

ARE YOU WILLING TO SAY, 'LORD, TEACH ME TO PRAY'?

SERIES: JESUS, SAVIOR OF THE LOST

By Ron Ritchie

I was at a college retreat at Mount Hermon a couple of months ago. In the course of our conversations, one student, with the freedom that college students have, asked me in front of everyone, "Ron, how's your prayer life?" Now, people ask me how's my wife and how are my kids and so forth, but not how's my prayer life! I realized the student had a real desire to know how my prayer life was, so I was hemming and hawing because no one had asked me that in 30 years, and I wasn't sure what the answer was. If you're like me, you might be tempted to tell the truth and answer that question with a word or phrase like one of these: shallow, empty, quick, boring, struggling, rare, confusing, I'm going to get around to it soon, or sometimes I pray and sometimes I don't, but when I do it's always, "God, help! "

If any of the above words or phrases seem to describe your life of prayer, I want you remind you that as you grow in a relationship with Jesus Christ, you hunger more and more to understand what it means to pray. The disciples of the Lord Jesus had that hunger. They saw the need to pray to God, but after watching the life of Jesus they became aware that there was something very seriously missing in their own concept of prayer. Let's turn to Luke 11:1-4:

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.'"

Our Lord and his disciples had been invited to dinner by Martha and Mary in the little village of Bethany. As we saw last week, it was during that meal that our Lord was able to share with Martha that he desired relationship over activity. In light of the nearness of the cross, her sister Mary had chosen the good part, which was sitting at his feet and learning about his life and ministry, which in turn would greatly bless her life. Each time we study the life of Mary in the gospel we find her at the feet of Jesus. Now as we look at Luke 11:1-4, we find our story opening up with Jesus sitting at the feet of his heavenly Father in prayer.

The disciples had grown up under the teaching of the Pharisees. They watched them pray three times a day after the model of Daniel (6:10) but they were also reminded by the Lord: "When you pray, you are not to be as the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners, in order to be seen by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full." (Matt 6:5.) Some of the disciples had been with John the Baptist, and he had taught them to pray before he sent them to follow Jesus as the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. They had seen the Pharisees and John the Baptist pray, and now they saw Jesus praying. That is why one of the disciples on behalf of all of them said to Jesus, "Lord, teach us to pray." It wasn't so much that the disciples wanted to learn a method of praying as that they wanted to understand the secret of the Lord's life and why he was always praying. For as they watched the life of Jesus, they became aware that he spent much time in prayer, and as a result he gained strength, courage, wisdom and power to overcome the evil one and to bring new life to many around him.

Ray Stedman, in his wonderful book on prayer entitled *Talking to our Father*, said,

"True prayer is an awareness of our own helpless need and an acknowledgment of divine adequacy. For Jesus, prayer was as necessary as breathing, the very breath of life itself."

In this passage we will find that the Lord offered his disciples a model of prayer rather than a model prayer. There's a big difference; one is a framework in which to approach God, and the other is a prayer we pray over and over as on a Tibetan prayer wheel. In the latter case you lose heart in it; you just spin the wheel and pray automatically. In my background we used the Lord's Prayer like that to get back to God after we had sinned. But within this model of prayer our Lord gave the disciples five spiritual insights into the secret of prayer in their daily lives. These insights will also help us in our daily prayer lives with our heavenly Father.

Are you willing to say, "Lord, teach me to pray?" If so, then...

I. When you pray, address your heavenly Father

Luke 11:2a

"Father, hallowed be Thy name..." When you begin to study the life of Christ in the gospel you soon become aware of the reality that Jesus was a man of prayer. You find him over and over again talking with his Father in heaven. We find him praying (1) at his baptism, (2) on the mount of temptation, (3) before his Transfiguration, (4) in the garden the night he was betrayed, and (5) on the cross before he was taken into the presence of Father, to mention but a few occasions. Our Lord was living out his life in this fallen world and seeking to teach his disciples that he had a loving relationship with his Father. In this relationship they had agreed that as the Son he would not say one thing, do one thing, or go anywhere without first checking in with his Father, for his desire was to do the will of his Father in heaven on earth.

In Matthew 6:9-13 our Lord had been teaching the disciples the differences between the way the self-righteous Pharisees were praying and the way they should pray. At that time he taught them to say, "Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name." The Jews would address God the Father in a formal way: Ali, my Father, or Abinue, our Father. But Jesus used the ordinary intimate form of the Aramaic word, which children used in addressing their fathers: Abba. Abba is like our English term Daddy or Papa. The key, both here and in the Matthew account, was the fact that our Lord, who had a loving relationship with his Father, was telling his disciples that because they had placed their faith in him as the Son of God they also could have a loving relationship with his Father; they could now as beloved children of God come into his presence and address him personally as Abba, Papa.

When I was in Israel one time, we had come down from Masada in the heat and headed straight for the pool at the Sheraton Hotel. I jumped in the pool and got cooled off, and then as I was relaxing in a lounge chair, I was watching a one- or two-year-old boy with his father. In the pool he looked like a little, chubby, black-haired, black-eyed cherub. He even had water wings on. His father had maneuvered him over to the shallow steps in the pool where he would be safe, and then he ran over to get a Coke from the cart on the other side of the pool. But the little boy stood up and turned around to show his father how well he was doing, and realized his father wasn't there! There was terror in his big, black eyes, and he cried, "Abba, Abba, Abba!" Over by the Coke cart his father called, "Aji, Aji," and ran back. The little guy came up the steps out of the pool with his wings fluttering on his back and jumped into his father's arms. As his father held him, he turned around, and I saw the boy's face with all the tears coming down, and I heard his little voice saying, "Abba, Abba, Abba," but this time from the comfort and safety of his father's arms. I have never forgotten that. I am allowed to run into the arms of the God of the universe and cry, "Papa, Papa!" Now you tell me a father who won't respond to that cry—imagine what a perfect God will do when his children leap into his arms!

"Hallowed be Thy name..." When Jesus asked his disciples to say this, he was reminding them of the need to come to the Father in an attitude of worship, for while we know him intimately as our Father, the name of God the Father is holy and is set aside from all other names in the universe. He is above everything he has ever created, and his name is above every name on earth and under the earth. So we're to enter his presence humbly, seeing his worth. Now, it is most important not to allow our minds to equate our heavenly Father

with our earthly fathers. For our heavenly Father is the one and only living God. He is the infinite, eternal, unchangeable, self-sufficient, perfect, all-powerful, all-present God, whose heart is filled with justice, truth, love, mercy, and grace. Our heavenly Father is much more than our earthly fathers could ever be in their humanity. And in fact, he is much more than he has even been able to reveal to us with our limited ability to understand and know him now. But by having the right idea about who he is, we can pray, "Hallowed be Thy name" from our hearts.

The prophet Daniel understood clearly how to hallow the name of God when he came before him in prayer seeking insight into the meaning of King Nebuchadnezzar's dream. The Lord God answered the prophet's request in a night vision. As a result Daniel blessed the God of heaven, and he hallowed and sanctified his name (Daniel 2:20-23):

Let the name of God be blessed forever and ever,
For wisdom and power belong to Him.

And it is He who changes the times and the epochs;
He removes kings and establishes kings;
He gives wisdom to wise men,
And knowledge to men of understanding.

It is He who reveals the profound and hidden things;
He knows what is in the darkness,
And the light dwells with Him.

To Thee, O God of my fathers, I give thanks and praise,
For Thou has given me wisdom and power;
Even now Thou hast made known to me what we requested of Thee...

Are you willing to say, "Lord, teach me to pray?" If so, then when you pray say, "Father, hallowed be Thy name." Then...

II. When you pray, be aware of the spiritual kingdom

Luke 11:2b

When Jesus was teaching his disciples to pray that God the Father would send his righteous kingdom to earth and that the world would acknowledge his Son Jesus as King of kings, both the kingdom and the King were being rejected by the rulers of the Roman Empire as well as by the Jewish nation. So for the time being our Lord was invading the spiritual kingdom of Satan which resided in the hearts of evil men, and offering redemption to all who would acknowledge him as their Lord and Savior. Once men and women accepted him as their new Lord and Savior, Jesus would set up his spiritual kingdom in their hearts and fill their lives with peace, joy, and righteousness in the Holy Spirit. Later the Apostle Paul would write to the Romans and remind them, "For the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit." (Romans 14:17.) When Jesus said, "Thy kingdom come," he was calling us to keep praying that it would come in the hearts of men and women everywhere, that the righteousness that is in heaven might come to earth, in and through us, to those who are held captive by the evil one. One day all the world will acknowledge Jesus as King of kings when he comes again to this earth and sets up his kingdom of righteousness, and we will actually be able to see it. But for now his kingdom is spiritual, and you and I are to be part of his wonderful plan of redemption.

What is our part in the spiritual kingdom of God? Now, since we have established a personal relationship with Jesus as King and Lord of the universe as well as of our own personal lives, we need more than ever to not only pray, "Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven," but to realize that God wants to use us to establish his divine rule in the hearts of men and women all around us right now. We need to be asking God in this terrible, false, materialistic, and humanistic society, "How do you want to use me so that

your will in heaven is done on earth? Should I be establishing a Bible study at my workplace? Should I have a home Bible study? Should I be involved in a local prison ministry, work with AIDS victims, or show up at the Stanford Children's Hospital? Lord, should I be a counselor at our Crisis Pregnancy Crisis Center, or cook for Green Pastures? Would you give me the courage to work with our East Palo Alto ministry or the vision to help and encourage our shut-ins and elderly? Lord, what would you have me do with the homeless and the teenage runaways, the crack addicts and their crack babies? Lord, use me as salt and light within my immediate family, community, school systems, and workplace. Lord, use me as a minister of reconciliation in your wonderful plan of redemption for struggling marriages, rebellious children, and injustice within government. Lord, Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. And Lord, please include me!"

This prayer can affect your life! Life gets adventurous, exciting, and rich when you pray this prayer. You might end up crying out to God, "Please, there are too many coming into the kingdom; give me workers! I can't do it all, the responsibility is overwhelming!" May that be your prayer. I hope your prayer isn't, "Oh God, I wonder what there is to do today." If we're bored, something is wrong. We haven't understood the prayer, "Thy kingdom come."

When you pray, address your heavenly Father and be aware of his spiritual kingdom. Next...

III. When you pray, be aware of your daily needs

Luke 11:3

"Give us each day our daily bread." In the garden before the fall of Adam and Eve this prayer was not necessary, for it was the Lord's delight to provide for his children. But then when sin entered into the world all that changed. Man was then faced with sweat and toil as he approached hard soil, thorns, and thistles, and his crops were jeopardized by disease and death. Since the fall, mankind has been faced with the lack of physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual bread. Therefore, we are encouraged to come before our loving heavenly Father and ask for bread not only ourselves but also on behalf of others. Bread stands for everything we really need for our earthly existence so that we can live out our life within the will of God. The longer we live, the more we should be conscious of how utterly dependent we are on our Father to provide our daily needs. You need to relate to him every day. It's like not eating for that amount of time, and then you can experience spiritual starvation.

Our loving heavenly Father is the one who was so willing to provide the manna and meat on a daily basis to his children the Israelites in their 40 years of wandering in the wilderness. He was willing to feed his faithful prophet Elijah during a drought in the days of the wicked rule of Ahab and Jezebel by sending some ravens with bread and meat. Then later Elijah was fed by a widow who was on the verge of dying because of lack of food. The Lord provided flour and oil, and her supply never ran out during the three years of drought (I Kings 17). The Father met Jesus' physical needs on the mount of temptation after Satan left him. Later he provided wine at the wedding of Cana. He was able to provide bread and fish for the crowds that followed him on two occasions. He provided fish for his disciples on two occasions. And it was Jesus who taught his followers: "...do not be anxious for your life, as to what you shall eat, or what you shall drink; nor for your body, as to what you shall put on...But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added to you." (Matthew 6:25, 33.)

Look at the prayer requests in our Sunday bulletin. These are men and women who are turning to the Lord Jesus for their daily needs. They are not turning to the Ed McMahan's of this world or to the California lottery to provide their needs. They are not turning to a lifestyle of lying and cheating on their income tax or in their business dealings. But they are seeking to become humble men and women who are depending on the one and only living God of this universe to provide their daily needs, sometimes directly and other times through us. We need to be calling on our merciful God on their behalf, that he will provide for them.

Are you willing to say, "Lord, teach me to pray?" Then address God as your heavenly Father, be aware of your part in his spiritual kingdom, and turn to him for your daily needs. Then...

IV. When you pray, be aware of your sinfulness

Luke 11:4a

"And forgive us our sins, for we ourselves also forgive everyone who is indebted to us." Sin corrupts our lives and destroys the fellowship between us and God and between each other. Sin is rebellion against God and against each other. Sin is missing the mark of God's intended purpose for our lives. Instead of having giving lives, we have taking lives. It includes greed, lying, murder, all the ways we act wrongly and break the laws of God. As we come into the presence and light of a holy and just God, we become immediately aware of our own spiritual darkness, our hearts filled at times with sinfulness, guilt, and shame. We know that except for our relationship with Jesus Christ as our Savior and mediator between the holy God and sinful man, we would suffer the wrath of God. But in order to be forgiven of our sins, we must first be willing to forgive from the heart all those who have sinned against us. Otherwise we are hypocrites. Our forgiveness is given to us by the grace and mercy of God (Ephesians 2:8-9). We need to extend that same grace and mercy of God toward those who are also victims of a fallen nature and who live in a fallen world.

Jesus, the innocent Lamb of God, was dying on the cross for the sins of the world, and yet he cried out to his heavenly Father, "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing." (Luke 23:34.) The apostle Paul would write later to the Ephesian believers as one greatly forgiven by the Lord Jesus, "Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you." (Eph. 4:32.) Each day as we come to the Lord and ask him to forgive our sins and then sense the great joy of being forgiven, are we just as willing to forgive others so that they also can have the burden of shame and guilt lifted in forgiveness?

We all fail each other. We are never quite the person others think we are. So we might be tempted as I was one evening to evaluate my friends and get a new set! But my wife reminded me that there isn't any other kind of person, and if there were, they would form their own club, and they wouldn't invite me. This is it until we get our new bodies. One day my younger son asked me why I was spanking him, and I had to confess I didn't know. I was still in the process of learning to be a father. As we learn from God and go through the process of growing, we need to be patient with each other and forgive one another.

Are you willing to say, "Lord, teach me to pray?" Then address God as your heavenly Father, be aware of your part in his spiritual kingdom, turn to him for your daily needs, be aware of your own sinfulness, and finally...

V. When you pray, be aware of temptations

Luke 11:4b

"And lead us not into temptation." (Matthew 6:13 continues, "but deliver us from evil." The word for temptation can also be translated test or trial. Once we come into a personal relationship with Jesus as our Lord and Savior, we soon realize that "...we...are being transformed" (2 Corinthians 3:18) into the very image of Jesus Christ. We are "...new creature[s]; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come." (2 Corinthians 5:17.) But as new creatures we still live in a fallen world, and we discover early on that at times our flesh, the old Adamic nature with all its weaknesses, tempts us to fall back into some old sin. Now temptation is not sin, and at times like that we need to realize that because we now have the person and power of the Holy Spirit within us and the power to choose between going back into a former sin or letting Jesus control our new life, we can say with Paul, "No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, that you may be able to endure it." (1 Corinthians 10:13.) But as new creatures in Christ we need to keep in mind the powerful temptations that come to us daily from the world, the flesh and the devil himself.

In this case we are praying that our Lord would not lead us, or allow us to come, to a temptation where we might fall. Twice in the Garden of Gethsemane our Lord asked his disciples to "pray that you may not enter into temptation" (Luke 22:40, 46). The temptation was that they would deny the Lord when the going got tough. They fell asleep only to discover later that Judas would betray him, Peter would deny him, and the rest

would flee.

But at times in our new life in Christ, we need to realize that the Lord may want to test or try our new life in order to help us learn how to depend on him for everything. Paul had a terrible trial in Asia, a trial in which he almost lost his life, but the Lord delivered him, and he was able to write to the Corinthian church, "...indeed, we had the sentence of death within ourselves in order that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God who raises the dead." (2 Corinthians 1:9). The apostle James tells us, "Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials (temptations), knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing." (James 1:2-3.) Sometimes God allows us to be tested so he can show Satan, as he did with Job, that we really are his man or woman, in order to bring maturity and great joy to our hearts and honor and glory to him. But we're allowed to ask the Lord to guard us daily.

I am privileged to be in a discipleship group of men from this fellowship. We are ten in number who have made a commitment to the Lord and to one another to help each other grow in our love for our Lord Jesus Christ, each other, his Word, his spiritual family, and the world around us. In the process of growing together the men are starting to share their lives, and we have been discovering that each man in the group is being blessed by the Lord, and at the same time many are being led into various temptations or trials not of our own choosing. As a result we are privileged to see each other growing in our relationship and walk with the King of kings, Jesus, our eternal Lord and Savior, as we pray for one another's pressures and trials and then see God's provision.

What we have been studying together is called the Lord's Prayer, but in reality it is a model or form of prayer offered to the disciples that covers all their needs as well as ours. It covers (1) our relationship with our Father, Abba, (2) our relationship with his spiritual kingdom on earth, (3) our personal needs as human beings, (4) our relationship with those who have sinned against us, as well as our sins against God, and (5) our relationship to the daily temptations from the world system, the flesh and the devil.

This prayer is our Lord's teaching to his teachable disciples, so it should be called the Disciple's Prayer. It is not a prayer that should be cranked out as one on some Tibetan prayer wheel, for our Lord is more interested in the motives and content of our hearts than any form. For some 2,000 years now, millions upon millions of believers in every country and in every language have approached their heavenly Father in the name of Jesus his Son using this five-step outline, expanding it according to their own personal needs. And God has answered them and all of us who are willing to approach him in faith believing that he, our loving and merciful heavenly Father, Abba, is willing to listen to us and then to answer our prayers according to his own eternal purpose. And this is the principle underlying our prayers: "Lord, teach us to pray. We want to know the secret of your life because we want to be like you."

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."

33rd Message
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April 14, 1991

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