

02

Know How to Pray

“The LORD is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth.”

Psalm 145:18, ESV

What is Prayer?

Simply put, prayer is a conversation with God. Just like in any other conversation, we both speak and listen. We speak about our joys, our frustrations, and our questions. We listen to Him in a lot of ways, but primarily through His Word, the Bible.

Learning to Pray

The question of how to pray is not new. Some of Jesus’ earliest followers asked Him that very question. His answer has been known as “The Lord’s Prayer” for thousands of years. This prayer is found in both Matthew’s and Luke’s gospels. To learn to pray we are going to use Jesus’ prayer as a model.

However, it is important to note that before Jesus teaches them to pray, He teaches them how *not* to pray.

How Not to Pray

Read Matthew 6:5-6

The hypocrites Jesus is talking about are the religious people of His day. They were making a show of prayer. They used big, fancy words so that others would be impressed by how good they were at praying. For them, prayer was less about a conversation with God, and more about the opinions of others.

Jesus contrasts their praying style with the word “secret” multiple times. He does this to make a significant point. Secret things are

things we hold inside. In other words, *prayer is between our heart and God*. We're not to worry about saying the wrong thing or using the wrong words, especially when it comes to praying with others out loud. God simply wants our prayers to be genuine.

Read Matthew 6:7-8

The Gentiles (those who were not Jewish) had a different problem with prayer. They weren't concerned about saying the right words so others would hear them. They were concerned about saying the right words so that God would hear them. For them prayer was a formula. Say the right things in the right way, and God has to respond.

Maybe you've tried to pray before but felt a sense of inadequacy. Maybe you assumed you didn't get what you wanted because you didn't pray the right way, or say the right words, or pray enough times. There are no magical words that get more of His attention. Remember, prayer is about your heart connecting with God. He actually knows our hearts better than we do. He already knows what we need.

Therefore, when we pray we don't come with showy words or empty repetition. We come as we are, with our hearts open.

The Lord's Prayer

Read Matthew 6:9-13

Let's take a closer look at each section of Jesus' prayer.

“Our Father in heaven, hallowed by your name.”

Jesus begins in an unusual place. When people pray how do we often begin? We begin with “me” in mind.

God help me...

God give me...

God if you will do this for me...

Prayer often begins as a self-centered exercise. Instead, Jesus turns our attention to focus first on God and His character. He

is holy, meaning He is set apart, different than us. This is an acknowledgement that He operates differently than we do. His heart is purer. His judgements are more just. His ways are better than our ways.

When we pray for His name to be hallowed, we are letting go of the way we think things should be, and we are trusting in His ways.

An example of this kind of prayer might be..

“God, thank you for your ways. Thank you that though I may not always understand them, I can trust them because You are good.”

“Your Kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.”

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When you hear the word “kingdom”, what comes to mind? Maybe you picture rolling green hills, stone castles, and knights in jousting competitions. That’s the kind of kingdom books and movies have placed in our minds, but there are still kingdoms today. Nearly 30 countries in our world are kingdoms, and they all have something in common. Their identity and power is strongly associated with a physical location. However, when Jesus began His ministry, He makes a statement that goes against the grain of the way we think about kingdoms.

Read Mark 1:14-15

What Jesus is saying here is the God’s Kingdom isn’t a place that we go. It’s something that He is aiming to bring to us. It isn’t anchored to a location. It’s anchored to the good news that He has come to not only save us, but also to introduce us to the ways of His Kingdom, ways like faith, forgiveness, peace, generosity, and love.

In praying for His Kingdom to come we are praying for the very things that He calls us to enact in this world. Yes, we pray for things like peace and forgiveness, but we also are to look for opportunities to make those a reality in the relationships around us.

An example of this kind of prayer might be...

“Father, because peace is a part of Your Kingdom, I pray for that peace in my neighborhood.”

“Give us this day our daily bread.”

In this section of the prayer Jesus emphasizes twice the daily nature of prayer. He encourages us to pray for “this day” and “daily” bread. This is a prayer of dependance. It is acknowledging in the moment that we need Him to provide.

This can be a difficult prayer for us to pray when the bills are paid and the pantry is full because we can falsely believe that we did those things. We rolled up our sleeves. We did the work.

While that may be somewhat true, there is a deeper truth at work. Who gave you the arms the sleeves are rolled upon? Who provided the work to pay for the shirt? Who gave you a mind to perform the tasks needed to secure and keep the job?

Praying for daily bread is acknowledging our physical need for God.

An example of this kind of prayer might be...

“Lord, thank you for providing what I need today. Thank you for waking me up. Thank you for the food that gives me energy. Thank you for the job that provides my income. Help me to see what You provide as enough. May it bring me joy, but never greed.”

“Forgive our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.”

Here, Jesus ties two prayer ideas together. First, we are asking God to forgive us of our debts. Some translations use the word transgressions or sins, but they are communicating the same thing. They are the thoughts and actions that go against the holiness of God. We ask Him to forgive our sins. How will He respond?

Read Psalm 103:10-13

Read 1 John 1:7-9

Isn't that amazing? Because of what Jesus has done for us through the cross we can bring our sin to God and He will remove them.

But now comes the tough part: Forgiving those who have sinned against us.

Read Ephesians 4:32

We forgive because we have been forgiven. That is not an easy task, which is why we bring it to God in prayer.

An example of this kind of prayer might be...

“God thank you that you have made a promise to forgive my sin. As I interact with my family, my coworkers, my neighbors...help me to be like You. Help me to forgive them when they sin against me. Help me to let go of offenses easily and be a light in this world like You have been a light to me.”

“Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.”

Finally, Jesus teaches us to pray against temptation and evil, but not just any evil. The words He uses here depict a certain kind of evil. *The* evil. This is a reference to Satan. He is the adversary of God. He has been at work separating humanity from God since the beginning of time. This is a prayer of awareness, knowing that there are forces aiming to pull us away from God and His goodness.

Read 1 Peter 5:8

One of the most common ways Satan likes to “devour” us is to attack our identity. He whispers in our ears that we're not good enough, we're not loved, or that God is disappointed in us. This is why last week we spent time reinforcing who we are in Christ. His Word defines who we are, nothing else.

An example of this kind of prayer might be...

“Father, I want to follow You with my whole heart, but sometimes my desires get the best of me. Today, guard my heart from temptation, and guard it from the evil one who would love nothing more than to see me experience the guilt and shame of my sin.”

Prayer

As you begin this journey of learning to pray remember three important things.

1. Prayer is like a muscle. The more you work it, the easier it becomes.
2. Structure often helps us stay on task when it comes to prayer. Is a formal structure necessary for prayer? No. However, many fail and give up praying because they don't know how to pray or what to pray for. This is why using the Lord's Prayer is a good way to start. It provides a path for prayer that is easy to remember and follow. However, it's not the only way. There are a lot of great models for prayer.
3. Prayer is a gift. Think about what is happening when you pray. You are communicating with the God of the universe, the One who made you. He has given us, through Jesus, full access to His ear.

Read Hebrew 4:15-16

How are we to draw near to Him? With confidence. Confidence that we are understood, we are heard, and we are loved.

Questions to Consider

- What are some of your misunderstandings or frustrations about prayer?
- What is your experience with prayer? On a scale of 1-10 rate how comfortable you currently are praying on your own. On a scale of 1-10 rate how comfortable you are praying out loud in a group.
- What most stood out to you about the Lord's prayer?
- What is something you will be talking to God about this week?

Next Session

Take some time this week to pray and speak with God using the Lord's Prayer as your guide.

Next time we will focus on learning how to read the Bible. As mentioned above, this is a vital part of conversing with God. To prepare for our time together *read Psalm 1*.