

Bible Study: How To Pray 2

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[0 : 00] St. Luke, which in the Bibles that we have here, if you have one, is on page 68.

And we're talking about prayer, and a large part of this chapter has to do with prayer. And the thing is that we probably need, if we're going to talk about praying, praying that the best way to learn about it is to do it.

And so I would ask you if you would bow your heads and we'll... Father, we are as your disciples were in this passage, seeking that the Lord Jesus Christ should teach us to pray.

And we need to learn how to pray. And to understand it, not just in terms of comprehending it with our minds, but so that it's very much the basis of our lives that we learn to pray.

And that's very hard for us to do. And so we need to learn from someone who knew and who knows how to pray. And so we do indeed pray that you will teach us to pray.

[1 : 56] And it's something we would just depend utterly on you to be able to do for us.

We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. Look at the text again, which is... I'm going to go over the same text as we read last week.

He was praying in a certain place, and when he ceased, one of his disciples said to him, Lord, teach us to pray. And 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, and forgive us our sins as we forgive everyone who is indebted to us, and lead us not into temptation.

And with that, the pattern prayer of the New Testament ends in the Gospel of Luke.

[3 : 10] And I want you to learn... I want us all to learn some things about it. One of the first things I'd like you to learn about it is this. That... The view that we have of ourselves is something like this.

That here I am. And I am alone. And there are... Though there's many other people who appear to be like me, I call out from the...

From my own life, and from the insularity, and the loneliness, and the terrible and particular individuality that makes me, me, me, and nobody else but me.

And I am irretrievably and inescapably me. I am not anybody else. I cannot escape the date of my birth. I cannot avoid the date of my death.

There's much about me that I have no control over whatever, and I have a sense of being trapped in being me. And as I look at me, I have the choice either to think better than the truth of myself, and therefore inflate myself with self-importance, or else I tend to think worse than the truth of myself, and therefore become depressed and discouraged and downhearted and an altogether miserable person.

[4 : 41] And nobody wants to have to choose between those two things, though we very often have those sort of two masks of our life. You know, like in the theater, the mask that's like that, and the mask that's like that.

You know, and there we are. And that's our life. And that's how we experience our life. And some days we put on this mask, and some days we put on this mask.

But in the, the, the, in a very amazing and peculiar way, we come to regard ourselves as being basically all there is.

And that to pray is in a sense to shout into a vacuum, and it echoes on and on through countless aeons of space and time, and never is there an answer.

And so, we think of the futility of prayer. But then, what happens, is that when God comes into our life, then the whole shift moves from us to God, and the reality of our life is God, and the circumstances of our life are incidental, because God is the eternal God.

[6 : 09] and we are in touch with Him. And our life is eternal because of our relationship to Him. And our life derives its meaning from Him.

And He was in the beginning. And so that, it really is a, a drastic transformation of our lives. When we move from the terrible self-centeredness, which is on the one hand so deceiving, and on the other hand so despairing, to enjoying the reality that God is God, and that the meaning of our life can only be found in relationship to Him.

I was talking to a young man who's somewhat doubtful about the authenticity of the Christian faith the other day, and he's off to spend two years teaching in Africa.

And because he is sort of questioning and debating on the validity of the Christian faith, I suggested to him that he read a certain book, and the certain book I suggested to him was John Taylor's Primal Vision.

[7 : 28] John Taylor's Primal Vision, which if you've read it, you will know, but if you haven't, I'll tell you. It really is because he was, he's a bishop in the Anglican Church who spent a great deal of his time in Africa.

Now you know that the church in Africa numbers in the millions of people. You know, we used to, as a child, talk about heathen, darkest Africa.

Well, the Christians in Africa infinitely outnumber the Christians in North America at this point. And if there is a heathen darkness, it's probably that of which we are the center at the moment.

But this book, The Primal Vision, really is to try and to show us that among the people of Africa, not having been through the process that Western culture and Western civilization has been through, is that they still have this sort of basic concept of God.

God is still very much a part of their lives. They still retain the primal vision. When we are involved, as we are this week, in next week, in evangelism, in seeking that people will come to faith in Jesus Christ, a lot of them dismiss it on the grounds that they're not sure if God exists.

[9 : 02] Now, that's a peculiar problem that we have manufactured in the Western world over the period of two or three hundred years, so that we have to fight with people to say that God exists and God has spoken in Jesus Christ.

Now, when you're evangelizing in Africa, you don't have to use that argument. All you have to say is that the God who you know exists has spoken to us in Jesus Christ.

And so, because they haven't lost that primal vision, as Bishop John Taylor calls it, they have an awareness of the presence and reality and purpose of God.

And so, prayer is not the anomalous activity to them that it is to the secular materialist people like us in the Western world, who don't know whether there is any reality beyond ourselves and our sort of subjective and personal awareness.

And that's why, when you come to the New Testament and say, Lord, teach us to pray, that this is something that we have to learn right from the beginning.

[10 : 26] This is why Bishop John Taylor says that the time is coming when Africans are going to have to come to North America and teach us about God. Because, because we don't know.

We may know how to run computers, but we don't know about God, and we need to be taught that. So, when we're asking the question with Christ's disciples, Lord, teach us to pray.

We mean what we want to do is restore this relationship to our life, where we are in constant communication with God. And, and that constant communication is something that belonged to Jesus, which he taught to his disciples, and which it is up to us to learn.

Now, fortunately, none of us had to learn how to breathe. The tradition is that having emerged from the womb, we were lifted up by the back feet and given a slap over the bottom, and we started doing it.

I, I don't know whether that's true or not, but that's the closest I know of how it works. And, uh, we, we, we start breathing. Uh, prayer is not something we start doing automatically.

[11 : 50] It's something we have to learn how to do. And, uh, and since this bond between us and God is the very source of our lives, then prayer, uh, is essential, is as essential in a sense to us spiritually as breathing is to us physically, because this is, this is the source of our life spiritually.

And that therefore prayer is very important. And it's for that reason, you see, that, that when Jesus started to teach his disciples to pray, he gave them this in a sense as the pattern of prayer, not just a prayer, which is to be said by rote.

Back in the days when, when Canada was a, a primitive country, we used to stand up and clasp our heads and say, the Lord's prayer every morning at nine o'clock.

Well, now we're enlightened. We don't do that kind of thing anymore. But, uh, in the, in the, in the, what happens, you see, and what, what we're looking at is that, uh, Jesus starts by saying, the God whom you don't know through me, you do know to be father.

And, and I went over this with you at some length last week and, and told you that it's, it's, it's not translated in lots of places in the new Testament because it is a very intimate and personal relationship to a living God through Jesus Christ.

[13:28] So that in Jesus Christ, we have the right to say, Abba, father, to approach the eternal God, the creator of heaven and earth, as father.

and that is not something which I, and I, I, I don't want, I don't want to repeat myself unnecessarily, but I, it does seem to me very important that though we have inherited this idea, perhaps in part from scripture, it's not what scripture teaches.

That is that, uh, you know, that we talk about God as the great mathematician because we are mathematically minded. or we talk about God as the, uh, as the great progenitor that has given rise to the whole of the human race.

That's not what we're talking about here. We're talking about a God whom we don't know. And whom we only have come to know through Jesus Christ.

And it's only through Jesus Christ that we call him father. Father. And, uh, and I think it's, it's important to know that. Well, then you see, once you have done that, then you, then you're, uh, you're, uh, you're given five key words by which, around which you are to, uh, to pattern, uh, the whole of your life.

[15:01] And, uh, and the, the five key words are hallowed, uh, kingdom, uh, and, uh, bread, and forgiveness.

And this is, this is to be the pattern of our prayer. And, uh, temptation. I'm sure you can all read that. Yeah. You can imagine what it says anyway.

So, um, there you have the five words around which all our praying is to be built. We address God as our father.

We say that his name is to be hallowed. He is to have a name which is above every name. You know, we don't make a name for ourselves.

We seek to hallow the name of God. And, uh, and, and then, uh, we seek that his kingdom should come.

[16:11] You know, and this is, this is really, I think, the, the most amazing kind of, uh, immediate relevance in, in the countries of Eastern Europe where these, thousands upon thousands of people have rallied in the streets and demanded change.

And they want to change from, uh, from a kingdom, which was really, uh, in, in a, in a, uh, I don't, I don't think I'm overstating the fact, but you see, instead of Christians praying for God's kingdom to come, they said, uh, as, as a gift from God, they said, we can create the kingdom ourselves.

Uh, and so the, uh, in accordance with, uh, uh, Karl Marx, uh, they went ahead to establish the human kingdom in which man would rule himself without reference to anything outside of himself. And they would defy any other kingdom to have power among them. And so they suppressed the Christian faith. They outlawed the Christian faith because it was oriented to another kingdom. And they said, there is no other kingdom. There is only the kingdom of men over which we have control and which we achieve by the process of revolution.

[17:51] So we go after establishing that kingdom. Well, we've just come to the point in history where all across Europe, uh, there has been a massive declaration which says, that kingdom doesn't work.

We need another. Now, uh, when you ask people that question, they say, well, the other kingdom is going to be fascist.

Well, we must pray God that that's not in fact going to happen. But what is it? Well, it is the kingdom of people who seek in terms of our earthly life to fashion a kingdom which resembles or at least anticipates the coming of God's kingdom, which is responsive to.

That's why if you look at the prayers for the state in the prayer book, you will see that the responsibility of the state is to create a kingdom which is responsive to and sensitive to the ultimate kingdom which God himself will establish.

So that's why we pray thy kingdom come. You know, I mean, uh, Bill Vanderzam announced that he's going to stay king for a while.

[19 : 21] Well, uh, and I, I want you to know that I believe in Bill Vanderzam. Anybody who, who, only because so many people say such awful things about him all day long, every day, that he can't be that bad.

Nobody could be as bad as they portray him. Uh, anyway, I, I shouldn't get into politics here. I'm sure. Well, anyway, but you see what, what we need to do is we need to say whatever kingdom we establish here on earth must be a kingdom which is responsive to and anticipation and in anticipation of that kingdom which God will bring.

And I told you a little bit about Charles Colson's book Kingdoms in Conflict last week that, uh, you know, that, uh, that the kingdom of this earth cannot become, uh, the kingdom of heaven, nor can those who profess to be members of the kingdom of heaven, nor can they take over and rule the world as though it was heaven.

So that there, those kingdoms remain in conflict. We live in one kingdom in anticipation of another. And that anticipation, that anticipation is given expression when we say, thy kingdom come.

Then we go on to bread and, uh, uh, give us this day our daily bread. Now, I am a hopeless shopper.

[21 : 06] And the reason, uh, I am a hopeless shopper, I suppose, is because when I go to a store, I know what I want. And that's why I go to the store.

And if they don't give me what I want, then I become frustrated and disappointed. And so I usually go away frustrated and disappointed. Because what you're supposed to do is go to the store and see what they have for sale.

And what you want has nothing to do with it. Uh, you, and, uh, you know, you know, this is on sale, this is on sale, this is on sale.

And you have to deal with people. Like, if you go and ask, uh, a huge department store like Simpson Sears for a game of Scrabble, in January, they will tell you, I'm sorry, that's only available in December.

Uh, they don't give you what you want. They, uh, try and entice you to take what they have available. And there's a, there's a, there's a difference.

[22 : 12] And, uh, it's part of the difference was, which is expressed by this petition in the Lord's Prayer. Give us this day what we need.

You know, not just what might be available to us, but, uh, the one who knows our hearts, knows our needs, and provides for us.

And we pray that he might continue to do so. When you, so when you say, give us this day our daily bread, we are, we are asking that God will meet the real needs that we have, rather than flog something on us, which, which, uh, we don't really need.

And so it's a, it's a very incisive and comprehensive kind of prayer. Um, so I once read an article which, which dealt with the intriguing subject of how your boiled egg arrives on your plate for breakfast.

You know, starting with a chicken laying it, collecting it, grading it, wholesaling it, storing it, uh, transporting it, uh, dem, uh, you know, uh, putting it in a showcase, you going, seeing it, being attracted by it, buying it, taking it to the thing, taking it home and everything.

[23 : 40] It's an enormously complex process by which one little egg ends up on your, you know, in your egg cup in morning for your breakfast in the morning.

Well, when we're praying, uh, give us this day our daily bread, we, we recognize that the whole complex structure of our world has to be so finely attuned that people can receive what they need on a daily basis.

You know, that you can't store it up. You, you need it on a daily basis. You have to, you have to breathe the air that is here. And so it's like a vast sort of city which has to deliver countless services to you when, uh, something like the San Francisco earthquake comes along and you suddenly find that you have no power, you have no TV, you have no television, you have no defense against robbery.

All the structures of the city which you're totally dependent on are suddenly taken away, away. And you're sitting on the street side, uh, waiting until you can find someplace to go and something to do because you could, you're practically powerless in that situation.

The whole enormous complex of the city has got to work in order that you can phone calls, be in touch with your friends, provide the, the water you need and the food you need and the things you need to look after yourself and your family and so on.

[25 : 15] So it's, it's that kind of prayer that you're saying that the God who has created us and who sustains us will continue to do so.

And so when you say, give us this day, our daily bread, you're praying for the whole world that God may sustain and keep our world by continuing to provide for us what we very basically need for our way of life.

And so it's a, it's a very comprehensive prayer indeed. And then you come to the prayer for forgiveness. And you ask that, that, uh, for, that we might be forgiven as we forgive.

And here you find, uh, you know, I suppose you could say it of bread that God may provide for us so that we may provide for others, that God may forgive us so that we may forgive others.

But this is like the kingdom, which is not our kingdom. And like, uh, the name, which is not our name and like the bread, which we can't provide for ourselves.

[26 : 33] We are dependent upon it. So forgiveness has its source in God. And while we can distribute it, we can only distribute it on the basis of the fact that we have received it.

And, uh, and, uh, and this really takes us in a sense to the heart of the gospel. Uh, because the question that came up on Monday night at the, uh, dessert party, the question that came up again last night at the confirmation class is always the question, you know, um, what if I can't forgive myself?

Or what if I have been so hurt by somebody that I can't forgive them? You know, and that, that the breakdown is always at that level. I can't forgive myself.

I can't for, I was, I, uh, some, you will, some of you will remember this. So I'll, I'll just tell you the, uh, the quotation I used the other night, which, uh, always intrigues me because this was the thing that implanted itself in my own mind and heart.

And that was, uh, when I used to take a Bible study in Kingston penitentiary, and, uh, one of the leading members of the Bible study group, it was a lovely Bible study group because it started at 530 and it went on as long as you wanted because there was no place else to go.

[28 : 01] Nobody was in a hurry to get away because there was no way of getting away. But, uh, Alonzo Boyd of the Boyd gang was a, was a happy member of that.

And he said to me one day, I know God has forgiven me. I can't forgive myself. Uh, that didn't have to do with his life of crime at that point, but he was talking about a personal issue that he was, and, and a lot of people, you know, really can't understand forgiveness.

Nor, and I, and I think quite rightly we can't understand it because if anybody is going to forgive anybody else, it's going to be at cost.

Cost, you have to pay the price in order to forgive somebody. Nobody else will pay it for you. You have to pay it.

And it's going to cost you something. Desmond Hunt used to use the illustration of, of, uh, the young man who, uh, was, uh, was engaged to a young lady and he went out with another young lady and very much offended the lady to whom he was engaged.

[29 : 16] And he came to her with chocolates and roses and asked to be forgiven. He had to pay for those chocolates and roses, but not nearly as much as she had to pay in order to forgive him.

And, uh, Ruth, there's a little lady in trouble outside that door. Yeah, I feel just, if you don't mind just checking whether she, uh, uh, so that forgiveness is very difficult on the human level, uh, it's very, very hard to do.

We really have to be taught how to forgive. It does not come naturally to us. And it doesn't come naturally to us simply because, uh, we don't, uh, we don't know what to do with it.

We don't, we don't know how to justify forgiving somebody. It's just too hard. And, and, uh, so that, uh, you know, and, and, uh, as somebody pointed out in one of the discussions, even if you do, in a sense, forgive somebody, you don't forget.

And, uh, whether you can forgive without forgetting, I don't know. I mean, it's, uh, uh, God, it seems one of the, one of the characteristics about being God is that he can forget.

[30 : 50] Uh, but one of the characteristics about being you and me is we can't. And when we've been hurt or offended, it's very difficult to forgive and, uh, almost impossible to forget.

Humanly, we can't do it. And yet we make it part of our prayer. Forgive us our trespasses. We're asking someone to forgive us.

We're asking God to forgive us. And we're saying that that reality, we pray will become a reality in our lives as we forgive those who, who offend us, who trespass against us.

Do you see how, if that could be, if that could be made to work, then, uh, what a powerful force it would be in our world.

If people were able to forgive. Well, that is essentially, that is essentially, why, at the heart of the Christian gospel, is, the determination that Paul had, when he said, you know, I am determined to preach nothing among you, save Jesus Christ and him crucified.

[32 : 11] Because what has happened there is that God has forgiven us at great cost, in that he so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten son, that whosoever believes on him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

In other words, the ground on which God forgives us, is that he has paid the price, for your sins, and mine, for our trespasses.

God has paid that price. And it's to be held up in front of you, you know, when Paul talks in Galatians, he says, Jesus Christ, before whom, Christ Jesus has publicly been displayed, as crucified.

In other words, it's a kind of huge billboard, that is set up for us to see, the public display, of the humiliation, of Jesus Christ, on the cross.

Because that's the basis, on which God demonstrates, his love to you and me, in forgiving us. We are forgiven, by God, at great cost.

[33 : 31] God, and therefore, when you ask the question, you know, I can't forgive, you know, you're saying, in effect, that the price, I have to pay, is greater, than the price, that has been paid.

And the price, that has been paid, is God, giving his son, to die on the cross. And so, humanly, you can't do that.

You can't say, it's too costly, to forgive, because of the cost, at which you were forgiven. And of course, we are renewed in that, when we take communion.

You know, that, this is my body, which was given, for you. And this is my blood, which was shed, for you. You are forgiven, by God, totally, and unconditionally, because of Jesus Christ.

And that's why Jesus, uses that, parable, in which he says, a certain man, owed his master, ten thousand talents. And he went to his master, and his master said, you're to be thrown, into prison.

[34 : 55] And the man said, have mercy on me, and I will repay. And the master, was so moved, that he forgave him, all his debt. And so the man, having been forgiven, not required to pay, having been forgiven, because the master, paid the price, of his forgiveness.

Then he turns around, to somebody, who owed him, ten talents. And said, took him by the throat, and said, pay me. And had him thrown, into prison.

You know, that's the, that's, the way in which, forgiveness, is, is, is, is, demoned, the nature of forgiveness, is demonstrated to us, in, the gospel.

So that the thing, of which we need to be, most profoundly aware, the innocent, the fulcrum, of our, own, relationship, to God, on the basis, on the basis, of which we pray to him, is, that we have been forgiven.

Unmistakably, unconditionally, forgiven. And irrespective, of who we are, it doesn't matter, who you are. God, has, forgiven you, through Christ.

[36 : 25] You may not be able, to take that, and it may be hard, on your pride, to accept that. But that's, that's what it is. And that's why we pray, you know, forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those, who trespass against us.

In other words, a whole, new dimension, comes into the realm, of human relationships, because, forgiveness, becomes possible.

which, humanly speaking, is quite impossible. And, and so, when we pray that, we're praying for, a kind of, very, virulent, contagion, to spread, through the world.

We have been forgiven, and everybody we touch, is forgiven too, because we have been forgiven. It's a contagion, of, of healing, and wholeness, and goodness, which happens, as the result of, our having been forgiven, and therefore we forgive.

Now, if somebody has offended you, deeply, and hurt you, extremely badly, and you wake up in the night, writhing with anger at it, and focus on it, then, I, I don't, I don't doubt, but what, you will be

extremely disturbed.

[37 : 49] And that's why, the, the, the wonderful prescription, in the hymn, is, to turn, and, survey, the wondrous cross, on which the prince of glory died, you know, where the whole realm of nature, mine, that were an offering, far too small, love, so amazing, so divine, that you have to, focus on, the cross of Christ, which is, God's public display, of the grounds, on which you've been forgiven.

So that's, you see, that's so much at the heart of, then, the last thing is temptation, down here at the bottom, the five things that our, our prayer is, is, to be patterned around, is, that the name of God, may be exalted above every name, that, the kingdom of God, may come, that, that, that, that, because we are dependent upon God, we pray that he will make provision for us, that we will forgive, because we are forgiven, and finally, that we will not be led into temptation.

And what temptation means, is, and I, you know, I, I think this, I still think this is the best illustration of it. Temptation is, that we will never, come to the place, where with regard to, our lives, and the way we have lived them, we will join, Frank Sinatra, in saying, I did it, my way.

That he, faced, all the powers, of darkness, and evil, and conquered. Now there's no, little indication, that he did that.

But he seems to think he did. And, and you see, that's the, that's the, the reality, which we have to, pray, that we will never be tempted, or find ourself, in the place, where we think, we have the capacity, within ourselves, to do it, by ourselves, without God's help.

[40 : 18] we will never be caught, in that position. That's what we pray. Lead us not, into temptation, into thinking, that I can handle this, by myself.

I can do this, in my own strength. you know, we teach our kids, to do that.

We teach our kids, to think that way. We ourselves, are taught, to think that way. But, Jesus says, you know, that, well, he goes on, to talk about this, when he talks about, the strong man.

And, and all we do, is lock ourselves, into, an enslavement, under sin, which, which we can't, break out of.

And we get back, to the point, where, you know, instead of living, in a relationship, like this, you go, you go back, to living, all by yourself.

[41 : 28] And thinking, that you can deal, with the whole of life, from the resources, you find in yourself. And you're not, dependent on, any relationship, or any reality, outside of yourself.

Well, that's how you pray. That's how Jesus, taught his disciples, to pray. Five words. You can say, the Lord's Prayer, as much as you like, and as often as you like.

But, it's very enriching, if you, start looking, at your life, in terms of, the five words. The hallowing, of the name of God, the coming, of the kingdom of God, the provision, of God, the forgiveness, of God, and the fact, that apart from, God, you haven't, the strength, to face, the power of evil.

And you know it. You don't want to be put, in a place where, you are tested. Beyond your strength. Well, that's it.

Do any of you, want to ask questions, of things that I can, sort of clarify, or, we'll pray.

[42 : 42] Lord, as we began, so we end. Teach us to pray, in the private, and personal circumstance, of all of our lives, with the particular temptations, and difficulties, trials, and tribulations, that each of us face, and through which, it is your purpose, to lead us, and by which, it is your purpose, to fashion us, according to, your son, Jesus Christ.

We ask that, indeed, you will do that, and you will accomplish, your will in our lives. And that, indeed, your name may be hallowed, your kingdom come, our deepest needs, our deepest needs, met in you, the fact of our forgiveness, finding expression, through us, in all our relationships.

And we acknowledge, that, we have no power, apart from you, against the forces of evil, that tend to move in, and take over our lives.

Lord, this way, we pray you will teach us to pray. Amen.