



LORD, TEACH US HOW TO PRAY

All the disciples grew up around prayer and participated as good Jewish men in regular prayer. Yet when they watched Jesus pray, when they heard him teach on it, and when they saw what happened when he prayed they decided that they were barely beginners. They were often with him when he prayed but would not have witnessed his most personal and intense prayer times, those times when he intentionally went off by himself to pray. They would often wake in the morning and find that he had already gone off to pray. While the rest of them were getting ready for bed, he frequently went to pray. Jesus prayed as though he was fed by it. Jesus prayed as though he would make a wrong decision without it. Jesus prayed as though his life depended on it. Jesus prayed as though the plan of God depended on it. His prayer life was rich, deep, powerful, and constant.

The disciples most likely discussed it together. Together they decided that they would ask him to teach them how to pray. One day after Jesus finished one of his prayer times and when they couldn't bear waiting any longer the disciples all gathered around and one of them asked, "Lord, teach us to pray." What they meant was "Lord, teach us to pray like you do." Jesus had been waiting for them to ask, and he was ready to teach.

At this point Jesus could have launched into the most phenomenal discourse on the nature and theology of prayer. He could have explained things about prayer to the disciples that would have shown them how prayer impacts the work of the kingdom from God's standpoint. He didn't. As the smartest and wisest man ever, he knew better than anyone that prayer is an expression of our relationship with the Father. Prayer is a means of confessing his place and ours, and how we desire everything around us to be formed and molded in exactly the manner God desires with nothing hindering that result. Instead of offering only philosophical concepts Jesus gave them the most brilliant format and practical guidance for approaching God. He knew that an understanding of and passion for prayer would develop as they spent time with God in this way. The gift he gave them that day is beyond compare. He replied to their request, "When you pray, say:

Our Father in heaven
Hallowed be your name
Your kingdom come,
Your will be done
On earth as it is in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our debts,
As we also have forgiven our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation,
But deliver us from the evil one."

Matthew 6:9 – 13, Luke 11:2 – 4

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We seem to have relegated this prayer to our children, or we may even use it as a joint prayer during corporate worship. Both of these are wonderful, but if we only use the prayer at these times, we do not fully understand the gift Jesus gave. The disciples wanted Jesus to teach them how to pray. After all, he was the Messiah and who else would understand prayer. They wanted him to teach them because when he prayed, a single portion of food fed multitudes; when he prayed, the lame walked and the blind saw; when he prayed the dead were raised, and when he prayed the glory of God was revealed. Also bear in mind Jesus' audience was not a group of children that day. His disciples were a mixed bag of men. Jesus was teaching the muscular, leathered fisherman to pray. Jesus was teaching the professional tax collector to pray. Jesus was teaching a young man in whom there was no guile to pray. Jesus was teaching a zealot who preferred all Romans dead to pray. This prayer had to cross personalities, ages, cultures, jobs as well as teach this unusual collection of men how to pray just like Jesus. This one prayer had to touch the hearts of vastly different individuals and change their lives. This prayer still today crosses centuries, nations and still teaches Christians how to pray like Jesus. Jesus is saying, "If you want to learn to pray like me, then let these words, concepts and concerns permeate all you are and become your prayer."



"...we learn to use the words given by him to speak intelligently and lovingly to our heavenly Father, with whom we are engaged in a common life. But we do use those words. And with them as foundation, and only so, we move out – partly on our own initiative, which God elicits and expects – into prayer over the details of our life and times 'under the sun.'"

Dallas Willard, The Divine Conspiracy, pp. 255



The Perfect Answer

His answer was part of Jesus' teaching the disciples how to pray. He taught them by modeling prayer before instructing them with words about prayer. When he used words, he did not give them a formula. He didn't tell them how many times a day to pray, or specify what postures to use when they prayed. His reply teaches the basics of prayer, and provides the foundation on which a rich and effective life of prayer can be built. This is a prayer into which disciples grow. Many of us memorized it as children, and when we became adults many of us set it aside thinking it was for children. None of us grow out of it, and it is a mistake for any of us to think we could.

This prayer is complete, and it addresses every part of life. In this broad brush stroke Jesus covers the entire canvas of prayer. We use the term prayer almost glibly, but here Jesus tells us it encompasses all of the ways we do and should relate to the Father,

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ourselves, others, and even the world around us. There is more to prayer than these words, but these words express the heart of prayer. If you want to grow in the life and blessings of an effective prayer life, then let this prayer become the foundation on which you build.

- Q** List the different requests you find in the prayer. This is not a question with “right” and “wrong” answers. We want you to spend a little time thinking about the portions of the prayer.

Following Jesus’ Model Ourselves

Jesus’ answer when we ask him to teach us to pray is the same as that he gave the disciples that day. Participation in the work of God and great blessings await those of us who are willing to spend a lifetime learning to pray as Jesus taught us. If you have not yet started this journey, this is the day you should begin.

What did Jesus mean when he said we were to pray like this? Did he mean that we should be certain to use his words? Maybe, but I believe he means more than that. He means that when we pray we are to understand, seek and cling to our father who dwells in the heavens. He means that when we pray we are to learn to ask him for every thing we need, and then learn total dependence on him. He means that when we pray we learn to receive and give forgiveness. He means that we ask for his provision in faith, even if we do not know how he will provide. He means that our lives change so that our prayers are full and honest expressions of what Jesus is giving and teaching in these words. Praying his will requires the courage that only comes through faith. Think about it, you and I need to be radically changed by God in order to fully pray this way. Interestingly, it is as we honestly pray this prayer that we will experience the very changes we need to in order to enter into it more fully.

How can we use this prayer today?

- ✦ Pray the prayer exactly as it is written in scripture.
- ✦ Pray through the prayer without embellishing on it. However, personalize it for yourself, your immediate family, others about whom you care, your church, your church leaders and their families, missionaries you know, etc.
- ✦ Follow the prayer as an outline and pray in depth about each section. If time does not permit, then select one portion of the prayer on which to focus.

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- ✦ Since the prayer is plural, arrange to meet with others and spend time praying through the prayer together.
- ✦ In addition to taking time to pray through the prayer without distraction, use this as a way to guide your prayer at other times through the day.
 - ☑ Follow one of the recommendations above while driving or during other normal tasks of the day.
 - ☑ Pray through pieces of the prayer as and when you have time during the day.
 - ☑ Whenever you see someone else, briefly offer some portion of this prayer to the Lord for them as seems appropriate.
- ✦ Focus on a different portion of the prayer to pray on different days of the week.
- ✦ Locate and study passages of scripture that discuss the topics addressed in this prayer and incorporate them into your prayer time.
- ✦ Intentionally walk through your neighborhood, or a shopping area, or your office quietly praying this prayer for as many as possible.



“Many people make little progress in learning to pray simply because they have not seriously entered into Jesus’ answer to the explicit request, ‘Teach us to pray.’ Praying is a form of speaking, and it is best learned by entering into the words that Jesus gave us to say to God when we pray.”

Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy*, pp. 254 – 255



Scripture Memory

"This, then, is how you should pray:

" Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from the evil one.

Matthew 6:9 – 13