

We usually think of John the Baptist as a prophet and martyr, and yet our Lord's disciples remembered him as a man of prayer. John was a "miracle baby," filled with the Holy Spirit before he was born, and yet he had to pray. He was privileged to introduce the Messiah to Israel, and yet he had to pray. Jesus said that John was the greatest of the prophets, and yet John had to depend on prayer. If prayer was that vital to a man who had these many advantages, how much more important it ought to be to us who do not have these advantages!

John's disciples had to pray and Jesus' disciples wanted to learn better how to pray. They did not ask the Master to teach them how to preach or do great signs; they asked Him to teach them to pray. We today sometimes think that we would be better Christians if only we had been with Jesus when He was on earth, but this is not likely. The disciples were with Him and yet they failed many times! They could perform miracles, and yet they wanted to learn to pray.

The greatest argument for the priority of prayer is the fact that our Lord was a Man of prayer. If Jesus Christ, the perfect Son of God, had to depend on prayer during his days of on earth, then how much more do you and I need to pray! Effective prayer is the provision for every need and the solution for every problem.

We call this scripture "The Lord's Prayer," not because Jesus prayed it (He never had to ask for forgiveness), but because Jesus taught it. There is nothing wrong with praying this prayer personally or as part of a congregation as we do each Sunday, so long as we do it from a believing heart that is sincere and submitted. It is easy to "recite" these words and not really mean them, but that can happen even when we sing and preach! The fault lies with us, not with this prayer.

Some scholars call this is a "pattern prayer," given to guide us in our own praying. It teaches us that true prayer depends on a spiritual and personal

relationship with God that enables us to call Him “Father,” and this can come only through faith in Jesus Christ.

Lyndon Johnson’s press secretary, Bill Moyers, was saying grace at a staff lunch, and the President shouted, “Speak up, Bill! I can’t hear a thing!” Moyers quietly replied, “I wasn’t addressing you, Mr. President.” It is good to remind ourselves that when we pray, we talk to God.

Jesus prayed at every major point in His life. He prayed at the time of His baptism, and at the time of the choosing of His disciples. He was often alone praying and also prayed with others around. He prayed for Simon, and He prayed in the garden before His betrayal. He even prayed on the cross. One of His disciples, impressed with Jesus’ life of prayer, asked Jesus to teach them to pray.

So Jesus gave the disciples this model prayer. In it Jesus began with an intimate direct address, Father. This was characteristic of the way Jesus referred to God in His prayers. This also tells us that in prayer we are not coming to someone out of whom gifts have to be unwillingly extracted, but to a Father who delights to supply his children’s needs.

He then made five requests. The first two dealt with God’s interests. The first request was that God’s name be hallowed, “to set apart or sanctify” or, “to treat as holy”. So the request was for God’s reputation to be revered and honored by men. In Hebrew the name means much more than merely the name by which a person is called. The name means the whole character of the person as it is revealed and known to us. Psalm 9:10 says, “Those who know your name put their trust in You.” That means far more than knowing that God’s name is Yahweh. It means that those who know the whole character and mind and heart of God will gladly put their trust in him. So, before anything is asked for ourselves, God and his glory, and the reverence due to him, come first. Only when we give God his place will other things take their proper place.

The second request was “Your kingdom come.” John the Baptist, Jesus, the Twelve, and the 72 had been preaching about the coming of God’s kingdom. When a person prays for the coming of the kingdom, he or she is identifying with the message of Jesus and His followers. It has been said that the purpose of prayer is not to get man’s will done in heaven, but to get God’s will done on earth. Prayer is not telling God what we want like God is a heavenly bell hop and then we selfishly enjoying it. Prayer is asking God to use us to accomplish what God wants so that God’s name is glorified, God’s kingdom is extended and strengthened, and God’s will is done.

The prayer then covers all of life: present needs; past sins and future trials. The third request was for daily bread. Bread is a general term denoting nourishing and filling food. So the request is for food that is necessary to sustain life for the day. This goes back to the old story of the manna in the wilderness. Only enough for the needs of the day might be gathered. We are not to worry about the unknown future, but to live a day at a time.

The fourth request concerned man’s relationship to God—the forgiveness of sins. Luke had already linked the forgiveness of sins to faith. In asking for forgiveness of sins a person expresses his or her faith that God will forgive them. When we pray we must pray for forgiveness, because the best of us is a sinful person coming before the purity of God. And we show our faith by forgiving others.

The fifth request is, lead us not into temptation. The question is asked why pray such a prayer since God does not want people to sin? The meaning is that Jesus’ followers are to pray that they be delivered from situations that would cause them to sin. His disciples, contrary to the Law experts, realized that they were easily drawn into sin. Temptation means any testing situation. It includes far more than the mere seduction to sin; it covers every situation which is a challenge to and a

test of a person's maturity and integrity and fidelity. We cannot escape it, but we can meet it with God. Therefore as Jesus' followers we need to ask God for help to live righteous lives. This is where Luke ends the prayer, but we are more familiar with Matthews version in chapter 6.

Jesus then gave two parables. The first parable concerns persistence in prayer. It is common in Luke for good lessons to be taught from bad examples. In contrast with the man who did not want to be bothered, God wants His people to pray to Him. The point of Jesus' story is that even a friend would get up and get the food for one who knocks persistently. Even if his motive was just to get rid of a nuisance.

For us to understand the significance of this parable we need to look at the custom of entertaining visitors and why this could have happened in the first place, after all, we don't usually get visitors arriving at midnight even in our high tech world. Travelers often journeyed late in the evening to avoid the heat of the midday sun. In Jesus' story the traveler had arrived towards midnight at this friend's house. In the east hospitality is a sacred duty; it was not enough to set before a man a bare sufficiency; the guest had to be confronted with an ample abundance. In the villages bread was baked at home. Only enough for the day's needs was baked because, if it was kept and became stale, no one would want to eat it.

The late arrival of the traveler presented the householder with an embarrassing situation, because his pantry was empty and he could not fulfill the sacred obligations of hospitality. Late as it was, he went out to borrow from a friend. The friend's door was shut. In the east no one would knock on a shut door unless the need was an emergency. In the morning the door was opened and remained open all day; but if the door was shut, that was a definite sign that the householder did not wish to be disturbed. But the seeking host was not deterred. He knocked, and kept on knocking.

The poorer Palestinian house consisted of one room with only one little window. The floor was simply of beaten earth covered with dried reeds and rushes. The room was divided into two parts, not by a partition but by a low platform. Two-thirds of it were on ground level. The other third was slightly raised. On the raised part the charcoal stove burned all night, and round it the whole family slept, not on raised beds but on sleeping mats. Families were large and they slept close together for warmth. For one to rise was inevitably to disturb the whole family. Further, in the villages it was the custom to bring the livestock, the chickens and the goats, into the house at night.

Is there any wonder that the man who was in bed did not want to rise? But the determined borrower knocked on with shameless persistence—that is what the Greek word means—until at last the householder, knowing that by this time the whole family was disturbed anyway, arose and gave him what he needed.<sup>1</sup> Jesus taught: How much more will God, who is a Father, and who deeply loves us, respond to our prayers! So Jesus encouraged people to be persistent in prayer—not to change God’s mind but to be steadfast in praying and to receive their needs. The tenses of the verbs are important here: “Keep on asking... keep on seeking... keep on knocking.” In other words, don’t come to God only in the midnight emergencies, but keep in constant communion with your Father. In John’s gospel Jesus called this “abiding,” and Paul encouraged us to, “Pray without ceasing” (1 Thes. 5:17). As we pray, God will either answer or show us why He did not answer. Then it is up to us to do whatever is necessary in our lives so that the Father can trust us with the answer.<sup>2</sup> Prayer does not change God, but prayer changes us.

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<sup>1</sup> Barclay, William, lecturer in the University of Glasgow (Hrsg.): *The Gospel of Luke*. Philadelphia : The Westminster Press, 2000, c1975 (The Daily Study Bible Series, Rev. Ed), S. 142

<sup>2</sup>Wiersbe, Warren W.: *The Bible Exposition Commentary*. Wheaton, Ill. : Victor Books, 1996, c1989, S. Lk 11:29

The second parable noted that the heavenly Father gives His children what is good for them, not what harms them. Jesus encouraged the people of God to ask. He noted that natural fathers give good food to their children rather than something that would harm them (some fish may look like snakes, and the body of a large white scorpion could be mistaken for an egg). How much more will the heavenly Father give what is good to His children. The Greek word translated evil is used to portray active rebellion against God and good, a treachery deeply embedded in the human heart. Jesus' illustration teaches that even the lost at times reflect the beauty God designed into humanity at the Creation. Even a fallen man knows how to give good gifts to his own child.

Again Jesus is emphasizing by contrast. If a sinful human being gives good gifts to his children, how much more will God, a totally good being, give good gifts to we who through faith have become children in His family?<sup>3</sup>

Jesus stated that this good gift is the Holy Spirit, the most important gift that followers of Jesus would receive. The heavenly Father gives both heavenly gifts and earthly gifts. Believers today don't have to pray for the Holy Spirit because this prayer of the disciples was answered at Pentecost<sup>4</sup> and we receive it as a gift at our baptism.

Someone has said that the Lord's Prayer has two great uses in our private prayers. If we use it at the beginning of our devotions it awakens all kinds of holy desires which lead us on into the right pathways of prayer. If we use it at the end of our devotions it sums up all we ought to pray for in the presence of God.

Now that we know how to pray, let us pray day by day.

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<sup>3</sup>Richards, Lawrence O.: *The Bible Readers Companion*. electronic ed. Wheaton : Victor Books, 1991; Published in electronic form by Logos Research Systems, 1996, S. 662

<sup>4</sup>Walvoord, John F. ; Zuck, Roy B. ; Dallas Theological Seminary: *The Bible Knowledge Commentary : An Exposition of the Scriptures*. Wheaton, IL : Victor Books, 1983-c1985, S. 2:234