly.

And God is good and therefore we can pray to him and we can trust him fully. We can trust him fully. pray. I'm sure it strikes you as it strikes me that as great a privilege as prayer is, we still fail to pray as we should.

We oftentimes find ourselves not praying as great as we would acknowledge the privilege of prayer really is. And for some of us, this could be a source of great condemnation from the enemy of our souls.

As David Powelson said, we have felt the guilt of not praying. And I think we've all been there one time or another.

[42 : 48] I want to remember today as we close that every day, every day, our salvation is not based on the strength of our prayer life.

Instead, it's based on the sufficiency of Christ's blood for repentant sinners. I want you to imagine an earthly father when it comes to his benevolent, dutiful care for his children, who would bring up particular performance issues to determine whether he will be dutiful and caring to that child.

That's repulsive to us. And friend, it is exponentially more repulsive for us to think that when we go before our father, when we have not been as faithful in prayer as we ought to have been, that that arises before him as a consideration in how he sees us and how he cares for us.

No, it never does. The only ground that matters before our God is the sufficiency of the blood of Christ for repentant sinners.

And as long as the blood of Christ is sufficient, and it is indeed sufficient, we have standing before God. Despite our many failures, despite our many shortcomings, we have a God who receives us. [44 : 44] And when we pray and he hears us in our prayers, he hears us because he heard Jesus. And Jesus has succeeded and Jesus has triumphed and been victorious in every single point where we fail on our own, and that is inclusive of our prayer lives.

prayers. But let us, by the grace of God, resolve to grow in praying. Let us take this pattern that Jesus has given to us, this general pattern, and let us pray.

And then let us take this insight that he has given to us, that we are to pray to God relationally, remembering that we are his children. And nothing changes that.

No failure on our part changes that. He receives us as his children, and he will give good gifts to us, and so we can trust him.

I pray that all of us, day by day, would seek to follow the Lord Jesus Christ, resorting to the place of prayer, and praying to God, who is our gracious and good heavenly father.

[46 : 21] Let's pray together. Father, we thank you for the Lord Jesus Christ, who has revealed you to us.

Lord, we pray that remembering that you are our good and gracious father, would be the reminder and the impetus to always come before you in prayer.

Lord, we acknowledge that there are so many times that our spirits are willing, but our flesh is weak, and so we need you, Lord. God, I pray that all over this room this morning that you, the great shepherd, would give grace to your people.

Lord, you know the ways we need grace to pray. Would you grant it to each of us that we would faithfully come before you in humble prayer.

We ask these things in Christ's name. Amen.