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# “Lord, Teach Us to Pray” (11:1-13)

Leon Barnes

*“And it came about that while He 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.’ And He said to them, ‘When you pray, say: “Father, hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread. And forgive us our sins, for we ourselves also forgive everyone who is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation.” . . .’ And I say to you, ask, and it shall be given to you; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened to you. For everyone who asks, receives; and he who seeks, finds; and to him who knocks, it shall be opened” (11:1-13).*

Do you ever feel that your prayers have become more a ritual or habit than a vital part of your life? Sometimes I do. The apostles of Jesus probably had some of those feelings as well. They were praying men. They were reared in Jewish homes and had been taught to pray from childhood. They had probably been satisfied with their prayer life until they came into a close relationship with Jesus and observed Him in prayer. When they heard Jesus praying, they felt as if their prayer life was inadequate. For this reason they asked Him for help, saying, “Lord, teach us to pray just as John also taught his disciples” (11:1).

It is amazing that they had heard Jesus teach with a power and simplicity that they had never seen before, yet they never came to Him saying, “Lord, teach us to teach.” Jesus was the greatest preacher who ever lived, but they did not ask him to teach them to preach; but when He prayed,

they saw such a vast difference in His praying and their own that they came to Him wanting to be taught to pray.

In response, Jesus gave the model for them to use and build upon. He said, “When you pray, say: ‘Father, hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread. And forgive us our sins, for we ourselves also forgive everyone who is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation’” (11:2-4). Most of us learned this prayer as children, with one distinction. We learned Matthew’s account of the prayer in Matthew 6:9-13 rather than Luke’s. Look with me at this great pattern for prayer.

## **GOD, OUR FATHER**

Jesus, began to teach them to pray. Notice the word “how” is not in the text. This is not a method; it is teaching us *to pray*. The first encouragement for prayer is our view of God. If we see God as “Our Father in heaven,” it is much easier to go to Him and pour out our hearts. He will understand. He will forgive over and over again because He loves us more than we can even love ourselves. This picture of God is utterly different from what the apostles had learned from their youth. They had seen God pictured as the “Almighty,” “Jehovah,” “Creator of the universe,” and “powerful Judge of all the earth,” but not as a father to them. How we see God will greatly affect our interest in and ability to pray. If He is my Father, surely I can talk to Him about anything and trust that He will understand. He will

help when I need it, but will not force decisions on me that I do not want to make.

As a father, God is different. He stands out. The phrase “hallowed be Thy name” demonstrates a close relationship with the Father and great love for the child. Jesus plays heavily on this a little later in the text. In 11:11, 12, He says, “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? Or if he is asked for an egg, he will not give him a scorpion, will he?” The answer is obvious. The father would not do anything to hurt the child. Love does not act that way. God loves us with a love deeper by far than anything we can imagine. He would not give us anything that might destroy our relationship with Him. If that is true of earthly fathers who are weak and often fail, how much more true is it of God? His name is to be hallowed or set apart. God is different. If we being evil give good things to our children, “how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him?” (11:13). Think, if God is our Father, surely prayer should not be formal or ritualistic, but rather a conversation with One who loves us and whom we love.

Prayer should come from a heart which longs for God’s control to be in the life of the one who is praying. “Thy kingdom come” is best explained by the next phrase in Matthew 6:10: “Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.” This is not so much a prayer for the establishment of the church as it is a prayer for God to reign in our hearts and for others to submit to that rule. In that sense, there would not be anything wrong with praying this prayer at any time.

### **OUR DAILY NEEDS**

The second encouragement Jesus gives for prayer is to talk to God about our daily needs (11:3). Prayer has too often been seen as something to use when you have big problems and you have nowhere else to go for an answer. God did not see it that way. He wants us to pray about the little things.

To pray for God to give us day by day our daily bread or food is putting trust in Him as the One who cares even about the minor things in our lives. But more than that, it is declaring our trust in Him. We are not to ask for needs by the month or year. We are instead to trust God to take care of our needs every day. Notice that

Jesus put prayer for food ahead of prayer for forgiveness. Probably the reason for that is that it is hard to think very much about spiritual needs while we are hungry. This text also acknowledges that God does have control even over the basic areas of our lives, such as daily bread. Without His blessings, we would not be able to keep our jobs and earn our way in life. In truth, every good and perfect gift comes down from the Father of light with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning (James 1:17).

### **OUR ETERNAL NEEDS**

The next thing Jesus says for us to pray about is forgiveness. Notice that He says to ask for forgiveness, “*For we ourselves also forgive everyone who is indebted to us*” (11:4; emphasis mine). All of us are plagued with guilt. We have sinned, and we continue to sin (Romans 3:23; 1 John 1:7-9). Unforgiven sin brings the wages of death (Romans 6:23). We are, therefore, always in need of God’s forgiveness. But what stands out from this request is that God is very willing to forgive and set us free from the enslavement of sin. The primary reason Jesus became a man and lived among us was in order to offer us complete forgiveness of our sins. In Hebrews 8:12, God is explaining to us the advantage of the New Covenant in comparison with the Old. One of the primary marks of this New Covenant is in this verse: “For I will be merciful to their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more.” Once God forgives a sin, He never brings it against us again.

On the basis of God’s being so graceful to us in offering full and free forgiveness, we should be full of grace to others around us in offering them the same kind of forgiveness. In Ephesians 4:32, Paul writes, “And be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.” If we are unforgiving, we risk being unforgiven by the Lord. But more than that, it demonstrates that we have not yet understood what God is really like and what grace should do in our lives toward others.

### **OUR PROTECTION FOR THE FUTURE**

The final phrase in Luke’s account of the model prayer is “And lead us not into temptation” (11:4). Forgiveness goes backward to take care of the sins of which we are already guilty. But the Lord knew that just taking care of our

past was insufficient, for even when we are cleansed, it does not take us long to get dirty again. God never allows us to be tempted above that which we are able to bear, and He always provides a way of escape from the temptations that do come (1 Corinthians 10:13). Neither should we ever be guilty of blaming God for being tempted. In James 1:13-15, the Holy Spirit told us,

Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone. But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death.

To pray for God to lead and deliver us from temptations keeps before us our need to be on guard, and it leans on a power greater than our own to escape; but if I am honest in praying such a prayer, then I will strive to avoid sins, instead of flirting with them and seeing how close to sin I can get without falling.

Many times God's deliverance comes when we flee from temptation to sin. Paul told Timothy to flee sexual immorality. Joseph was right to run when he was tempted by Potipher's wife. The reason so many fail in their quest for moral and spiritual uprightness is because of their own belief that they are too strong to be moved by

such desires. David was a man after God's own heart; but when he stood on the rooftop gazing at Bathsheba, he lusted and began the process that led to adultery and murder.

### OUR CONTINUAL ASKING, SEEKING, AND KNOCKING

Prayer is not intended to be a one-time occurrence. It is not even something to try to get by on a minimum. It should be a way of life. Jesus says to keep on going to God, seeking His will, asking for the things we need, and knocking on His door. He is not reluctant to help. He is our Father and wants to give us the very things we need; but, as a father, He also knows that some of the things we want so badly are things that would do us more harm than good. Sometimes, because of that greater understanding, God answers "No" to our request. Sometimes His answer is to wait awhile because we are not ready for the answer yet, and sometimes God gives us far more than we have had the wisdom to ask for. Still, His plea is for us to keep on with our prayer life, making it a natural part of our daily life.

The busier we become, the more we need the blessings of God in our lives. Instead of busy schedules driving us from our knees, they should drive us more often to our knees. Will you resolve with me to be more faithful to God in your prayer life?

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## *Applying Scripture to Life*

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### *First Things First*

The president of a large factory wanted to talk to his company's manager about an urgent matter, but the manager's secretary said, "He cannot be disturbed, for he is in conference—as he is every day at this time." "But," said the impatient official, "tell him the president wants to see him." She firmly replied, "I have strict orders, sir, not to disturb him." Angrily, the man brushed the secretary aside and opened the door to the

manager's private office. After one look he backed out, gently closed the door, and said to the secretary, "I'm sorry! Is this a daily occurrence?" "Yes, every day he spends fifteen minutes like that." The president had found his manager on his knees before his open Bible!

*Positive Notes for Daily Living*

### *Not Done in Haste*

A young girl said to her mother just after a white-haired visitor left their home, "If I could be

such an old lady as that—so beautiful, serene, sweet, and lovable—I should not mind growing old." The discerning and keen-witted mother replied: "If you want to be that kind of old lady, you'd better begin making her right now. She doesn't impress me as a piece of work that was done in a hurry. It has taken a long time to make her what she is. If you are going to paint that sort of portrait of yourself to leave the world, you had better be mixing your colors now."

*Moody Monthly*