

# Teach Us to Pray

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[ 0 : 00 ] Let me read Luke 11, 1 through 13 for us. Now Jesus was praying in a certain place, and when he finished, one of his disciples said to him, Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples.

And he said to them, when you pray, say, Father, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread, and forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone who is indebted to us, and lead us not into temptation.

And he said to them, which of you who has a friend will go to him at midnight and say to him, Friend, lend me three loaves, for a friend of mine has arrived on a journey, and I have nothing to set before him.

And he will answer from within, do not bother me. The door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed. I cannot get up and give you anything. I tell you, though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, yet because of his impudence, he will rise and give him whatever he needs.

And I tell you, ask, and it will be given to you. Seek, and you will find. Knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks, receives, and the one who seeks, finds, and to the one who knocks, it will be opened.

[ 1 : 18 ] What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will instead of a fish, give him a serpent? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him?

So this winter and spring, we're walking through the Gospel of Luke, and in particular, we're studying this middle section of Luke's Gospel where Jesus is on his journey from Galilee up to Jerusalem.

And in this middle section of Luke's Gospel, this journey narrative, one of the main themes over and over again is the theme of discipleship. What does it mean to be a follower of Jesus?

And we need that kind of instruction today. We need to know what it looks like, what shape it takes, the heart of being a follower of Jesus. So that's what we're gonna be considering together over these coming weeks and few months as we're looking at Luke's Gospel.

And the specific topic here in our passage today is the topic of prayer. Jesus himself has just finished praying, and one of his disciples, Luke, doesn't tell us who, it could have been any of them, says, Lord, teach us to pray.

[ 2 : 37 ] Now, I wonder if you've ever found prayer to be hard, something that doesn't come naturally. Maybe for you, prayer is just the easiest thing in the world.

You just have rich hours of prayer end on end. You don't need any help. If that's you, this sermon is not gonna be very helpful for you. But for the rest of us in the room, this is gonna be for us.

So you can just zone out, scribble in your bulletin, whatever you wanna do. But if you're like the rest of us, maybe you found prayer to be frustrating. Maybe you found prayer to be even boring at times. Maybe you think of prayer as something you wish you could do well, but you struggle to do so. And then, of course, there seems to be so much out there about prayer.

I mean, how do you choose? Where to go? Who do you turn to for help? In the first century, there were various Jewish groups and they all had their own distinctive prayers that they used.

Apparently, as this first kind of references, apparently John the Baptist even taught his disciples specific prayers to say.

[ 3 : 46 ] And you know, today too, there's no shortage of options. Every religion seems to have its own practices of prayer. Even within Christianity, there are hundreds of books about prayer or

collections of prayers.

Where do we start? Have you ever wished that someone would just teach you how to really pray? Well, if that's you, and I know that's often how I feel too, you're in good company.

Every honest follower of Jesus at some point is going to say, Lord, teach me, teach us to pray. And the beautiful thing about this passage is that Jesus does just that.

He teaches us how to pray. And He does so by addressing the heart of two of our biggest problems or two of our biggest difficulties when it comes to prayer.

He's going to address one of those problems in verses two through four, and then He's going to address the second deeper problem in the rest of the passage. And this first difficulty that He addresses in verses two through four is the very real difficulty that oftentimes in prayer, we just don't know what to say.

[ 4 : 58 ] What are we actually supposed to be praying for? How many times have you sat down to pray and it feels like all that you can really come up with is, oh Lord, would you bless this person?

And then you look down at your prayer list maybe and you say, oh Lord, would you bless that person? And while you're at it, would you bless my spouse and bless my kids and bless my friends and bless my church and bless that guy I met at the gas station the other day?

And we don't even know what the word bless means. What are we even praying about? And yet we keep saying that and that's all we say. That's all we know what to do. And pretty soon, if we're brave enough to admit it, we get pretty bored praying like that, right?

And our mind immediately wanders to our to-do list for today and our prayer life lacks all the depth and profundity that real communion with God ought to be.

But in these first few verses, Jesus realizes what a real need that is. And so rather than launch into a long discourse about prayer, it's nature, it's theology, it's ins and outs.

[ 6 : 07 ] Jesus says, when you pray, say this. It's like when a child's learning to write their letters for the first time and the teacher sort of puts their hand over the child's hand and then helps them move the pencil across the page.

Jesus is here putting his hand over our hand to help us begin forming the words of prayer. It's an incredible picture of Jesus as a good teacher with kindness and tenderness.

When you pray, say this. And of course, what we have in these verses is what's come to be called the Lord's Prayer. There's another version of this same prayer in Matthew chapter 6.

Matthew's version is a little longer and it's probably the more familiar of the two, but in substance, they're really the same. And you'll have to remember that during his ministry, Jesus was constantly traveling from city to city, teaching his disciples and teaching various crowds.

And as like any traveling teacher of the day or today, he likely taught this prayer on numerous occasions with slight variations from time to time. So it shouldn't throw us off or surprise us too much that we have at least two versions of this recorded in the Gospels.

[ 7 : 17 ] Jesus probably taught this on numerous occasions. But when we come to the Lord's Prayer, I think there are two dangers that we want to avoid as we approach this prayer that Jesus teaches us.

On the one hand, we want to avoid the danger of just empty repetition. You know, even if you didn't grow up in the church, you might be able to recite the Lord's Prayer or at least parts of it will sound familiar.

You know, even as I was reading the text, you were probably like, wait a second, this kind of sounds familiar. Where did I hear this before? I know one guy whose high school football team would all recite it together before their games.

I don't know what they thought that was going to do before a football game, but they did it anyway. It's just become sort of part of our cultural wallpaper, the Lord's Prayer. So there's a danger that the Lord's Prayer just becomes something that's sort of religiously sounding that we just sort of repeat and recite and we don't really pause to make the prayer our own or to say the words with understanding and with meaning and with the kind of passion and depth that we're meant to pray it. But the other danger is that we swing the pendulum all the way to the other side and we never have any reference to the Lord's Prayer at all in our praying. We just ignore it or we avoid it.

[ 8 : 27 ] As if Jesus had said, when you pray, say whatever comes to mind. Well, that can't be the right way either, right? So rather, putting both of these extremes aside, what we see in the Lord's Prayer is that Jesus is actually giving us a rich pattern to follow and to internalize, a pattern that

should deeply shape and form our own praying.

Think of an athlete learning their sport. Some drills they will do over and over and over and over again so that in a real game situation it becomes second nature so that when they need to improvise, the fundamentals are in place to actually respond to the new challenges of the game with grace and with skill.

Music is another good example. A jazz musician will spend a lot of time learning every single note in a Coltrane song, playing it just like he played it. Not because they're going to play that exact same notes in their own performance but so that when they come to play their own song, they've deeply internalized the principles of how to improvise from the best and they actually have the skill to do it.

And prayer is a lot like that. It's a learned experience. And it can be helpful to actually pray and replay the Lord's Prayer word for word either together when we gather or individually in our own times of prayer so that it can sink into our hearts so that our times then of spontaneous prayer are formed and fashioned by the profundity and the power of what Jesus is teaching us here.

So the Lord's Prayer rather than something we just mindlessly recite or just we ignore altogether ought to be the scaffolding, the structure, the deep sort of pattern of our praying.

[10:21] So let's take a few moments then and consider this prayer together. Of course, it would take more than just one sermon to uncover all the riches of the Lord's Prayer, but I hope I can just highlight some things this morning that will help us to kind of make this prayer our own in the coming weeks and months.

The first thing to notice is that the prayer falls into two halves, doesn't it? And you see that the first half, the first part, is centered on God. It's about God's name and God's kingdom.

And in Matthew's version, he adds God's will. And then the second part considers our need. Give us. Forgive us. Lead us.

So there's God and then there's us. And I think there's a good lesson here. Too often our prayers simply begin and end with our own personal material needs.

But Jesus is teaching us here that first and foremost, prayer ought to be God-centered. We should pray for God's name, Jesus says.

[11:23] God's name is God's revealed character, who he's revealed himself to be, his nature.

Jesus says we should pray that God's name would be hallowed, which is a really strange word.

But it means to be set apart or acknowledged as holy. In other words, we pray that God would be seen and known and honored and loved as the God he really is.

That he would get all the praise and glory and reverence he deserves. That's what it means to pray that God's name would be hallowed. And Jesus says we should pray for God's kingdom to come.

That his reign of justice and grace would rule in our hearts and our churches and our communities and our families and our neighbors that we would know him and trust him and serve him as king overall. You know, if we spend more time praying for God's name to be exalted and for God's kingdom to come, we'd probably spend a lot less time being upset when it came to the status of our own name and our own kingdom, wouldn't we?

Maybe I'm not getting the credit I think I deserve. Maybe my plans and dreams and agendas aren't working out the way I planned. But you know, the more we pray for God's name to be exalted and God's kingdom to come, the more and more our hearts will come to rest in the fact that my real good and my real joy and my real purpose isn't ultimately found in the exaltation of my own reputation or my own agenda, but in the advance of God's name.

[13:03] And God's agenda. So first, the Lord's Prayer teaches us to be God-centered in our prayers, but second, right along with that, it teaches us to bring all, absolutely all of our needs to God, to hold nothing back.

Jesus teaches us to pray openly and honestly for provision and for pardon and for protection here. I actually stole that from Pastor Greg as we were talking about this passage earlier this week.

Isn't that nice? Provision, pardon, and protection. So let's look at provision. Give us each day our daily bread, Jesus says. That is, whatever is needful for our physical and material well-being.

God cares about those things and he wants you to ask him to provide them so that he can demonstrate his goodness and his all-sufficiency. mercy. But then Jesus also teaches us to pray for pardon.

Forgive us our sins. Now because of Jesus' finished work on the cross, everyone who places their trust in Christ is completely justified before God.

[14:11] So this request for pardon isn't saying that believers can lose their salvation along the track so they have to keep going back to God to get their justification renewed. No, that's not what Jesus is saying.

Jesus is saying, rather, he's showing us the need, he's saying that we need to be daily going back to his finished work that has justified us.

Whatever sins have been revealed in our life that day, we need to bring them anew, put them under the cross so that we can know the assurance and the power of his forgiveness.

We go back to an already complete forgiveness again and again, which then flows out, Jesus points here, flows out into a life of forgiving others. He says, for we ourselves forgive everyone who is indebted to us.

One writer put it this way, believers are not simply objects of forgiveness, they're conduits of forgiveness. Jesus, extending to others what God in grace has freely extended to them.

[15:17] In other words, as we pray for God to forgive our sins in the same breath, we pray for our own hearts that we would forgive others in the same way. So there's provision, there's pardon, and then there's protection.

Lead us not into temptation. And with this request, ultimately, Jesus is teaching us to be humble. To acknowledge our need for God every moment to keep us free from sin.

We acknowledge with this prayer that we are not spiritual superstars. That we can't make it on our own. That we need God's help to live holy lives and to withstand the tests to our faith that come every day.

So with these three requests, we're really meant to bring every area of our lives to God in prayer.

Now the last thing I want to point out about the Lord's Prayer is not just that it's very God-centered, that it involves all of our needs and all of our requests, but it's also a corporate prayer.

And I think we overlook this a lot. Jesus says it's about us and our. Give us. Forgive us. Lead us.

[16:26] This prayer isn't just for our private, personal requests. It's meant to be prayed together as the church. This is the church's prayer that Jesus taught us. You know, isn't it amazing that though cultural practices of prayer change from place and place and time to time, you could go to almost any Christian church of any time and any place and you'd find them praying these words.

Isn't that a beautiful thing? So yes, from time to time, honoring the corporate nature of this prayer might mean actually repraying these actual words together in unison during a church service or during a prayer gathering.

But more than that, it will mean praying the substances of these requests with one another and for one another.

Take any of these five petitions that Luke lists here and consider what would it mean for us to pray this as a church? For example, how might we be praying as a church for God's name, for his revealed character to be seen as holy in us and among us and around us, through us?

Well, one way would be for our love to grow for one another more and more. Jesus said that the world would know we are his disciples by our love for one another.

[17:58] God is love, John says in his first epistle. No one has ever seen God. If we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us. We might pray, God, make your name great among us by empowering us to be a loving church.

Help us to reflect your self-giving love that you displayed on the cross. You loved us when we didn't love you. We were your enemies and you died for us, so help us to love one another even when it seems like we are not being loved in return.

And may our city see this love that we share, this supernatural love, and may they know how great and how holy you are. Father, hallowed be your name.

And each one of the petitions could be expanded like that in infinite ways as we take this prayer and make it our own, not just personally, but corporately. You see, the Lord's prayer is beautiful in its simplicity, isn't it?

It's so straightforward. We don't have to heap up lots and lots of phrases to pray how Jesus taught us, and yet this prayer is utterly profound. Each one of these petitions is like a mountain range that you can scale and climb and explore.

[ 19 : 17 ] And the more time you spend praying and meditating on one of these great summits, the better perspective you get of all the others, like climbing one mountain and then getting an even better view of the mountain range on the other side of the valley.

Each one of these prayers should become our own. So friends, when you encounter the difficulty of not knowing what to say in prayer and how many of us have been there, take up this prayer Jesus has taught us.

Pray it and make it your own. Say it in your own words. Fill out the petitions with the details of your own life, with the details of the life of our church. See how other prayers in scripture expand on the same themes.

I've been spending some time reading the Psalms lately and it's striking how many of the petitions in the Psalms in one way or another can be connected to the Lord's prayer. This is the Lord himself teaching us to pray.

How could we not make it the heartbeat of our own prayer life? Surely Jesus knew what he was doing when he taught us this prayer as a pattern for our own. But there's another problem, isn't there?

[ 20 : 26 ] On the one hand, prayer is hard because often we don't know what to say, but there's a deeper difficulty that we encounter. We often struggle to pray because, well, we don't think it'll make any difference.

Right? God doesn't seem to answer, so we stop asking. Have you been there? wondering what use is it to pray?

And I think this problem really gets to the heart of prayer. We need words to say, yes, we need Jesus to put his hand over ours, as it were, and to help us form the words, but just as much, we need Jesus to teach our hearts, to speak to our hearts, to encourage us to pray when we've grown tired or weary or even cynical.

And to do that, Jesus tells a story. Imagine at midnight, he says, you hear a knock on the door. A friend has just arrived to your home on a journey. He's traveled through the middle of the night as so many travelers would in Jesus' day to avoid the burning heat of the Middle Eastern sun.

[ 21 : 40 ] He's arrived at your doorstep at midnight, but you have nothing to set before your friend. Not even a few loaves of bread for a single meal. And of course, hospitality meant everything in Jesus' day.

It would have been massively embarrassing, not just for you, but for your whole village to leave a guest unprovided for. That would have been like a big social no-no.

Hugely embarrassing not to provide for your guest. But you're all out. And of course, the next batches of bread won't be baked until the morning. And unfortunately, there are no 7-Elevens who are open 24-7 in the first century, so you are out of luck.

You are not going to get some hostess cakes to sort of set before your friend. What do you do? Well, the only thing anyone would do in your shoes, you quickly head outside, go to your neighbor's door, and you start knocking.

Ah, open up. I need to borrow some food. Lord, somebody just arrived. They didn't text me beforehand, and I don't have anything to give to them. And then Jesus says, imagine this answer comes from within.

[ 22 : 51 ] From your neighbor's small, one-room peasant home just like yours, you hear him call out, ah, really? Come on. I finally got the kids to sleep.

I am not going to get up and give you any bread. It is not going to happen. There ain't no way. I already locked the door. Do you know how hard it is to unlock the door?

I'm sleeping. I cannot get up and help you. Go knock on someone else's door. But then Jesus says this.

He says to this group of first century people exactly what they know he's going to say. They all know that that neighbor might not get up and give you bread on account of your friendship but because it's so embarrassing to have you knocking on his door late at night and because all the neighbors can hear and because the reality is in your village nobody wants to be that guy who refused to give a few loaves of bread to someone in need so he could show the all-important thing of hospitality.

In other words, because your lazy neighbor wants to save face, Jesus says you know he's going to get up and give you whatever you need. The social pressure is just going to be too great and he's going to do it.

[ 24 : 13 ] And I think Jesus' audience would have kind of chuckled as he told them this parable just as you and I do today as we think about this grumpy neighbor complaining that he doesn't want to wake up the kids and yet still rolling out of bed because he's embarrassed by the racket being made and not wanting to come across as stingy and inhospitable.

Many in Jesus' audience might have actually been that guy on an occasion or two. Who had a knock on their door and had to get up and give the bread. And the point Jesus wants us to see is this.

Even if your grumpy neighbor, if even your grumpy neighbor will get out of bed and give you what you need, if even he's going to get up and respond and answer your request, how much more will your generous heavenly father who neither slumbers nor sleeps, who knows every request before you even ask, how much more is he going to hear every request you make and give you exactly what you need?

So ask, Jesus says, and seek and knock and don't give up. And then he switches the metaphor and says, if earthly fathers know how to give good gifts to their children, how much more your heavenly father?

Ask and it'll be given to you. Seek and you'll find. Knock and it'll be open to you. Now of course, ask and it will be given to you.

[ 25 : 44 ] Doesn't mean that God will give us absolutely anything and everything we ask for. Our heavenly father is so much infinitely wiser than us and has infinitely better plans than we could imagine.

The divine story that he is telling might not go according to our timeline. The divine story that God's telling in our lives might not follow our plot arc that we would have scripted.

But that doesn't mean that God's sovereignty and love and wisdom and patience are all working for your good. Indeed, for your greatest and highest good.

You see, what Jesus is trying to drive home in the second half of the passage is the unimaginable reality contained in that single word with which the Lord prayer begins, Father.

You don't get it, do you? He says. God is now your father. Jesus is inviting us to experience the same intimacy that he has as the eternal son of God with God the father.

[ 26 : 56 ] He's saying, you now step into that because I've come. God is the God of God as their ministry that his followers now also have God as their father.

Now, I know that your earthly father may have done nothing but bring pain and heartache in your life. Lots of us can attest to that in this room. But don't you see that is not how God relates to his children.

children. He's the perfect father who holds nothing back in his love toward you. Think about the mission of Jesus himself that climaxes in his death and resurrection.

The heart of compassion that Jesus constantly shows the way in which he's willing to absorb the shame of the people around them and give them his honor. All of that is Jesus carrying out and expressing the father's love for you.

And as Paul says in Romans 8.32, he who did not spare his own son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?

[ 28 : 11 ] You see, friends, the cross is the undeniable sign that our father loves us and will always be loving to us in all things.

And the supreme gift of the father as Jesus highlights in Luke 11 here is the Holy Spirit. You see, because of what Jesus has done, we not only share Jesus' status as sons and daughters of the father, but wonder of wonders, we become partakers of the divine nature.

not just a new status, but a whole new nature. The sharing of God's own life with us through the Holy Spirit.

The same Holy Spirit that indwelt Jesus throughout his ministry now dwells in us. You know, in prayer, you may not always get what you ask for, but in this kind of prayer that Jesus teaches us, you will always get more and more of God himself.

So when you ask, Jesus says, ask confidently. Ask, seek, knock, for the follower of Jesus' prayer always, always makes a difference.

[ 29 : 42 ] Because you see, in Jesus, we don't pray to some distant God, we don't pray to some far off deity, we pray to the holy, loving, triune God, our heavenly Father, who sent his Son to atone for our sins, and who sends his Spirit to make us partakers of the new creation, to put something in us

that is so powerful and rich and new that connects us to the age to come, and that will draw us there, whether we realize it or not.

So this is what it looks like to pray as followers of Jesus. Confident that God is our Father through the work of Jesus, we can take up these bold petitions, may your name be hallowed, may your kingdom come, give us what we need, forgive us when we've fallen short, lead us in your paths of righteousness, and we can ask with expectant trust that our heavenly Father not only hears, but he answers, answers, and he answers with a readiness and an abundance that flows over even to the giving of his very own self and the person of the Holy Spirit.

So friends, this week and this season in our life as a church, may we commit to a renewed practice of prayer. Where is your difficulty?

Is it because you don't know what to say? Is it because you don't know what difference it will make? Do you see what Jesus is teaching you here? You can take up this Lord's Prayer as your own, and you can expect a fresh outpouring of his Spirit as the result.

Let's pray. Let's pray. God, in the quiet of this moment, we confess that Lord, prayer is difficult for us.

[ 31 : 50 ] Lord, we confess that oftentimes it's not just the busyness of our schedules that gets in the way. Lord, it's not just the crowding of our responsibilities. It's not just our distractedness that keeps us from prayer, but we confess, Father, that it's a deep unbelief in your goodness and your willingness to hear us.

It's a deep doubt that you really do respond to us as a father responds to his children. Father, as we gather around this table again and take the Lord's Supper, would we taste and see afresh with the eyes of our hearts that you are exceedingly, wonderfully good.

And that if you have indeed given us your Son, how will you not also graciously in your own time give us all good things?

Father, we pray this in the name of Jesus. Amen.