

TEACH ME TO PRAY: THE LORD'S PRAYER APPLIED

The Importance of Prayer

A robust prayer life is of critical importance in cultivating a close walk with Jesus. It is our primary means of communication with Him. Jesus wants to hear from us. He wants to hear our worship and praise. He wants us to ask Him what His will is for us. He wants us to tell Him our troubles and seek Him for guidance. He wants us to confess our sins and ask for forgiveness. Most of all, He wants us to have power to overcome sin. Jesus said, "Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation." Matthew 26:41.

The Lord is our Father and our friend – an ever-present help in times of trouble. If we consider Him to be our Father and friend, we should be in constant communication with Him – talking to Him about any and every thing throughout the day. We talk with our family members. We talk with our friends. We talk with our coworkers. We even talk with our pets. However, we neglect talking with Jesus. It is impossible to have a relationship with someone when there is no communication.

The Lord loves and cares for us deeply, and He knows exactly what we are going through. The Bible tells us that God even knows how many hairs are on our head. Matthew 10:30. He wants to commune with us in prayer, and it is through this close communion that we can experience His grace and mercy and develop an emotional connection with Him. The Bible says:

For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin. Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need. Hebrews 4: 15-16 (NIV).

No Special Skills Required

You may feel intimidated by the thought of praying as if it requires some special talent or skill. It does not. Prayer is simply talking to the Lord – anytime and anyplace. You may feel tongue-tied or feel as though you do not know what say, and those feelings are understandable. After all, you are talking to the Creator of the universe! But, prayer should not be an intimidating experience. Just talk with

the Lord. Praise Him for His goodness and mercy and tell Him what is on your mind. All prayer requires is a thankful heart and a genuine desire to seek out God's will and to do it.

How Did Jesus Say We Should Pray?

Jesus left guidelines for us to have a powerful prayer life. Those guidelines are found in Matthew 6:5-15:

⁵ And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward.

⁶ But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly.

⁷ But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking.

⁸ Be not ye therefore like unto them: for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him.

⁹ After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name.

¹⁰ Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.

¹¹ Give us this day our daily bread.

¹² And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.

¹³ And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.

¹⁴ For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you:

¹⁵ But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

“Thou Shalt Not Be As the Hypocrites” – Pray with Sincerity

The first thing Jesus admonished against in verse five is praying for show. Some people love to “play church” where they show up every Sunday, sing the loudest, and pray with the most dramatics all for the purpose of being seen and admired. This is not the kind of prayer God wants. In fact, Jesus called these type of people “hypocrites” because they use prayer as an act of self-glorification rather than as an act of worship. People who pray in this manner will not be rewarded by the Lord; the admiration (or in some cases, amusement) of people is all that their prayers will accomplish.

“Enter Into Thy Closet” – Pray in Secret

To be clear, Jesus was not saying in verse six that it is wrong to pray in public or to pray in church. Jesus was saying that it *is* wrong if the only time that we pray is when we are in public and others are watching. We should have an active prayer life in private. The term translated “closet” means “private chamber” or “private place”. Cultivating a consistent private prayer life will result in a deep emotional connection with God, which in itself is a great blessing.

“Use Not Vain Repetitions” – Pray With Substance

In verses seven and eight, Jesus admonished His followers not to use “vain repetitions”. That means just saying words without having any real desire to seek the Lord; in other words, babbling on and on when your heart is not in it. In his Commentary on the New Testament, Dr. Warren Wiersbe explained, “A request becomes a “vain repetition” if it is only a babbling of words without a sincere heart desire to seek and do God’s will.” Therefore, saying some words and calling it prayer then forgetting about it shortly thereafter is a vain repetition. God wants us to pray with substance, which is genuine worship with a genuine desire to seek His face and accomplish His will for us.

The Lord’s Prayer

When the Disciples asked Jesus how to pray, He gave them “The Lord’s Prayer” to use as a guide to communicating effectively with the Lord. It was not Jesus’ intention that people simply memorize the words to repeat later. Rather, His

intent was to provide a model by which we could structure our prayers. The prayer starts with a focus on God: His glory, His Kingdom and His will. Only after we put God's concerns first are we to pray for our own needs.

“Our Father” – Put God First

The prayer starts “Our Father which art in heaven”. This identifies to whom we are praying – Almighty God the Father of all creation. What an honor not only to approach Him boldly in prayer through Jesus Christ, but also to know that He is indeed our Father! Next, “hallowed be thy name” are words of praise and worship. “Hallowed” means something that is holy and revered. This was Jesus’ instruction to offer heartfelt praise and worship to the Father.

We should pray for Christ’s coming Kingdom. Jesus is coming back soon to rule and reign. We are to pray not only that His Kingdom will come quickly, but also that the primary focus of our life is to see that His will be accomplished here on Earth, just as it is accomplished in heaven. To pray that God’s will be done, is to pray that we will live holy lives that are completely surrendered to the Lord and ready for His work because that is His will for us. See related Bible Studies “God Requires Holy Living” and “Cultivate the Fruits of the Spirit; Eradicate the Lusts of the Flesh.” Dr. Wiersbe notes, “We have no right to ask God for anything that will dishonor His name, delay His kingdom, or disturb His will on earth.”

Praying that God’s will be done also includes praying for the healing, deliverance, and salvation of others. It is God’s will that all people become saved; therefore, we should pray earnestly for the salvation of all people. The Bible says, “The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.” II Peter 3:9.

“Give Us This Day” – Pray for Your Needs

After we offer praise and worship to the Lord and pray that His will be accomplished, we may then pray for our own needs. It is fine to pray that the Lord will meet our daily needs, that He will forgive our sins, and that He will lead and guide us. We must be careful that we are praying for our “needs” and not begging for unnecessary “wants.” We *need* bread daily; we may *want* filet mignon, foie gras, and caviar daily. There is a difference. In addition, we should not pray that we never be tempted, rather we should pray that God would guide

us so that we will not depart from His will and find ourselves in a situation to be tempted.

Deliverance from evil is two-fold. First, we should pray for God to help us overcome the desire within us to sin and do evil. We have the Holy Spirit to do just that and we should pray for a refilling of the Holy Spirit every day. Second, we should pray that God help us overcome the evil one and to stand victorious in this evil day in which we now live. God has already given us the tools to be overcomers; pray that God will help us to use them. Read Ephesians 6: 10-17 to learn about the tools.

“For If Ye Forgive Men, God Will Forgive You” - Forgiveness is a Prerequisite to Effective Prayer

Lastly, Jesus cautioned that we must not have an unforgiving spirit. Our prayers will have no effect if our heart is full of anger and bitterness. Dr. Wiersbe wrote, “If God answered the prayers of a believer who had an unforgiving spirit, He would dishonor His own name. How could God work through such a person to get His will done on earth? If God gave him his requests, He would be encouraging sin!” God has forgiven us; therefore, we must be quick to forgive those who have wronged us to maintain open communication with the Lord.

Make the choice to have a powerful, active prayer life and a deep, emotional connection with our Lord and Savior. Choose Jesus today!

God bless.