

Learning to Pray: The Lord's Prayer

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- [0 : 0 0] Well, last time we met together, I mentioned that we decided to call our four prayer gatherings this year Learning to Pray, because every one of us struggles with prayer.
- I think it's very important to be honest about that. None of us feels content with our prayer life. The Holy Spirit desires us to pray. God wishes us to pray.
- And in the Bible, there are lots of passages about helping each other in this area. So part of what we're doing is trying to help each other as the Holy Spirit helps us.
- And last time, I made two points. And the first is about prayer, the who, not the how. Do you remember, we talked about the fact the Bible doesn't give us one technique, but the Bible presents us with God, the God to whom we pray.
- It reveals God. And who you're praying to controls what you think you're doing, how you think you do it, what you ask for, what you expect from it.
- [1 : 0 6] So the who is the most important thing. Secondly, we talked about a bridge between the Word of God and prayer. And I just introduced one little way of doing this, which I found useful, and I hope you all have found useful as well, since we talked about it last time.
- It is one way of taking the small parts of the Bible, a verse or a phrase or a passage, and turning them toward prayer. And they are the four letters that spell out the word ACTS, A-C-T-S.
- It's adoration, confession, thanks, and supplication, asking for things. Do you remember adoration? Adoration is for who God is.
- So we read a text or we read a passage, and as we begin to meditate on it, we think about what is it that we can worship God from in this passage?
- Who is he? We talked a bit about that last time. Secondly, what does that need me to confess? And there's always something to confess.
- [2 : 1 3] Thirdly, what can I specifically thank God for out of this prayer? And fourthly, what do I need to ask out of this? So let me give you an illustration, those of you who weren't here last time.
- I thought I'd give an illustration to the shortest verse in the Bible, John 11, 35, because I want to get through this quickly and get to the Lord's Prayer. Jesus wept. You know, that's the shortest verse, right?
- Jesus wept. Well, now, what happens when we do ACTS on this? Well, you remember the context? Jesus is at the grave of Lazarus.
- Lazarus has died. He's about to raise him from the dead. He goes to the grave and he weeps. And I think there's much to praise God for here because it reveals something to us about how deeply he entered into our lives.
- Here is the Son of God weeping in front of death and its separation of the family. How genuinely the Son of God experienced our pain.
- [3 : 1 5] And I would begin to praise God and say, I praise you, Heavenly Father, that you are the source of life and that you sent your love to experience our death.

And the wonder is, and this is where I would go with it, that he gave his life so that we don't have to face death. That his steadfast love fulfills his promises, that he is powerful, that he is good.

These are the things I would praise God for and I thought. Secondly, I would confess that my heart is cold and I don't care for others the way that Jesus does.

Not only that, but I'm ungrateful. I'm ungrateful and I barely think about God's care and the depth of his love.

And you could confess all sorts of things yourselves along that line. I would give thanks to God. And this is just a very quick run through.

[4 : 18] That I think this passage continues the whole picture of Jesus giving life through his death in John's Gospel. And what an amazing thing that Jesus should use his powerful eternal life and lay it down for me.

And I would say thank you to him for doing it through the cross, giving over his life so that I would live forever. And then under supplication, supplication just means asking for things.

I think I'd ask God to give me a greater sense of love. Love for Christ, his love for me. I think I'd ask him to make me more like Jesus. And then it's easy to tee off into other things to ask for.

I would ask him to help me in my own death, as I think about my own death. I can think of a number of people at St John's who are facing death as well. Help me to see this day through the lens of his life.

There's some things I would pray for and you might have other things you would pray for. So do you understand the model there of what we're doing? Does anyone have any questions before we go to the Lord's Prayer?

[5 : 21] Any comments? No, some texts are easier to praise God out of, some are easier to...

It's just one way of doing it, okay? We learned this last time and we're going to practice it again tonight. Is that alright? Okay, good. Let's go to the Lord's Prayer. Here it is.

On the left, that's in Greek. On the right, this is the modern English version from Matthew chapter 6. It is, in the Greek, it's 72 words long.

And it was given twice by Jesus, once in the Sermon on the Mount and then at a different time in his ministry, when the disciples saw how deeply committed to praying Jesus was.

And they said to him, Lord, teach us to pray. And so he repeated this. When you pray, pray like this. And there are all sorts of fabulous quotes about the Lord's Prayer.

[6 : 25] We never get beyond this prayer. And when Jesus introduced it, he said, pray like this. So, he wants us to pray in this pattern of prayer, rather than just parroting the words.

I mean, anyone can say, Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, our kingdom come. That's not it. It's that these, this, the meaning of these phrases should shape and form our prayer.

They keep our prayers God-centered. I want to introduce you to the shattering shape of the prayer. The prayer comes in seven phrases.

The first is, we address God as Father. And then there are six petitions. So, we address God as our Heavenly Father.

And then there are six separate petitions. And what do you notice about them? So, we go, Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

[7 : 33] That's the first half of the prayer. And then I put a line in with the second half. What do you notice about the first half and the second half? God's the first one, the second one.

Our us. Exactly. So, your, your, your, us, our, our, the three other petitions. This is very important.

It means that we first seek God, our Heavenly Father, as we address ourselves to Him. And then the first half of the prayer that Jesus teaches us to pray is about God's concerns and God's glory before we get to anything about us.

And I think that's a bit shattering for our shopping list praying. I mean, I don't know about you, but the largest part of my prayer is just asking for things.

But every time I come back to the Lord's Prayer, this is a great help. And I think it's helpful to us in two ways. Firstly, it teaches us how to pray for issues.

[8 : 36] So, let's imagine that you are a parent of a teenage or older child and the child is going astray from Christ.

We pray with all our hearts that God will bring them back. But if we pray around the Lord's Prayer, we can actually pray that God, the Father, will show His name to be holy in the way that God brings our young one back.

And that His kingdom would be extended. Bring him home because you're the King of glory. But whatever God's will, His will will be done. You see? So, it's not just going through the petitions, but it's shaping our prayers around them.

Or imagine you won the lottery. What's it worth today? I don't know. What is it? Millions? Squillions? I don't know. Imagine you won.

Or imagine you lost all your life savings. How would the Lord's Prayer inform how you prayed? It's so you won the lottery. Well, Father, how can this win make your name more holy?

[9 : 46] How can it spread the kingdom? Yeah? Or if I lose, it's the same. So, I think the way Jesus teaches us to pray is to heal us of our self-centeredness first.

That's the first thing. And the second thing about the shape of this prayer is that when we do pray about our own concerns, like daily bread and pardon and protection, it's not separate from God's glory and his concerns.

In other words, Jesus is saying that these things too, what we eat, what we wear, these things too are God's concern, and God can, he can glorify himself through these things.

So that when we are praying for our daily bread or for our retirement or for our loved ones physically, these are also a means to God's glory.

We're not bending him to do our will, but we are, prayer is an exercise of growing in our trust of God. Is that okay? Anyone want to make any comments or ask any questions?

[11 : 00] Chris? So, you don't have time and want people to be careful and pray for them. But most of it, most of the time for me, it's, please help them.

And, you know, if you were to do this, what you just did, then every person, it would keep them all together. Too long. Yeah. And so? Yeah, far too long.

So, what do you do? Lump them all together? Yes. That's what I do. I don't know. What do other people do? So, anyone want to kick in there?

Come again? It's too great to think about counting sheep. Thank you for that honest answer, Tracy. That's not exactly what I was thinking for. Yeah.

Well, I think you can do a bit of both, one and two more together, but if there are some friends or family that really are on your heart, you know, you're going to be in the midst of this.

[12 : 05] Oh, now, I would be in the midst of this. Yeah. Oh, you mean what? Countries? Well, the list. Yeah. Oh, that's so important.

When I was a child, I met my great-great-aunt who had been a missionary in Africa. she was 103 or something. Yeah, she was one of the first white missionaries in Africa.

And she looked at me through her little glasses and she said, David, come with me. And she took me upstairs and opened an exercise book where there were lists of names. There were four columns on each page of an exercise book.

And she opened up to Thursday. She said, your Thursday, I pray for you on Thursday. I don't imagine she prayed for me in any great depth. But I was on her heart and her mind. But I think what happens is we too quickly go to the list rather than dwelling in the presence of God, rather than seeking to shape our prayers by this prayer.

And I don't think we should be legalistic about this. I don't think we should say, do all six petitions with every prayer that we have. But I do think that the thing that Jesus is teaching us here, that God's concerns are first and our concerns are second.

[13 : 27] And that we do, I think we do need to give time to God's concerns. So that even as we're praying for our friends, as you do, we're praying that through God meeting their needs, His kingdom will grow.

Tracy. I want to be sure. I take back 30 staff and I try to do one a month. So I go through one a month. What a really interesting idea.

So you take one person, you have 30 staff, you take one person a day and you go through them in a month. Well, that's fantastic. Then you can say to people, I'm praying for you once a month.

When people ask you to pray for them, if you feel you may forget, do it while you're talking to them. The other thing is that I think...

I think I might say this a little bit later. I might say this later.

[14 : 33] Is that okay? Okay. Let's keep moving. Yeah. Say now. I think the first part, I think the first part, it informs the second part.

What's the second part? Can you tell me? Absolutely. Absolutely. I think both put each other in context. They're not separate from each other.

Thank you. Yeah. There's all sorts of things to say about this, but I need to move on. I need to get you working. But before we do, I just want to speak about our address to God.

Oh, that's right. I know what I was going to say. Sometimes when I hear people praying, we pray for God to bring peace in the Middle East, or we pray for God to bless these people.

And I always want to say, so that, so that the gospel would go forward, or so that the kingdom would come.

[15 : 37] So when Paul teaches us to pray in 1 Timothy, he says, pray for governors and rulers, pray for the mayor and for the premier, so that they might rule well and the gospel would go forward.

It might be peaceful and for the goodness of the Christian faith. So I think that's part of this Ruth as well. It's not just praying these things, but it's that our desire is conformed to God so that these things will come through.

Am I making that clear? Thank you. Alrighty, let's go on to the, let's go on just to talk a little bit about the address to God. Our Father in Heaven. And I think what God wants us, or Jesus is teaching us to do here, is before we race into prayer, where we address ourselves and we realise who it is we're praying to.

And there's a great deal of richness here, but let me just mention, I'll spend time on the second two. Let me talk about Father. God has made himself our Heavenly Father.

And many of us have had miserable experiences with our earthly fathers. And it's not you take the best of your earthly fathers and read it onto God.

[16 : 49] It's completely the other way around. We look at how God the Father is with his Son, Jesus Christ. So when we pray through Jesus' name, we pray to our Father in Heaven.

And we pray to Him because we have the unique privilege of calling Him our Father. That's what it means to have the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit comes into our hearts so that we cry, our Abba Father.

We have a basic instinct calling God Father. And everything that God feels and delights in in Jesus Christ, He loves and delights in and us as well.

And I think it's okay to pray to God as God did, you know, God do this, God do that. But I think it's much more helpful to call God Father, our Heavenly Father. In Heaven, it's not He's out there, it means that He dwells in majesty, unapproachable, and power, and might.

And this is calling us to recognise His greatness. Our God is free from limitations and inadequacies. And this is where praise begins. There's a note of praise in this first phrase, our Father in Heaven.

[17 : 58] I wanted to be personal for a moment, so there's only been a couple of times in my life when I have not been able to pray for an extended period of time.

I just couldn't do it. And in both of those times, this is as far as I got. In fact, I really only got the first two words.

And I remember at really the most difficult time in the Anglican crisis, and I was sick on the bed and reading terrible stuff, all I could pray was our Father.

And the fact that He was our Father meant that I wasn't alone in this. It was very important to me. And the fact that He was a Father meant that He knew what I needed.

So they're very precious things in here to lead us into prayer. So, before I describe, before I give you your job, let's see if there are any questions or comments.

[19 : 05] No? Okay, let's move on then. So what's going to happen now is you're going to get into groups of about six each, and Lynn Unger is going to come around and give you a sheet of paper on which there is one petition.

Let me explain before you get into the groups. I'd like you to appoint a scribe, someone who writes stuff down, and then we're going to take each petition in the Lord's Prayer.

And in your group, you've got one petition. And I'd like you to go through A-C-T-S with your petition. So, let's say it's hallowed, you know, holy be your name.

Hallowed be your name. If that's your petition, you may want to, that's quite easy in terms of adoration and confession and thanks, and supplication, actually.

Some of them are not, not so easy, I think. But let's take, we're going to take a bit of time on this. So, I'd like the group leader to, and the scribe, to put A, you know, A-C-T-S down the side of the page and just write some things that the group brings out of that petition for which we can adore and thank God and confess to God.

[20 : 30] And then when we're finished, when we're finished doing that exercise, it's going to take about 12, 13 minutes. I'm going to get each group to pray the prayers that you've written down.

So, so one person in the group will stand and lead all of us in that petition. Is that okay? Yeah. Erin. Spoiler, the petition number six, leaders not into temptation, whoever gets that one, I wonder if it's with, it used to be 30 seconds like just to explain the first half, that really doesn't understand it.

Yes. It is a bit tricky. Erin, is there anything you want to say about it? I'm actually not looking to know. Why don't we put Erin in the group where he has to confess his sins?

Well, okay, let me make a couple of comments. I'll go back to, is there a prayer after this? Yeah, here it is. So we pray that God will not lead us into temptation but deliver us from evil.

The word temptation can either be tempt or test. And the, the, most of our life is lived in a spiritual minefield where even the good things we can tread on and blow up.

[22 : 05] so we're asking God not to lead us toward the evil side of, we're asking God to lead us away from the evil side of things. So even being tested, so all of us are tested from time to time by God.

We might have a testing circumstance, we might be suffering, some difficulty we're going through, even a good thing can be a test from God. In the test, we're asking God, instead of leading us into the evil side of it, but delivering us from, and I think most commentators think it's the evil one, it's Satan himself.

So I have enough trouble with my own flesh, my sinful heart, the world has its pressures, but Jesus says, pray that as you're tested, don't, as you're tested, ask God for help that you will not enter into the evil side of it that you'll be delivered from Satan.

that you'll be and it's very helpful. Are there any other comments or questions? No? Five groups.

Five groups. Thank you, Lynn. We've only got five groups? We do. Okay. All right. Well, let's divide into groups of six and let's go to it.

[23 : 22] Any questions about the exercise? Let's divide it into groups and let's do it. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.