

Teach Me to Pray – Part 2
Sermon by Pastor Joe Davis
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I. INTRODUCTION

“Lord, teach us to pray.” This is what I’m asking Jesus to do in each of our lives here today. And there’s no one who can answer this request more perfectly than Jesus himself. This is a request we can know with certainty is according to his will, and one that he loves to answer. For those of you who were here last week, you’ll remember that we’ve begun a journey into discovering what God has shared with us in Scripture about his design for prayer...how it works and ways we can do it practically and effectively on a continuous basis. This is Part 2 of “Teach Me to Pray,” and we’re going to focus today on what we all know as, “The Lord’s Prayer.”

Now as soon as I said, “the Lord’s Prayer,” your mind may have already shut down. You may have thought: “I’ve heard a zillion messages on the Lord’s Prayer; I have it memorized; I know what each line means; and I may as well skip the sermon today and get started on my afternoon activities.” So if we have a mass exodus now, I’ll know exactly what’s going on! But before you head out the door, I’d like to challenge you to come to the Lord’s Prayer this morning with fresh eyes, asking the Spirit to let you see it anew and allow you to take away something today that will help transform your view of prayer to be in line with God’s view of prayer.

Yes, there will be things we look at that you already knew. But God’s Word is living and active and has the ability to pierce to the deepest level of our being and pinpoint misconceptions and lies we may be believing. Amen?!

If you keep your eyes and ears open and allow the Spirit to guide you, you WILL learn something today that will be useful in teaching you how to pray effectively according to God’s design.

I mentioned to you last week a book by Bryan Chapell called, “Praying Backwards.” Well Bryan faced a similar struggle in approaching the Lord’s Prayer, and to begin I want to briefly share with you his journey of rediscovering it and

one way the Lord used it powerfully in an extremely difficult and stressful time of his life. Bryan says:

“I would love to tell you I had a great prayer plan for each of those stressful days, but I cannot. When I tried to pray, my thoughts chased all the things that I needed to do. I wanted to meditate on the goodness of God, but my mind filled with the noise of surrounding expectations and occasional accusations. Though I knew the old saying, ‘When it’s hardest to pray, pray hardest,’ I could not find enough quietness in my soul to focus my prayers. I could not pray as hard as I wanted. Then I rediscovered the Lord’s Prayer.”

“As a child, I learned the prayer that Jesus taught his disciples. I have recited it so many times that it can run out of my mouth and hardly tax my brain – or touch my heart.” *[And that may be where some of us are today.]* “But one day the Lord let my eyes stumble across an account of a great man of God in circumstances similar to mine who focused on God by reciting the Lord’s Prayer out loud as he took his morning walks. I am a jogger. I reasoned that if I could say this familiar prayer out loud on my morning run, then perhaps my other prayers would move forward too. I am from a church tradition that is not fond of repetitious prayer, but I was desperate.”

“So I began reciting the prayer as I ran. I am sure that other joggers, noticing my mumbling, thought a crazy person had joined them. There were still many times that I had trouble making my brain move through the prayer. Thoughts of tasks and strategies would still cut me off in midphrase before I realized what had happened. But then, because I knew the prayer so well, I could always pick up the line and force my brain to pray as Jesus taught. The result was that, despite all the distractions, I have never experienced a sweeter, richer time of prayer.”

“As I wrenched my mind from the daily turmoil and repeated the words of my Savior, the Holy Spirit began to minister to my heart. I found fresh comfort in the old phrases I had stopped really hearing. Yes, there were days when I still lost focus. At times I could not help but liken myself to the monk who is reputed to have wagered with a fellow monk whether either could recite the Lord’s Prayer without being distracted. The second monk offered a horse to the first if he could recite the Lord’s Prayer even once without his

thoughts straying. The first monk took the bet and began to recite. Within two sentences he stopped and said, 'You win. Even as I was praying, I began to wonder if the horse came with a saddle.'"

"I know that kind of distraction, but I also know the mercy of my Lord who forgives my wayward thoughts and gives me his prayer to help keep my mind riveted to him."

This is one example of the power of the Lord's Prayer and how God can use it in our lives. We can all relate to the tendency of our minds to wander as we pray, and here God used it to bring focus and calm and proper perspective in a very distracted and stressful season of one man's life. Reciting Psalm 139 or Psalm 23 has served a similar purpose for me at certain times in my life, often when I'm lying in bed stressing and worrying or trying to solve the world's problems. Clearly the Lord's Prayer can be useful as a prayer to recite and pray on a regular basis in our lives. But let's look closely at it today and see what else it teaches us about how to pray, because the Lord's Prayer was shared with the disciples in response to their request of "Lord, teach us to pray." Clearly Jesus wants us to learn some crucial things about how to pray through the prayer he shared with us.

II. THE LORD'S PRAYER

Now there are a couple of slightly different versions of the Lord's Prayer in the gospels, one in Matthew and one in Luke. Today we're going to focus in on the one found in Matthew 6, verses 9 through 13 today. Let's read it to begin:

9 "Pray, then, in this way: 'Our Father who is in heaven, Hallowed be Your name. 10 'Your kingdom come. Your will be done, On earth as it is in heaven. 11 'Give us this day our daily bread. 12 'And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. 13 'And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil. [For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.']

First, notice that Jesus prefaces this prayer with the phrase, "Pray, then, in this way..." That phrase, "in this way," indicates that he's primarily giving us an example of what godly prayer looks like, not just a prayer that's only meant to

recite word for word over and over. While it can be extremely useful and powerful to pray this prayer just as Jesus shared it with us (as in the story I just shared with you), the application goes far beyond that and speaks to some of the key elements God intends to be a part of our communication with him.

A. Honor, worship, adore and thank God

So let's tackle the first phrase: **"Our Father who is in heaven, hallowed be Your name."** First, we notice that this prayer is directed and addressed to the Father. Have you ever wondered if you should be praying mostly to the Father, or to Jesus, or if it's OK to direct your prayer to the Holy Spirit? I've had some confusion in this area myself. Well, considering what Jesus instructs us to do here and looking at other prayers recorded in Scripture, the primary pattern we see appears to be directing our prayers to God the Father. However, we do need to remember a few things:

- 1) God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, three-in-one, was not so clearly revealed in the Old Testament, so we wouldn't expect to see prayers to Jesus or the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament.
- 2) Jesus always prays to the Father, but he wouldn't, of course, have prayed to himself.
- 3) There are a few times when people pray to Jesus in the New Testament. Stephen, as he was being stoned to death, said: "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!" and "Lord, do not hold this sin against them!" Paul recorded himself praying to Jesus in 2 Corinthians 12, verses 7 to 9, where he requested Jesus to remove his thorn in the flesh. Paul says there, "...I implored the Lord three times that it might leave me. And He has said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.' Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me." And, of course, there's that familiar prayer recorded for us in Revelation 22:20: "Come, Lord Jesus."

But should we pray to the Holy Spirit? Well, we don't have any prayers recorded for us in Scripture that are directed to the Holy Spirit, but considering that he is fully God and a distinct person of the Trinity; that he dwells within us; and that we are to walk in dependence on him; there is nothing to indicate we shouldn't ever pray to him.

Wayne Grudem has some helpful thoughts here:

“To say that we cannot pray to the Holy Spirit is really saying that we cannot talk to him or relate to him personally, which hardly seems right. He also relates to us in a personal way since he is a “Comforter” or “Counselor” (John 14:16, 26), believers “know him” (John 14:17), and he teaches us..., bears witness to us that we are children of God (Romans 8:16), and can be grieved by our sin (Eph. 4:30).”

Based on these truths and others we see in Scripture, we can conclude that our prayers can be directed to the Father, the Son or the Holy Spirit, but the primary pattern given to us in the New Testament is praying to the Father, through the Son. And this is the emphasis Jesus gives us as well here in the opening phrase of the Lord’s Prayer.

So as we look at the first phrase, I see three primary elements. First, we’re approaching God as Father, and not just any father, but OUR Father. We’re coming into his presence as his very own beloved children, able to call the God of the universe, “Abba,” or “Daddy.” We’re coming to the Father of fathers, the one who’s very identity is Father...that’s who is and has been for all eternity. And as we come to him as Father we also come in appropriate humility, recognizing that we’re the children in the relationship, respecting his authority and position over us.

The second element I see in the opening phrase is that we’re acknowledging that our Father is in heaven and we’re on earth. This is the imagery we saw last week in Ecclesiastes 5, verse 2: **“Do not be hasty in word or impulsive in thought to bring up a matter in the presence of God. For God is in heaven and you are on earth; therefore let your words be few.”** Can you see that stark contrast intended by the author of Ecclesiastes? It’s the contrast between gigantic and miniscule...it’s the contrast between the universe as a whole (which even the Hubble space telescope has only begun to uncover) and the tiny speck in it all called earth.

A lot of you have seen movie, “How Great Is Our God,” and have a pretty good idea of the contrast we’re talking about here. As we come to the Father we recognize that we’re coming to the One who sits enthroned on high and to whom

the universe is insignificant in size. We come to the One who created, designed and sustains the universe, who sees everything perfectly, and who knows all the details of the past, present and future. We recognize that “Father knows best” in a big way!

And the third element I see in the opening phrase is that we come in reverence and awe, praying “Hallowed be your name.” I don’t know the last time you used the word, “hallowed,” in your day-to-day conversation, but the only time I seem to use it is when I’m saying the Lord’s Prayer. In looking at the original Greek, we find that it means to make holy or to set apart. The idea expresses the complete opposite of being common or ordinary. So in praying, “Hallowed be your name,” we are exalting and honoring and lifting up the glorious name of God the Father as one-of-a-kind, extraordinary, completely above and beyond. And we’re desiring that the name of God the Father be glorified above all and that he be recognized and honored as the holy, all-powerful, all-knowing, perfect Father that he is. We’re praying that he would receive the glory that he deserves.

In summary, in this first phrase of the Lord’s Prayer, we come in humility as God’s very own children, offering him the honor and glory he deserves, praying that others would do the same, and remembering that only he possesses all wisdom and has the perfect solution to every problem we face. We come realizing that prayer isn’t about telling the Father what to do, but rather drawing near to behold him, fellowship with him, glorify him and seek his glory and his will.

B. Express your desire for God’s will to be done

This desire for God’s will is expressed in the next phrase found in verse 13: “***Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.***” Here we’re instructed by Jesus to express our desire for God’s kingdom to come and God’s will to be done. This, of course, expresses our desire for the triumphant return of Jesus and the setting up of his kingdom and rule on this earth, but I believe it’s about more than just praying for the 2nd coming.

You’ve probably noticed in your reading of the gospels that Jesus talked a lot about the kingdom of heaven or the kingdom of God. In Matthew alone, Jesus mentioned it 32 times. Many of his parables were aimed at describing what this kingdom was like. Additionally, we learn that we enter the kingdom of heaven through repentance and faith like a child. When we turn away from our sins and

place our faith in Jesus Christ as our Savior and Lord, we enter the kingdom of heaven and are invited to eternal life with God that begins now...we're invited to walk through life in the very power of God...God comes to act with us. The kingdom of heaven is a kingdom where God has his way in our lives as we learn to walk in dependence on him.

So as we think about praying, "Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven," what we're also praying is that God would have his way in my life and the lives of other believers so that his will is accomplished in and through us, just as it is always perfectly accomplished in heaven. We're praying that he would allow his kingdom to come so fully in our lives, that we are truly transformed and empowered to accomplish his will on earth by his power and for his glory. We're saying, "Father, teach me to walk in complete dependence on the Spirit, in the fullness of your kingdom power, so that you can accomplish your will in and through me."

We're also reminded that in prayer our focus is to be the seeking of our Father's will rather than our own...to be convinced that he really does know best...to be seeking after his solution and wisdom rather than asking him to rubber stamp whatever plans we may have come up with.

C. Pray for daily needs, spiritual and physical

So this brings us to the third phrase of the Lord's Prayer, found in verse 11: "***Give us this day our daily bread.***" Now I'd say most people typically think of this as asking for our physical needs to be provided for, and certainly that is part of what Jesus is teaching us to pray for. The clear sense that I get from this request is, "Father, provide what we need for today." It's not asking for an overabundance or praying that the Father would fill up your barn with enough food to last for a year, but simply asking the Father to take care of what you need for today. It implies a day-by-day trusting in God for the providing of each day's needs, and encourages us to remain in dependence on and communication with God daily.

Later on in Matthew 6, Jesus talks extensively about our tendency to worry about what we're going to eat and how we're going to get clothes to wear and where we're going to get money for this or that. His remedy for that is to live in peaceful trust in God for provision of these things, rather than trying to stockpile food and

horde money. He encourages us to take life a-day-at-a-time and trust him to provide, as we ask him to give us what we need for each day. He says in verses 31 to 34 of Matthew chapter 6:

31 "Do not worry then, saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear for clothing?' 32 "For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. 33 "But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. 34 "So do not worry about tomorrow; for tomorrow will care for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

Our call is to seek the Father's kingdom and his kingdom power working in and through us, as Jesus just encouraged us to do in prayer. And as we pray we simply ask the Father to provide what we need for each day, learning to trust him to provide for us as he has promised...taking it one-day-at-a-time.

This prayer for daily bread also applies to the spiritual bread we need to grow in our relationship with God. Remember that famous quote from Jesus as he used the sword of the Spirit to do battle with Satan: ***"It is written, 'MAN SHALL NOT LIVE ON BREAD ALONE, BUT ON EVERY WORD THAT PROCEEDS OUT OF THE MOUTH OF GOD.'"*** Physical bread is good and the Father knows we need it to survive. But spiritual bread is just as important to our spiritual life and growth, and we can't live the life God is calling us to without it. We need to know and understand the Word of God if we're to live life in the power of God and be used to accomplish his will on earth. We also need to be able to hear God's direction to us as we seek to make choices that glorify him.

I routinely face situations as a pastor that I feel very inadequate to handle. But the Lord is teaching me to ask for the daily bread of his guidance, direction, wisdom and power as I walk into each of these situations. And he is providing. As I've been building relationships with other pastors I often hear about the challenges they're dealing with and I'm sometimes tempted to worry: what if that happens to me or to our church some day? And when I take all the difficult things others are dealing with and imagine them all coming my way at once, it's an overwhelming thought. But the Lord's been reminding me to take one day at a time and just ask for daily bread to deal with individual challenges as they come, trusting him to provide what I need in each situation.

This, I believe, is the heart of what Jesus is teaching us here when he asks us to pray, "Give us this day our daily bread." Whether we're asking him for provision of our physical needs or provision of our spiritual needs, we ask for what we need for that day or moment and trust the future into his hands, refusing to worry about all the potential things that could possibly happen to us in the future. In each moment we call out to him and watch as he provides what we need for each situation and day.

D. Confess sins, ask forgiveness and forgive others

Next in the Lord's Prayer is verse 12: "And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors." Here we encounter the need to deal in prayer with our failures and areas where we have not walked according to God's will...areas where we have not allowed God's kingdom to rule in our lives. Part of our daily conversation with God involves allowing the light of his truth to shine on the dark parts of our lives. And when in this process he exposes sin, we acknowledge it, turn from it and ask the Father to forgive us. In a future sermon on prayer, I hope to address the effect sin has on our effectiveness in prayer, but for now, suffice it to say that unresolved sin does affect our communication with God in a very negative way.

Here in verse 12 Jesus is teaching us to take care of sin issues as we pray...confessing our sins to the Father, asking for his forgiveness and the power to change. But, as you've probably noticed, there's something that can keep us from resolving our sin issues in prayer, even if we confess them and ask for forgiveness; and that is, our own refusal to forgive other people. Jesus gives us more guidance on this in verses 14 and 15 of Matthew chapter 6. He says:

14 "For if you forgive others for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. 15 "But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions.

What Jesus teaches us here is that we can't clear the air with God until we're willing to forgive other people for things we're holding against them. Our communication with God will be hindered until we learn to truly forgive other people, even if they don't apologize or do what we think they need to do in order to make it right.

But please don't take this to mean that the forgiveness Jesus' provided for us at the cross is withheld, jeopardizing our very salvation, until we've fully and adequately forgiven every other person we've ever been hurt by. If that were the case, none of us would be saved. Our sins have been forever nailed to the cross and our salvation is secure. Instead I believe this refers to the way bitterness and a spirit of unforgiveness affects our day-to-day relationship and communication with God. If we're knowingly refusing to forgive someone else and refusing to have any kind of continuing relationship with them, then we shouldn't expect to have a healthy relationship with God.

Did you know that you can forgive someone in an instant, while you are praying? Sometimes people think they can't really forgive someone unless they go have a conversation with them or tell them face to face. Some people have even told me that they don't need to forgive someone unless that person repents and acknowledges some guilt and remorse. But listen to Jesus' words in Mark 11, verse 25:

25 "Whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father who is in heaven will also forgive you your transgressions."

There are a few important things we can conclude from this verse. First, we need to forgive others at all times. Whenever you pray, forgive. In other words, it's never OK to refuse to forgive someone. Did you get that? It's never OK to refuse to forgive someone. Are you counting on God's forgiveness for your failings? I can tell you that each of us here have some failings right now that need to be forgiven, even if we may not be aware of them. Well, if you're expecting God to forgive you for those, then you'd better plan on forgiving other people, even if they don't acknowledge their guilt or apologize.

Secondly, you can forgive others in an instant while you're praying. You don't need to coordinate a big meeting before you can forgive. Certainly it's appropriate to try and resolve conflict and hurt feelings by meeting with someone. In fact, we should make every effort to do that if there's been a break in a relationship. But we don't need to wait for that meeting before we can forgive. And we don't need to wait for them to do what we think they need to do before we can forgive.

Thirdly, we are to forgive all things of all people. If you have anything against anyone, forgive. That's about as broad a statement as you can get: anything against anyone. There's nothing and no one that's not covered by that statement.

And if you combine this truth with the directive to pray at all times, we as children of God are to literally live and breathe forgiveness. Grudges are to have no place among the children of God. Yes, we have challenges in our relationships and we frustrate and hurt each other at times and we need to work diligently to resolve those issues and speak the truth to each other in love. But we must never wait to forgive...holding onto bitterness and refusing to forgive is always out of step with God's will in our lives. We're only hurting ourselves and our relationship with God if we refuse to forgive other people from the heart.

What are some signs that you haven't truly forgiven someone? You treat them badly...cold shoulder anyone? You work quietly or loudly against them. Perhaps you completely refuse to speak to them or acknowledge them in any way. Maybe you talk badly about them to other people. Or you can't stand the sight of them. If this is where you are with someone in your life, it's time to do business with God as you pray, repenting, asking for forgiveness and the power to forgive that person as God has forgiven you. ***"Whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father who is in heaven will also forgive you your transgressions."***

E. Pray to resist temptation and be delivered from evil

And this brings us to the final section of the Lord's Prayer in verse 13 of Matthew, chapter 6: ***"And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil [For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.]"*** This is a prayer asking the Father to keep us away from those situations where we're tempted to sin...that he would lead us away from those temptations that we're too weak to resist and in doing so, keep us from giving in to evil.

Now we know that God never does the tempting himself, so the prayer here is not, "Father, please don't tempt me." He would never do such a thing. We know this to be true not only because of his character as revealed in Scripture, but also from the words of James 1, verses 13 to 15:

13 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. 14 But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. 15 Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death.

Our own human longings and lusts for God-substitutes are what lead to temptation. And of course Satan and his forces are doing everything they can to flaunt the things that tempt us in our faces and try to convince us to turn away from God. He wants us to believe that God's holding out on us and keeping us from the best things in life. Satan is doing everything he can to lead us to those places where temptation overcomes us and we give in to evil.

The prayer Jesus is sharing with us here could be expressed this way: "Father, keep me from going to those places in my life where I repeatedly fall into sin. Deliver me from those temptations by whatever method you need to use to take care of it once and for all." If we spent a few minutes, my guess is that we could all come up with a pretty good list of the things in our life that tempt us most greatly to evil...the places where we repeatedly fall or used to fall before God delivered us. And the encouragement from Jesus here is to diligently and persistently pray for this deliverance...asking God to actively work to keep us from returning to these pockets of sin in our lives. This comes through continuous prayer, learning to walk by the Spirit. As we're told in Galatians 5, verse 16: walk by the Spirit and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.

I can testify personally that God does answer these prayers when we cry out to him...not always in the way we expect or might prefer...not always immediately...sometimes in a more painful way than we might wish...but he listens, works in the background and brings deliverance in a much better way than we could ever come up with ourselves.

We're talking spiritual warfare here, my friends, and it requires persevering, persistent, tenacious prayer. To win the battle we're in with the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places and experience God's deliverance, we need to pray continually and without giving up, trusting that God hears and responds to our prayers.

And notice in the last half of verse 13 that this praying to resist temptation is done with confidence in God's power to deliver us and enable us to resist and stand firm...it's a believing prayer. This praying against temptation and evil is done with the proclamation that "...Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen." It's the prayer of faith...believing that what God has told us in his Word and shown us in our personal walk with him is true: we're no longer slaves to sin, but by his grace working through the power of his Spirit within us, we can resist temptation and choose God's infinitely better way of living life.

III. CONCLUSION

In your struggle with sin, pray. As you face temptation, pray. As you plan how to avoid facing similar temptations in the future, pray. Don't make the mistake of trying to fight the battle in your own strength and willpower. A wise man once said, "Prayer is the battle." Without it, we'll be fighting in our own human strength. We'll be taking our "fist into a pistol war," as a popular song has expressed. Lord, teach us to pray...this is our desperate and sincere cry to you.