

# Bible Study: How To Pray 1

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 11 January 1990

Preacher: Harry Robinson

[ 0 : 00 ] the basis of what I have to say. So we're going to be working consecutively through the stories in Luke chapter 11. And the topic is prayer.

And it begins with, he was praying in a certain place. And when he ceased, 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 thy name.

Thy kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive everyone who is indebted to us.

And lead us not into temptation. That's the end. That's why you have two versions of the Lord's Prayer in the service of morning prayer in the prayer book.

[ 1 : 16 ] That there are two versions in the New Testament. This is the short, Lucan version of the Lord's Prayer. Now, first, I want to talk to you a little bit about prayer.

Look at the text where it says... Let me... First, I want to pray. That's... Before I even do that, let's just... Father, we have this passage from the Gospel of Luke before our minds and our hearts.

And we ask that you will give us such perception with our minds, that your word might penetrate our hearts, and that from our hearts it might bear fruit in our lives, in enriching the prayer life of each one of us, and in giving us that longing to pray, which the disciples had when this story was written, the longing which derived from them watching the Lord Jesus pray and desiring from that experience to learn to pray themselves.

We ask this in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. Now, the fact is that he was praying.

Now, what I would like to know is, how did they know he was praying? Was he in a posture of prayer?

[ 3 : 02 ] You know, which is the way we tell. If your eyes are closed, your head bowed, your hands together, and your knees bent, you know that somebody is praying, or at least pretending to.

I mean, that's standard. But there's nothing to suggest that that was what was happening here. All I knew was that he was praying. He might have lit a candle.

He might have spun a wheel. He might have gone through beads on a chain. I mean, those are all signs, presumably, that somebody is praying.

Because I think one of the sort of tantalizing problems for all of us is what is it to pray? And we want some kind of physical dimension to prayer in order to reassure ourselves and the people around us that we are praying.

I just wrote a letter to a friend and said, I've been praying for you. And I thought to myself, well, now, what will this friend think I mean by that?

[ 4 : 15 ] Will she think I mean that I've gone into church every morning at 10 o'clock and knelt down in the third pew and prayed for her? Will she think that maybe while I've walked along the sidewalk and been thinking about her, I've prayed for her?

What will she mean? She's just lost her mother, and she's been very much on my heart and in my prayers. But there is something which is at the heart of prayer, which doesn't, which I think does not necessarily have any physical dimension to it, such as a book I read, a prayer, a bead I counted, a candle I lit, a journey I took.

None of those things, they may be outward disciplines that help us to pray, but they are not prayer. And the terrible brevity of Luke's statement that isn't very helpful, is it, when it says he was praying? Because, of course, we all bring to that our own interpretation of what that means. I mean, most of us read with pictures, don't you? I mean, when somebody says he's praying, you have a picture of what that means.

And it would be interesting to know what all your pictures are. What were they looking at when they, or what were they observing? What did they sense when they knew that he was praying?

[ 5 : 53 ] Had he gone off by himself? Was he in a corner by him? What was he doing? That's one thing that you need to know, I think, in looking at this passage. The second thing that you need to know is that this is chapter 11 of Luke, and these have been disciples who have been with him for a long time, and he hasn't yet taught them to pray.

Now, why should that be? I mean, is that an accident in the writing of a gospel, that it doesn't come from chapter 11, that he talks about prayer?

That Luke says that that was then, further on in Jesus' ministry, that he talked to them about prayer. And another thing to observe about it was that he didn't raise the subject, they did.

In other words, he didn't start out that morning by saying, I would like to teach you about prayer, but they came to him and said they would like to learn, from which you might derive the argument, if you want, that you can't teach people to pray until they're ready to learn, which may be true, too.

And we come to times in our lives when we would like very much to know how to pray, because we often have a very strong desire to pray, but almost no equipment, whatever, to do it.

[ 7 : 21 ] And so our prayers feel futile and meaningless, because we don't know the how to, even though the longing may be very real indeed. So all this is focused around the fact that Jesus was praying, and they asked him to teach them.

And they had another experience of prayer, and that was that John the Baptist had taught his disciples that they knew how to pray.

And it would be interesting to see, in the light of the whole gospel story, why John's disciples knew how to pray, but the disciples of Jesus as yet did not know how to pray.

And so Jesus takes it, and he says to them, when you pray, say.

I mean, I like those two words coming together. When you pray, say. In other words, you're praying, but as you're praying, you put it into words.

[ 8 : 31 ] Now, I don't know. I may be pushing this way too hard, but that I would like to think that this means that prayer is not merely words, that prayer is something even more profound than words, but that when you are praying, words give a focus to whatever it is you're praying about.

So you use words, but praying is something else, more and greater, perhaps, than the words you use. And that, of course, is borne out, because whenever you want to test how proficient you are in prayer, you should always turn to Romans chapter 8, where Paul says, in verse 26 of Romans chapter 8, likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness, for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words.

Now, that's not Paul the novice Christian. That's Paul the mature apostle saying we do not know how to pray.

We are in a position of dependence. And so that he says, we don't know how to pray as we ought, and we are dependent upon the Spirit himself interceding for us with sighs too deep for words.

It can't all be words. Then if you go back and look at that wonderful caricature of prayer in Matthew chapter 5, you get, I mean, it's absolutely devastating.

[ 10 : 32 ] I mean, to all our most humble and modest and aspiring attempts to pray, that Jesus comes along and says in chapter 5, and when you pray, I'm sorry, I guess it's not in chapter 5, it's in chapter 6, verse 5.

And remember that, I mean, this is what I mean by devastating. When you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. In other words, it's not something for play-acting.

And human beings like to make it something for play-acting because human beings love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners that they may be seen by men.

It really is hard not to be seen. I tell you, because in answer to the prescription here, I dress up in a long robe and stand up in front of people on Sunday and do my praying there where everybody will be impressed with what I'm doing, whether God hears it or not.

And, you know, the potential for artificiality in that is so great. But it's a kind of human longing that we have that somehow, even if God doesn't hear, people will see us pray and be impressed with us for doing it.

[ 12 : 11 ] And so it shows how deep into the human heart is the business of communicating with God.

It has to be something which, whether or not it affects our words that we use, the body postures that we assume, or any of those things, prayer is something from deep within us, responding by the work of the Holy Spirit to the reality of God.

So it's a very profound thing. It has to be in terms of this description. And that's why Jesus says, even though the human desire is to pray in the synagogue and on the street corner, he says that you get, there are rewards for doing that, but they're not from God.

You go into your room, you shut the door, you pray to your father who is in secret, and your father who sees in secret will reward you. So it's a very secret process.

It's not a coming out of the closet, it's a going into the closet. And then he says that, and again he emphasizes, in praying, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do.

[13:43] I mean, prayer is very easily mimicked by any cartoon character. I mean, you know, comic person, sort of stand-up comics can tear prayer to shreds in a moment simply by doing what Jesus says here, you know, heaping empty phrases on one another.

You know, one day you see it on movies and television all the time, where it becomes an object of derision and humorism. Heaping up empty phrases do not be like them.

Again, because it's a secret matter and it's secretly rewarded. When you pray, say, then he goes on in Matthew to give you the Lord's Prayer. But back again to Luke, which is where I want us to look at that.

So we're back in Luke chapter 11 and ready to look at what it is that Jesus says we're to say when we pray. There's only five petitions here, so there they are right in front of you.

You can look at them. But the five petitions begin, Father. Father. Now, I think this is a very important statement.

[15:27] Just this, the one word Father is a terribly important statement. It's an important statement because it's not hard for us to imagine God.

Somebody must have brought, you know, brought all this that is in nature together. Somebody must have set the stars in the sky. Somebody must have put the planets in orbit.

Somebody must have balanced out things. Somebody must have created the rose. Somebody must have inspired Beethoven's Fifth Symphony. We can conjecture the possibility of God in a million different ways.

But, you know, or you can, as many people in the world still do, they see God in death. They see God in their enemies.

They see God in disease. They see God in a storm that may break. They see God in drought, famine, and pestilence.

[16:36] They see God in all those things. And they are properly respectful and deeply reverent of that God in the hopes that he will not visit those things upon them.

So they have that kind of relationship to God. And it's a fearful relationship indeed. And that's the only way they know him.

And they, so that, you know, when they, when they try to depict God, whether in art or in, in idols or statues, you know, you get great, bulbous eyed, terrible looking creatures which represent God.

This dreadful, terrorizing kind of visions of God. And yet, having the necessary effect of creating deep respect and awe and reverence for such a terrible force.

And so, you see, it's not hard to think about God. And even if you were an astute scientist and you saw the mathematical precision with which the whole universe is put together, you could conceive of God as the great mathematician.

[18:03] Or, you can, you can conjure up, and I recently read one of William Temple's books in which he does this with all the brilliance of his lucid mind and articulate use of words.

He said, you can establish beyond any doubt a reason to believe that there is a God. He, that's, he says, that's there.

The philosophers can do that for you without benefit of the Old or New Testament. They can give you a reason to believe that there is a God.

But, it is light years beyond any of that when Jesus says to his disciples, when you pray, say, Father.

Father. See, it's a, it's an amazing thing that this God through Jesus Christ we come to know as Father.

[ 19 : 20 ] We address him as Father. And if you look carefully at the New Testament, you'll know that twice this is not even translated. you, you retain the original Aramaic, I guess, which says Abba.

You know, that it's, it's a very personal and intimate acknowledgement of God as Father. And we know him as Father only through and because of Jesus Christ.

That's the only way we know him. God. Now, in the day in which we now live, with all the superior enlightenment of our day, you very often get people talking about the Mother God instead of the Father God.

You know, and the Goddess. I understand that the Royal Ontario Museum had a whole, a whole review of the Goddess in human history.

And how instead of the Father being the source of all, the Mother is the source of all. And there's this great debate that goes on about whether we derive ultimately from Adam or Eve, from a Father God or a Mother God.

[ 20 : 50 ] And that you have great debates going on about that in our world. But they're still talking about God the way a mathematician talks about the great mathematician as a sort of concept of, you know, the primeval womb from which all life comes, you know, or the primeval progenitor from which all life comes.

They're still talking in those abstract and philosophical terms. When you as a Christian are taught by Jesus Christ to say, Father, you are saying it because Christ invites you to know God as Father through him.

That's the only way we can address God as Father is through Jesus Christ. And so that, you know, the biblical pattern is that God is the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

and it's because he is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, that in Christ and through Christ we address him as Father.

And we are not saying eternal progenitor of the male sex from whom all life derives and who is ultimately in control. We're not saying that, even though a lot of people think we are, we are saying, Abba, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

[ 22 : 48 ] And it might be necessary for us to make that clear by always saying our Father, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, because that's the only way we as Christians claim to know him as Father, is through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Otherwise, for us, as for anybody else, he's some terror-surrounded awesome reality beyond our, you know, beyond any possibility of our knowing him.

The only way we know him is through Jesus Christ. Well, that's, that's it.

I want to to, I've done this with you before, but I want to do it with you again. And that is just go through what it is we pray to our Father.

And what we pray to him is first, hallowed be your name. Now, if you turn to Genesis chapter 11, which is the first book in the Bible, I just discovered this the other day, which gave me great delight, and I'm anxious to share it with you.

[ 24 : 12 ] Genesis chapter 11 and verse 4, you will see that it says the whole earth had, this is Genesis chapter 11, the whole earth had one language and few words, and men migrated from the east and found a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there and they said to one another, come let us make bricks and burn them thoroughly and they had brick for stone and bitumen for mortar, then they said, come let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens and let us make name for ourselves.

Now it's that let us make a name for ourselves in Genesis 11 for that I want you to look at. See, because here is humanity asserting its independence of God and saying we are no longer dependent upon him, we are dependent upon ourselves.

We have created a city, we've built a tower, we have one language, nothing is impossible for us, we have made a name for ourselves.

And that's what they did.

Now, what I would like you to see, I think, again, is the fact that my name is Robinson.

[ 26 : 20 ] My name is Robinson because my father's name was Robinson and his father's name before him was Robinson and it goes back into the dim dawn of history.

And my name is Robinson, I carry that name. Incidental and pertinent to me is only my given name, but the name I bear essentially is Robinson.

Now, what that means is that I may do great honor or bring great shame to that name, but that name is important and one of the motivations of my life would be to bring some measure of honor to that name, the name of my father and his father.

And so all of us get involved in that in a fairly fundamental way. I was, you know, it raises the question and I, and again, I'm only raising this, not controversially, I hope, but that when a woman is married, she takes on the name of her husband and she brings honor to that name by the way she bears it.

I would like to know if any of you are familiar with a lady who I haven't met her personally, but I've heard a great deal about her and her name is Margaret Roberts.

[ 28 : 01 ] Do you know who Margaret Roberts is? Does anybody know who it is? Well, her name is, in fact, Maggie Thatcher. But, so, in a sense, the honor accrues to her husband's name, not to hers, because her name to which she was born was Margaret Roberts.

Ruth found that out for me in two minutes before this service. But, because I had no idea what her name was. But, you see how, in a sense, that kind of thing keeps happening.

You know, it's something that happens in our society. That humanity makes a name for themselves. We have a name and reputation. And, you know, and how it's a very sensitive point in our whole life about this business.

How do you make a name for yourself? And, the importance, I think, of when you pray saying, hallowed be your name, is that the supreme objective of our lives is that we should bring honor to the name of God.

You know, that we don't derive a name for ourselves, but we bring honor to the name of God. And, that's why we pray.

[ 29 : 47 ] Hallowed be your name. You know. Now, that's fairly, it's a sort of profound kind of understanding, which is at the heart of the business of prayer.

That as you pray about the circumstances of your life, where you're going to go, what you're going to do, who you're going to marry, how you're going to live, how you're going to handle the problems of this day, how you're going to handle this circumstances or that circumstance, in all of that, you're saying, may your name be hallowed by what I do.

You know, that I want to bring honor to your name. I don't want to bring dishonor to your name. I pray that by my life, your name may be hallowed.

And that's, you know, that's, that's the first thing that you, that you pray. The second thing that you pray is your kingdom come.

Now, the, it's a sort of a, I think, a significant time in world history to raise this point.

[ 31 : 20 ] But, you see, what's, what's involved is this, that all over Europe, the kingdoms are breaking down.

Now, whether they are kingdoms or not, you can debate, but the whole structure is breaking down. And, the great, I mean, the, the terrible problem that people are waiting breathlessly to see is what kingdom is going to come.

What kingdom will come to replace the kingdoms that have failed all over Eastern Europe? What kingdom will come?

What are you praying will come? Well, I think Christians have thought, well, of course, if we give the rule over to the church, then the kingdom of God will most surely come.

But, you know, we, we now know historically that that is not, that the church and its authority is not coterminous with the kingdom of God, that they can be quite different things.

[ 32 : 32 ] And that when we're praying, thy kingdom come, we're talking about an ultimate kingdom of God, which has its beginning in the hearts of those who are subject through Christ, by the Holy Spirit, to the rule of God, but not necessarily those who say we are the Christian Democratic Party and should be elected to rule this country.

Because the kingdoms of this world are different from, and often, more often than not, alien to the kingdom of our God and of his Christ.

And so when we're praying, thy kingdom come, we're saying that what we want to see in our earthly kingdoms is an anticipation of the kingdom of God.

Whatever is set up in Poland, we hope will be not a kind of people making a name for themselves independently of God, so that they no longer have to hallow the name of God, but even defy the name of God, not setting up that kind of kingdom, but setting up a kingdom in which the name of God continues to be hallowed, and the ultimate realization of the kingdom of God is the goal and objective and desire of the people, that that's what they see beyond the national salvation front, as in Romania, that they see something beyond that.

The national salvation front may be, in a wonderful way, God's provision for now, and it may go bad tomorrow, we don't know, but what we're looking for always is the ultimate kingdom in which God's name is to be hallowed, and his rule is to be recognized, the rule that will only ultimately come with the return of Christ.

[ 34 : 47 ] And so you're praying in the midst of a kingdom, that the kingdom will come, and we've learned not to anticipate that if you were put in control, you could deal with it.

the difficulty that I'm referring to is well handled by Chuck Colson in a recent book called Kingdoms in Conflict.

Christ. And what he says in that book, you know, because he's fairly well aware of the kingdoms of this world, you know, Chuck Colson having been the hatchet man, or as they called him, for Nixon, before he became a Christian.

And he's had to think over that whole thing, and his attempt to say how it works, is that there are basically kingdoms in conflict.

The kingdoms of this world and the kingdoms of our God are in conflict. And if the kingdoms of our God pretend that they can run the world, they're wrong because they can't.

[ 36 : 15 ] And if the kingdoms of the world think that they can produce the kingdom of God here on earth, they're wrong because they can't. And that's why he says that these kingdoms are always in conflict and that that's the way it must be.

And that the kingdoms of our God cannot take over the world and the kingdoms of the world cannot produce the kingdom of God, the ultimate, you know, the end of history as the global deal.

Did you read that thing on the end of history? I read in the Manchester Guardian the end of an editorial on which I mean, this is he ended his article on Romania by saying and this isn't the end of history as that silly man said to take this prodigious piece of writing into it.

What that silly man said? Well, anyway, that was how Chuck Coulson handled this trying to balance out in his own sort of mind and experience this conflict between the two kingdoms and that Christians are to be prisoners of the kingdom of this world, servants to the kingdom of this world, but belonging to the kingdom of our God.

And that's why Christians are to pray to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, may your name be hallowed and may your kingdom come.

[ 38 : 12 ] And I'm going to quit there because I want more time to do the rest of it, so I'm not going to try and squeeze it in today. Do you want to ask any questions about that or should we just quit?

Only this, I would think, that the disciples of Jesus said to Jesus, teach us as John the Baptist taught his disciples.

Yeah. So when he said that John the Baptist said to the followers to affect you of their sins, Jesus confirmed that they acknowledged their misdoings which were there.

Yeah, except, I mean, I think, I don't think prayer was invented by Jesus. I think it is a fairly, I think it's a universal human experience.

But how you do it, people have made all sorts of wonderful attempts as to how you do it. pray. Oh, yeah. Yeah.

[ 39 : 37 ] Oh, yeah. People always and everywhere pray, I think. have become the children of their own.

So that Jesus isn't teaching people to pray who never knew how, he's teaching people to pray in terms of the God who has made himself known to us in Christ.

God. He wants to realize that he was playing in a different way. Yeah, that what they knew of prayer, yeah, that's, yeah.

He knew something more than they knew about it. Yeah, yeah, I think that's right. that's right.

that's the point, that's what it is in the Hebrew, Abba. And that's why we have it, is simply because they, you know, the New Testament translators said, you can't interpret this, you can't, you have to give it as it was.

[ 41 : 17 ] And so instead of trying to interpret it, they just said, Abba. Oh, oh, yeah, I think it's a very personal approach to God as a loving heavenly father.

I think that, yeah, yeah, there's, yeah, and that's what happened to go over to players may God grant to everybody that that's true, you know, that you come to that kind of childlike relationship is renewed in us as we grow older.

Because it really is a picture of dependence upon and trust in, isn't it? I mean, you're not saying, God, I found you out, I now understand you and know how you work.

You're saying, I trust myself to you because I don't understand and I don't know how you work, but I trust you. Well, with that, let me just say a prayer.

Father, it is wonderful the fact that you gave us this scripture in order that as the disciples of Jesus asked him to teach them to pray, that that very scripture in which they asked would be the basis on which you, by your Holy Spirit, continue to teach us to pray.

[ 43 : 24 ] Father, your name be hallowed, your kingdom come.

Father, your kingdom come. And with that, we cover all of time and all of history and all of the whole of our lives. All of the whole of our lives. So we ask, Father, that even as we study these things, you will indeed, by your spirit, help us in our struggle to pray.

And teach us to pray. We ask it in the Lord Jesus' name. Amen.