

The Twelve | Enrolled in the School of Jesus (C)

Lessons on Prayer

Luke 11.1-13
February 7, 2021

It happened that while Jesus was praying in a certain place, after He had finished, one of His disciples said to Him, "Lord, teach us to pray just as John also taught his disciples." ² And He said to them, "When you pray, say: 'Father, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. ³ 'Give us each day our daily bread. ⁴ 'And forgive us our sins, for we ourselves also forgive everyone who is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation.'"

⁵ Then He said to them, "Suppose one of you has a friend, and goes to him at midnight and says to him, 'Friend, lend me three loaves; ⁶ for a friend of mine has come to me from a journey, and I have nothing to set before him'; ⁷ and from inside he answers and says, 'Do not bother me; the door has already been shut and my children and I are in bed; I cannot get up and give you anything.' ⁸ "I tell you, even though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, yet because of his persistence he will get up and give him as much as he needs. ⁹ "So I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. ¹⁰ "For everyone who asks, receives; and he who seeks, finds; and to him who knocks, it will be opened. ¹¹ "Now suppose one of you fathers is asked by his son for a fish; he will not give him a snake instead of a fish, will he? ¹² "Or if he is asked for an egg, he will not give him a scorpion, will he? ¹³ "If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him?"

We're looking at the "source documents" of the Christian faith, the Four Gospels.

We're especially interested in why Jesus Christ spent so much time and energy on the twelve young men who were in His school. We're exploring HOW He went about training them. AND how their training should inform how the church trains shapes people today.

Here, the students ask the Teacher for a lesson – they want to be taught to pray. Disciples ought to pray – that seems to make sense.

I notice on social media that people solicit prayer from friends and often these friends reply, "My thoughts and prayers" or "sending prayers your way". Even in our un-churched society everyone seems to pray. People of all religions pray and even irreligious people pray.

The disciples prayed – my friend John said "Of course these guys prayed: they were serious Jewish young men – they'd witnessed their fathers and teachers praying... BUT something about the way Jesus prayed really caught their attention."

So what was it? If Jesus Christ's whole approach to life and spirituality and morality and religion – if it was all upside-down and different – AND IF the early church was like the “UN-RELIGION” well how would the Jesus-Method of prayer be different?

If you're already a Christian, how is your practice of prayer? Is it different from your Facebook friends (“sending prayers your way”)? What IS the radically different way that Jesus gives and gets His disciples (ancient and modern) to pray?

So let's look at it:

- 1) A Different Way of Prayer**
- 2) A Different Reason for Prayer**
- 3) A Different Result from Prayer**

It'd be difficult to find a person who really believed in prayer who was satisfied with his/her practice of prayer. If I asked for a show of hands, I'm not sure if anyone would say, “Yes! I'm happy with how much I pray and how effectively I pray.”

And if we asked, “why?”...asked, “well, what's keeping you from the practice of prayer you want to have or that you think you should have?” I think most people would say EITHER, “I don't know how...don't know what to say...” OR “I don't make it a priority... I let other things get in the way...I guess I don't think prayer is really as important as I say it is...If I had to be open about it, I'm not motivated.”

I think that's what it boils down to: either I don't know how (need instruction) or I do know how but I don't do it (need motivation/discipline).

We want to know how to pray (the form) AND we want to actually be able to do it...because it may be possible to know HOW and yet...not be able to keep it up...not be able to develop a practice of prayer.

Apparently, there was something about the way Jesus Christ prayed that provoked admiration or at least curiosity from His students... And as they were coming to think of Him as Rabbi...and a great rabbi...they wanted Him to do what all the great rabbis did for their students...to sort of pass on the secret, magic, grandiose, impressive prayers that ONLY great spiritual masters could ever compose.

And when they ask, “Teach us to pray!” Jesus answers BOTH our issues – the model prayer (1st paragraph) is the instruction (form/how to) and the two little stories are the motivation for the discipline “Teach us to pray”: what to say and how to keep on.

In the model prayer, Jesus gives a very different approach...not this magic formula/incantation or perfect eloquence. It's first, very simple/short, 38 words in the original language. Children can learn it.

Is it to be repeated...over and over again?... No (Jesus actually taught against mindless repetition in prayer Matthew 6.7 – Matthew is 58 words with a tag and Luke's is 38 words – so not the exact words like an incantation). It's small and simple, not a formula but a seed. It suggests all the big categories that can be unfolded in prayer. It grows and expands. It primes the pump for an infinite number of prayers in all these different categories. It's a SEED-PRAYER.

Second, not only SIMPLE (like a seed) but it's ROOTED like a tree. It's rooted in a view of God. It's fixated on this God and King Who ought to be recognized and admired. Every beauty or pleasure we ever encounter in this life is like a faint echo of Him. We may say a thing is beautiful but He is Beauty Himself...and this prayer wants that reality to be universally recognized. "Hallowed be Thy Name".

Finally, we could say SIMPLE (like a seed) ROOTED in God (like a tree) and thirdly FRUITFUL (like a grove). It's a prayer deeply aware of others. "Give US this day OUR daily bread...Forgive US OUR sins...for we also forgive OTHERS..."

Eugene Peterson makes a sharp distinction between solitude and privacy. There's a place for solitude in prayer (where we withdraw from others in order to return more deeply engaged to listen) but privacy is getting away from others so I don't have to be bothered by them. And in this way...there's no such thing as a private prayer. "We can no more pray a private prayer than we can speak a private language" (Earth and Altar, p. 16). We're bearing fruit together like trees in an orchard: common soil, all interconnected ...One God over all...and all people with common needs, facing common dangers.

OK...so if that's how I pray...using this seed prayer (simple, rooted in God and praying always with others in mind...like an orchard) if that's the instruction I need...HOW DO I KEEP IT GOING? How do I sustain a practice of prayer?

Well, the big idea here is TRUST...to trust in a God who is mighty over all...who is the essence of power and beauty for whose appearing the whole universe LONGS – Thy Kingdom Come is our greatest need...

BUT this same Almighty King is also a Father to be trusted. That's really the big idea of the whole passage. You think that God is like a stingy, sleepy, grouchy neighbor (and even if that's what He is...it would still make sense to bug Him 'til He answers).

And you think God is one of those grumpy, domineering, bossy jerks such as we sometimes find in families to this very day (though I remind you: even the worst kinds of fathers still feed their kids when the kids ask for food – so it'd STILL make sense to ask God for your needs!)

“BUT”, says Jesus Christ, “the true God I come to reveal is like NONE OF THESE CHARACTERS...He’s better than a grouchy neighbor ...in fact better than a good neighbor...HE’S A FATHER...and not a mean, bossy father but a totally loving, attentive, wise, perfect Father... better than the earthly ideal.

This idea has to be central in your prayers...it’s gotta be the first word, “Father, hallowed be Your name...” and this thought has to pervade the whole prayer and be the prevailing attitude.

“I know,” says Jesus Christ, “you look around in this fallen world and THINK you see evidence to the contrary...see evidence that God is an evil father (like we are: imperfect and short tempered ...one day indulging our children and next day mean and impatient... capricious).

YOU THINK the apparent delay in answered prayer means that God is asleep...or can’t be bothered... but I am here to tell you...here to show you...despite the APPARENT evidence...the Holy, Holy, Holy God loves you deeply...like a perfect Father.”

But the evidence you think you see...is NOT what it appears to be...LOOK at Me...soon you’ll see...ROCK SOLID, undeniable, irrefutable evidence that God is the perfect Father...

I, His eternal Son, His perfect Image (Heb 1.1-2), the Apple of his eye, the One He cherishes with a brightness and heat that surpasses all the stars and super-novas combined...HE WILL PART WITH ME...in order to have YOU.

He will turn His enemies...into His own sons and daughters in the moment when I am clothed with your guilt...and your rebellion is charged to ME... when I pray to the Father... and call Him not “Abba... Papa...” but I will lose the privilege of that address and will call Him the generic, “My God, My God...”

In that moment, when I am forsaken by Him with Whom I am One...I will give away My eternal status to YOU...and you’ll no longer be strangers but sons.

God the Father is that serious about having YOU as His own beloved children... He will punish Me IN YOUR PLACE.

“And from now on...whenever you find yourself asking, ‘Why is God not answering? (Is He asleep like a bad neighbor? Is He corrupt and mean like a cruel father?)’... in the moment, you THINK you have this evidence...let My cross be the lens through which you see... THIS delay is

NOT meant to hurt you and it will in fact help you and heal you. The Almighty Father brings good...even out of death...watch me... look at My Cross/Resurrection and you'll see it's so."

This GOOD thing that you're sure you should have... you just "KNOW" a loving Father would WANT you to have... in that moment the Cross tells you, "Father knows best...only trust Him...only trust Him."

Different WAY of Prayer; Different REASON for Prayer and last: different result from PRAYER. While every form of spirituality uses prayer to pry blessings out of the hand of a stingy deity or to get the universe to favor you...or to get advantages...or blessings...or salvation, Jesus Christ's way of prayer doesn't aim at blessings from God; it aims at God Himself.

V. 13 - "If you fathers, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him?"

Let's face it – we really don't know what's good for us. When we ask for what's GOOD and in keeping with His infinite wisdom/will – He gives us our daily bread – gives what's good. When we ask for a rattlesnake or a scorpion because we're sure it would be good – He withholds those things.

But what He will NOT withhold is what we really need (and really want though we don't often see it and that is His own Presence – the Holy Spirit)

HE IS THE GREAT BLESSING YOU WANT, and NEED AND FOR WHICH YOUR HEART TRULY HUNGERS!

Why settle for the blessings of God when you can have God Himself...can be tenderly at rest in Him, can know Him as present with you?

People say, "Prayer changes things" and God does change things...but prayer REALLY changes US! It awakens us to TRUST. And when we trust, when, under the Holy Spirit's influence, we're seeing the world, even really hard stuff through the story of the Cross (and that becomes how I know God loves me as the Perfect Father), when I'm seeing through THAT lens, THEN a crust of bread becomes a feast... and a pain/heartache that drives me to pray becomes a pleasure.

Without the Spirit, though, nothing will satisfy. Our souls will be restless until they find their rest in God... And that rest only comes to the degree that we receive and enjoy the Spirit of Sonship for Whom We pray and BY which we PRAY and cry out, "Our Father, Abba Father."

Pray.

The kingdom for which the twelve prayed was a shadow, hence their disappointment and despair when Jesus was put to death: the egg of hope, which their fond imagination had been hatching, brought forth the scorpion of the cross, and they fancied that God had mocked and deceived them. But they lived to see that God was true and good, and that they had deceived themselves, and that all which Christ had told them had been fulfilled. And all who wait on God ultimately make a similar discovery, and unite in testifying that "the Lord is good unto them that wait for Him, to the soul that seeketh him." (Lam 3.25)

For these reasons should all men pray and not faint.

- A.B. Bruce, *The Training of the Twelve* (1894)

We can no more have a private prayer than we can have a private language. A private language is impossible every word spoken carries with it a long history of development in complex communities of experience. All speech is relational making a community of speakers and listeners. So to is prayer... we are involved whether we will it or not, in a community of the Word spoken and read, understood and obeyed (or misunderstood and disobeyed). We can do this in solitude, but we cannot do it in private. It involves an Other and others.

- Eugene Peterson, *Earth and Altar: The Community of Prayer In a Self-Bound Society* (1985)