

How to Pray

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Date: 19 June 2005

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[0 : 0 0] Well, just as you stand, let's bow our heads and pray. Father God, it is indeed a privilege and a glory that we should be able to bring all things to you in prayer.

And that in coming before you, there is such peace, such joy that is ours. I pray now as we gather around your word that you would encourage and kindle in us a desire to pray, to have a relationship with you through Jesus that is intimate and loving and reverential, in which we bring to you all the needs of our hearts.

Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. Please be seated. And it would help me if you would keep your Bibles open to that reading from Luke chapter 11, page 68.

I'm just going to look a little bit this morning on prayer. How do we pray? How should we pray? What can we pray for? I recently found an old prayer journal of mine from when I was 17.

I was digging through some boxes. It was a big, long book, and it had these boxes on each page. And one big box would say, My Requests. And then the next big box would say, God's Answer.

[1 : 2 0] That would be the easiest book in the world to write, don't you think? And in one of these boxes, under Requests, from when I was 17, so I was still in high school, I had written in these words, Failing Algebra.

I have to say, I was desperate at the time. It was the third term, and the end of the year was coming up, and my average for the year for Algebra was looking pretty ropey.

In fact, I was going to need a miracle if I was going to pass Algebra. And so, really, at the last hour, I resorted to the only thing that I knew that really could make a difference.

I turned to the only power that I knew could overturn my lousy marks and get me through Algebra. And, you know, there was an answer of sorts, too, because I went to one of those big Christian, you know, gatherings, some speaker come into town, and who should be there but my Algebra teacher?

I'm not a speaker. Praise the Lord. God is good. But, in the end, he very lovingly and Christianly failed me anyways.

[2 : 2 6] But, I think God answered that because, you know, in the end, it didn't matter. I still got into university and had children, and, you know, I'm still a decent human being. So, I guess, you know, it worked out somehow. But, you know, I think I'm not alone that sometimes we do approach prayer and God in that way, don't we?

Kind of turning to God to meet a very immediate need which I see very clearly and I want Him to come down and deal with that need right now. And, we sometimes wonder why, you know, things don't quite work out in prayer.

Why it seems that God doesn't answer prayer the way we think we ought to, the way we want Him to. Turning to God in prayer can seem sometimes very confusing and fruitless, even a waste of time and hard to do.

You may have situations in your life right now which you are very concerned about. You may have problems in your life that seem insurmountable. You may have things about which you are praying and praying and praying and wondering, am I seeing any results here?

What is the point of praying? That's why I want to look very briefly this morning at these verses, these wonderful verses from Luke's Gospel in which Jesus teaches us about prayer.

[3 : 40] He gives us a version of what we call the Lord's Prayer and then he teaches about prayer, gives us a couple of stories and some teaching. And I think the teaching that he gives us is extremely practical.

He essentially tells us to pray and to expect answers. But over and above and around it all, he places a relationship.

He places the central relationship of all our lives, of your life. And that is your relationship with God. And it is in that relationship with God that prayer takes its proper place and it is in that relationship that prayer is answered.

So let's just look at the passage. I want to mainly look at Jesus, the Lord's Prayer and then see the teaching in the rest of the passage based on that. If you look in the passage, there's two things.

The relationship we have and secondly, the requests we make. First of all, the relationship we have. And here I'm at verse 2. When you pray, say, Father, hallowed be thy name.

[4 : 51] Thy kingdom come. Very famous words, aren't they? Very familiar. But you see, at the heart of prayer is relationship with God. And as you will see, this is a relationship of love, but also a relationship of authority.

It is a relationship of intimacy, but also a relationship of submission. See, first of all, Jesus allows us, urges us, welcomes us to cry out to God, to pray to the God who created the universe and who sustains everything by His almighty word and call Him Abba, Father.

Father, Father, Father, you may not realize what an awe-inspiring thing it is to be invited to have a personal, intimate relationship with God.

You may have forgotten how glorious it is that you can have an intimate, personal relationship with almighty God, but that relationship is the great fruit of being a Christian.

When you accept Christ, when you turn to Christ, the door is opened for you to have a relationship with God that is intimate and loving.

[6 : 10] You can cry out to Him from your heart. You can bring before Him all the needs of your life and heart. It's opened up to you because of Jesus. That is why you who are sinful can have a relationship with God who is perfect.

You see, the Bible teaches that when you accept Christ, God places the Holy Spirit in your heart, which is why you who are of flesh can have a relationship with God who is spiritual and eternal.

And that is why you can cry out to God, Abba, Father. See, Paul writes about this in Galatians. He says, because you are children of God, God has sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts saying, Abba, Father.

Or again in Romans, chapter 8, Paul writes, for you did not receive the Spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption. When we cry, Abba, Father, it is the Spirit Himself bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God.

That's what is made possible when you become a Christian. It's not possible without Christ. But the freedom to have a relationship with God and cry out to Him in prayer as Abba, Father, He's close to you, intimate.

[7 : 28] That's the fruit of being a Christian and having the Holy Spirit in you. It is a relationship of intimate access to God. But, it is also a relationship of reverence and submission because He says, Hallowed be Thy name.

Thy kingdom come. You see how the tone changes here. We go from intimate access to respect and to submission. We are submitting to a power that is much higher than ours.

We do not bend God towards us. We bring ourselves before Him. God is holy. God is almighty. We human beings do need to approach Him with reverence.

He is unparalleled in holiness. His name is completely unique. Hallowed be Thy name. God is unique. This is a person. This is the God who has spoken into history.

Spoken and revealed Himself in the Bible and in Jesus. He is strong to save. He is the God who makes and keeps promises. So, we are not praying to an amorphous force in the universe.

[8 : 33] but to a God who has a character and a nature that He has revealed to us. He is holy and He is set apart from all others.

That's why the psalmist writes in Psalm 111, He sent redemption to His people. He has commanded His covenant forever. Holy and terrible is His name. He is God.

We recognize the awesome, awe-inspiring nature and name of the God we dare to approach. His glory is before us as we come to Him.

But also, Thy kingdom come. That's where we sign the contract. That's where we submit. This is clicking on the agree button. We are signing on to God's program for the world.

This is an affirmation that God has a will and an intention for the world. He is actively involved. He is bringing it into being. His purpose, His kingdom is absolute and it is being worked out and will be triumphant.

[9 : 35] And as His people coming before Him in prayer, we submit to that. Over to You, God. Your kingdom come. And our lives and our prayer needs to be in submission to that.

To God's kingdom. To His plan for the human race. we need to bow down ourselves and submit ourselves to Him. Your kingdom come. Now, do you see how the nature and framework of your relationship with God enables you to pray?

You have intimacy with God. You have loving access to God through Jesus Christ. His Spirit enables you to have that relationship and cry out to Him, Abba, Father.

But it is reverential. It is submissive. After all, we are coming before the highest power there is in the universe. So we submit to Him. The posture we bring in prayer is one of submission.

Our hands held out before Him. Our Father in Heaven, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. And you see, that means a lot for how we pray because we have a relationship.

[10 : 48] We're not superstitious. This is not superstition. A superstitious religion is about bending the will of the divine to favor yourself.

If I do this, God will hear my prayer. If I'm a good person, He will answer me. If I wear this T-shirt or this cross or this emblem, then God will help me.

That's superstition. That's not what Jesus is talking about here. He's talking about a relationship. He's saying, come to God. And because it is a relationship and we are submitted to Him, we're not going to demand inappropriate things.

Is prayer about what you want or is prayer about what you need? Is prayer just making a list before God? Well, that's not submissive, is it?

What we're doing is coming before Him in love and putting your relationship with Him at work. And so what all of us need to do to have a rich prayer life is really cultivate your relationship with God.

[11 : 48] You need to cultivate a rich intimacy with God. And that comes when you read His Word every day, when you worship Him, and when you spend that time with Him in prayer. It's the relationship we have.

That is the foundation of prayer. And maybe, you know, if you're not cultivating your relationship with God, that's why prayer seems so hard and so cold.

Why there doesn't seem to be any answer in your life. the wonderful thing is you are invited through Jesus to have a relationship with Him. He's given you everything you need.

The relationship we have. But also, the requests we make. And here I think Jesus becomes very practical. And I want to look at this because there's just one thing essentially that I want you to get out of this.

And it is that Jesus encourages you to pray, urges you to ask God for things, and tells us to expect that God will answer us. Now, if you look in Jesus' prayer in verses 3 and 4, you're going to see that there are two kinds of needs He puts before us.

[12 : 54] In 3, our physical daily needs, give us each day our daily bread. And then secondly, in verse 4, our spiritual needs, forgive us our sins, as we forgive everyone who is indebted to us, lead us not into temptation.

Give us each day our daily bread. Now, you might, your mind might wander back to the book of Exodus. Well, the people of Israel wandered in the desert and God provided for them manna every day.

Remember, they weren't supposed to collect the manna and store it in their refrigerators. They were supposed to rely on God to provide every day the manna that they needed. And that request takes us into the here and now of our daily lives and brings all of that before God.

And the amazing thing is that God cares about your needs, your daily needs. God is involved in the here and now of your life and is able to meet your needs.

He's the provider. He is interested. And Jesus teaches us to pray and to be very bold in prayer. Look at verses 5 to 8, that amazing story about the friend who goes to his friend in the middle of the night and makes a request of him.

[14 : 03] The man is in bed. His friend comes and he asks for three loaves, not just one, three. The middle of the night, everyone's in bed. Look at this boldness. And then Jesus picks up at this point in verses 9 and 10.

And I tell you, he says, ask and it will be given you. Seek and you will find. Knock, it will be open to you. Everyone who asks, receive. And he who seeks, finds. It's extremely clear, isn't it?

It's wonderful. Jesus is saying, ask. Be bold. Be bold. Come before God with all of your needs. Now, he doesn't say that, you know, you're going to receive everything exactly the way you want it or when you want it.

But we are told to ask God boldly for our needs and expect him to answer. God is interested in the details of our lives. He's involved. He's not disinterested in the tangible, physical aspects of our lives.

So the question for you is this. Do you ever ask? Do you come before God with your needs? I think for much of the time I'm a virtual prayer.

[15 : 08] I don't know about you, but I often say, oh yeah, we have to pray about that. My wife gets furious when I say that to her now because she knows I'm giving her the brush off. Annie, we'll pray about that. Don't worry about it. We'll pray about it. But actually, do I actually come down before the Lord and ask him and bring before him the God who loves me the needs of my heart and my life?

I think many of us lose out fundamentally. I think you may not think you're worth it. You may not think you're worth it. That God is too busy running the universe to really deal with you.

That God is too big to care about you. You may not think your needs are important enough for God to take notice of. You may think that your problems or issues are too great for God to deal with.

Yes, you know, God is very powerful, but in this case, forget it, in this situation, there's no, God can't deal with that. This is too big. This is absolutely impossible for God to fix. Perhaps you think that you're just not worth it.

Your problems are too great. But, you know, if you love someone, if you have a relationship with them, then you want to talk to them, don't you? You want to spend time with them, and that means telling them your needs, telling them what's going on in your life.

[16 : 27] It's the same with God. He wants you to tell him. It's about a relationship. Ask, and it will be given you. Give us this day our daily bread.

God is involved in the here and now. God is involved in your life. God continuously, lovingly, cares over your life. Cares about every concern that you have.

So we need to come before him in prayer. Let's say, for example, you're praying about your career. You're upset about your career, and that's a big issue for you. It's a good thing to pray about. You're frustrated in your career or if it seems to be going nowhere.

You see, there's a far cry from saying, Lord, just give me a better career. Get me a better job. I've got to have a career. To coming before God in a relationship and saying, Lord God, I need you to help me here.

I'm struggling. I'm frustrated in this job. I need you to help me. God cares. We come before him in a relationship to meet with our physical needs.

[17 : 30] But, and with this I'm going to close, we also pray for our spiritual needs. He does say, forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone who is indebted to us, and lead us not into temptation.

Just as I read those words, I wonder if you regularly pray in quite this way. Do you pray for the meeting of your spiritual needs? Forgiveness of sins.

And the modeling to go out and do that to others. Protection from temptation which causes you to fall away. That's what Jesus is talking about here. These are fundamental needs for your ongoing growth as a human being and for your relationship with God.

See, God is in the business of meeting all of your most fundamental needs. And just look at the comparison Jesus makes in that final little vignette from verses 11 and following.

Read in verse 13. He says, How much more will the Heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him? That's right, you saw the odd.

[18 : 37] I was kind of not expecting that ending. How much more will God give you the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him? You see, God wants to meet your most profound needs.

and perhaps the greatest gift God can give you in this life is the Holy Spirit residing in your heart. When God intervened supremely in human history, sending His Son to die on our behalf and rise again, He did it to meet your most profound and eternal needs, which is salvation.

When you become a Christian and God puts the Holy Spirit in your heart, He opens up communion between you and Him. He promises that He's going to do that.

In Ezekiel, God says, A new heart I will give you and a new spirit I will put within you. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes.

See, that is what God gives to every Christian when you call upon Jesus. That's why Paul says in Ephesians, in Christ, you are sealed with the promised Holy Spirit.

[19 : 43] See, and it is that wonderful gift of the Spirit. It is the meeting of your spiritual needs, which God wants to do in your life. That is the most eternal, significant gift God can give you and that makes all the difference in your life.

Because, you see, we're praying here that God will keep us faithful to Him. We're praying that He will make us like Him and Jesus is promising to do that. Jesus is promising that God will give you deeply and richly of His Spirit so that you can know the most profound, the most refreshing relationship ever in your life.

So that you can know the most abiding joy that comes from having a relationship with God. So that you can be filled with the Spirit and cry out to God, Abba, Father.

and it is in the heart of that relationship that is intimate and loving and reverential and submissive and powerful that prayer is answered.

Well, I still failed algebra that year, but over the years I did learn not to treat God as the last resort, but as the Lord of my life who is walking through me with my life.

[21 : 05] And what I found is that in the good times and in the bad, prayer has not been an inoculation against hard and difficult times and it has not led to the fulfillment of my every wish.

But, my relationship with God has been an abiding presence in my life. When I have given myself to that relationship, then prayer has been rich and it is rich.

When I take that time and submit myself at all of my needs, all of my problems, to Him. And I think of one of the biggest times of prayer in my life, and this is the last time I'm going to preach on this because it's about my son and he's six now so he knows if I preach on him, so this is the last time, was when my son was born and he developed a liver disease right after he was born.

Some of you know this. And we had to go to hospital with him and it was a very bleak time. And, it was a scary time and he had to have a large operation and we didn't know what was going to happen.

We thought he might die. And that was when I discovered what it really means to have a relationship with God. To have His Spirit in my life. Because in my panic and fear, I started praying, Lord, just heal him.

[22 : 15] Heal him. Heal him. And what I wanted was when they opened up my son and had that operation that it would be healed. That someone would be miraculously fixed. But then I realized that I have a God with whom I have a relationship.

And so, my wife and I together began to pray. We turned back to the Scriptures and prayed together and brought the situation in submission to God.

And so far, I've been praying every day of my son's life for him. And as you know, he's a vibrant, very alive little boy. But we pray for him every day. Submission to the God who has walked with us through our lives.

See, that is the joy of it all. The joy and wonder of seeing prayer and answer lies in the reality of those words, our Father who art in heaven.

Amen. Amen.