

“Teach Us to Pray”

Luke 11:1-4

I begin our study from God’s Word by asking you a personal question; “Why do you pray?” If you and I were face-to-face and I asked you that question, how would you respond? I hope you would be able to give me a variety of reasons why you pray, but it would be interesting to know what reason you put at the top of that list.

Prayer has always been important to the people of God. The subject of prayer occupies a significant amount of text in the Scriptures. We have many prayers recorded; prayers of praise and thanksgiving, prayers for divine intervention in time of crisis, prayers of repentance, prayers for blessing and spiritual growth, prayers of fellowship and communion.

Some portions of Scripture command us to pray, others encourage us to pray, and still others instruct us how to pray and things we should avoid in prayer.

The Scriptures also alert us to things that hinder the effectiveness of our prayer. The Psalmist said *“If I regard (or cherish) iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me.”* James tells us that we ask for things to *‘...consume upon our lusts.’* In doing that we are often guilty of asking for the wrong things. Or we ask, and don’t really expect to receive an answer. Again, James warns us *“...don’t let that man think he’ll receive anything from the Lord.”*

So we can begin our study of God’s Word by agreeing that prayer is important. It is so important; Jesus not only taught about prayer, He modeled it for the Twelve and for us.

As we continue our study in Luke’s Gospel, we come to the opening verses of chapter eleven; what is often called “The Lord’s Prayer.” But I believe we could more appropriately call it “The Model Prayer.” I believe you’ll understand my reasons for this as we explore the text together. I’ve titled our study, “Teach Us to Pray.”

Our text for this study is Luke 11:1 to 4. Many of you can recite this prayer from the more traditional form found in Matthew’s Gospel. So listen as I read **Luke 11:1 to 4**.

This text contains several IMPERATIVES given by Jesus which, if followed, will teach us how to pray.

In meditating on this text, I was blessed to see the connection between the closing verses of chapter ten and these verses from chapter eleven. Taken together, the picture of Mary sitting at Jesus' feet and the subsequent instruction provided by Jesus in this text, gives us a fuller, richer understanding of fellowship with Him and with the Father.

Before we begin looking that the imperatives in this text it will help you and me to understand what an imperative is. An imperative is an order or a command usually expressed in a forceful manner; such as, "Do this" or "Don't do that." It also expresses the idea of necessity. "It is imperative that you follow the steps of the process in their prescribed order." Try to keep this definition in mind as we explore this text.

The First IMPERATIVE is,

A Request for Instruction

Luke tells us that Jesus was praying in a certain place. When He finished, one of His disciples said, "*Lord, teach us to pray; just as John taught His disciples.*"

As you heard, I titled this imperative a request for instruction. I hesitated to use the word request. Because the Greek text makes it clear that the verb, teach, is an aorist imperative. That is, an action that takes place at a certain point in time and it carries with it a sense of urgency. So we could paraphrase the disciple saying "*Lord, teach us to pray...right now!*"

Prayer was an important part of Jewish life. Though not recorded for us in the Luke 4 synagogue scene, a series of prayers were offered at both the opening and closing of the regular services. Alfred Edersheim states that "Jewish punctiliousness (strict attention to formalities) defined every movement and attitude in prayer. If those rules were ever observed in their entirety, devotion must have been crushed under their weight." Those kinds of regulations make prayer a burden rather than a privilege and delight.

So can you imagine this disciple observing Jesus in prayer; recognizing the natural way in which Jesus is conversing with His Father? I can almost hear him thinking, "If this is what prayer is, I want to know how to do it."

Earlier, in Matthew's record of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus had taught the disciples certain precepts about prayer; posture, place, attitude, etcetera. In Luke 9:29 and other places He taught them by His example. Something in His manner of prayer or the wording struck this

disciple in a particular way and led him to ask Jesus for instruction. And who better to ask for guidance in prayer than Jesus? So then, this request comes with a sense of urgency, and you and I are blessed to be the recipients of Jesus' instruction!

The Second IMPERATIVE is,

A Reverence for the Father

If indeed this is a model prayer, and it surely seems to be, it is not so much our desire to repeat the words verbatim, but to understand and apply these principles to all our prayers.

If you survey the recorded prayers of Jesus you'll see them sprinkled through with abundant references to the Father. And as Jesus begins instructing us in the art and discipline of prayer, He teaches us to acknowledge and confess "Our Father who is in Heaven."

What is the significance of this phrase? First, all prayers, even the prayers of the heathen, are addressed to someone or something. The designation of our Father in Heaven acknowledges that we understand Him as the source of our life, indeed all life, both physical and spiritual. Addressing Him as Father establishes identity, paternity.

Addressing God as Father shows a level of familiarity tempered by reverence and awe. In my own experience as a child I remember loving my dad, wanting to be with him, and wanting his approval. But I also remember fearing his displeasure when I disobeyed his commands. God is love, that is true; but that is only half the picture. He is also absolutely holy and just!

Our understanding of God's role as Father is also influenced by progressive revelation. In Exodus 33:23 God responded to Moses' request to show him His glory by saying, "...*you shall see my back parts; but my face shall not be seen.*" Compare that with Second Corinthians 3:18 where Paul writes; "*But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.*"

God revealed Himself to man as one who loves, is caring, and is approachable. In Psalm 68:5 David writes of God, "*A father to the fatherless, and a protector of widows, is God in His holy habitation.*" Jesus, who showed such compassion for sinners and pronounced such harsh judgment on the self-righteous, said in John 10:30; "*I and my Father are one.*" As we address the Father, we do well to remember these truths.

In verse two, we now encounter three imperatives. I will list them and then we'll look at each one in detail. They are "*Hallowed be your name; Your kingdom come; and Your will be done, as in heaven so on earth.*" These imperatives are exclusive to God and appear in the text in descending order. By that I mean they begin with God's name, move to his kingdom, and then finally to His will on earth.

Hallowed be your name. This is the first imperative. We may understand this as; may your name be held in reverence and treated as holy. God's name identifies who He is; His purpose, character, reputation, and more!

Jesus teaches us the imperative of understanding who we're addressing when we pray. Consider Isaiah's vision of the holy God and Isaiah's response in chapter six of his prophecy. Think of those who approached God carelessly, like Nadab and Abihu, or Ananias and Saphirra. Then remember that through Jesus we can "*...come boldly [confidently] unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need*" Hebrews 4:16. We must learn to approach God's throne with care, respect, and reverence.

In his series of teaching on "The Holiness of God," R.C. Sproul tells of an experience he had when he was in the college classroom. Every day at the beginning of his class the professor would ask a student to pray. Day after day the students dutifully bowed their heads and began to pray audibly.

One day, when the professor asked a certain student to pray, the student said, "No." As you can imagine, his classmates were stunned. When the professor asked the student why he refused to pray, the student replied; "Because I am not in the proper frame of mind to pray."

That student had a refreshing honesty. He knew what was in his heart, and he was willing to admit that he was in no frame of mind to address God and hallow His name. How many times have you and I bowed our heads to pray when our thoughts were a million miles away, or we entertained thoughts of bitterness, an unforgiving spirit, or even anger at God for some perceived injustice? Jesus said, "Be careful, be sure to hallow my Father's name."

The opposite of holy is profane or common. Many Scripture passages warn us against profaning God's name. We can do this by using His name lightly, as a by-word, or by careless living. When David sinned with Bathsheba he gave the enemies of God great occasion to blaspheme or profane God's name.

When you and I approach God's throne it is imperative that we remember to reverence His name and regard Him as holy. This brings us to the next imperative.

Your kingdom come. We could spend a long time on this one. What did Jesus' disciples understand Him to mean with this imperative of prayer?

The kingdom of God, as the people of that day understood it, was foreshadowed in the Jewish theocracy. The rabbis often wrote about the kingdom of heaven, a term synonymous with the kingdom of God. It's true they understood the kingdom to mean divine worship, adoration of God, and the sum of religious duties. But they also looked forward to the Messianic kingdom; the literal rule of Christ on earth. The Gospel record reveals this longing in a variety of comments and questions raised by religious leaders and the people.

Jewish understanding of the kingdom was often narrow; they saw the kingdom as belonging to them. But there was a vague consciousness among the people that the principle of the kingdom was universal in nature. That consciousness may have come from the Prophet Daniel. Chapter seven, verse 27 reads *"And the kingdom and dominion and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people of the saints of the most High, whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey Him."*

In the past, I've defined the kingdom of God as "the realm in which the will of God is fully carried out." Marvin Vincent says "the kingdom of God is, essentially, the absolute dominion of God in the universe, both in a physical and spiritual sense." We're not yet experiencing this in its fullness, are we? German theologian, Friedrich Tholuck, wrote that the kingdom of God "is an organic commonwealth which has the principle of its existence in the will of God." Jesus said we should pray that His kingdom would come.

To pray that God's kingdom will come assumes that it is not yet here in its fullness. So how should we obey this imperative?

Let's remember, first of all, that Jesus gave this model prayer, according to Matthew's record, fairly early in His ministry. So that seems logical for the disciples of that time to pray that the kingdom would come. They were expecting a political kingdom. Even after the Resurrection the Twelve were questioning Jesus about restoring the kingdom to Israel, Acts 1:6.

After Pentecost it became clear that the political revival of Israel was not the focus of Jesus' life and ministry. His purpose was to call out a people for Himself, regardless of race or

ethnic background, to be agents of His grace in the world. I hear many people talking about “building His kingdom” but Jesus did not tell us to labor to bring in the kingdom or to build it. He told us to receive it (Mark 10:15) and to pray that it would come.

So as we pray that His kingdom will come we are praying, as I understand the Scriptures, about two principal things: *“The moral and spiritual kingdom which the God of grace is setting up in this fallen world...”* That’s the kingdom now. We are praying that more individuals will receive the kingdom as little children. Personal transformation by the new birth expands the kingdom of God in the present. And by virtue of that transformation there is both a physical and spiritual impact on our world.

There is also that future aspect of the kingdom when Jesus will exercise dominion and authority over all things. According to Scriptures like First Thessalonians 4:18 and Second Peter 1:11 we are to use the future aspect of the kingdom as a means of encouragement and consolation. We can pray with the martyrs of Revelation 6:10, *“O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?”*

We come now to the third imperative; **your will be done**. This third petition is clarified by the following words - ... *“as in heaven, so on earth.”*

How is the will of God performed in heaven? There, His authority is absolute! His will is carried out completely, perfectly, cheerfully, and gratefully by His ministering spirits. The scenes of heaven that are recorded in Scripture should move us to awe and worship. And we ask, “Will this prayer ever be answered outside the new heaven and new earth?”

You know, a common question we ask is “What is God’s will for me?” As we pray for God’s will to be done on earth as it is in heaven, we need to remember some specific things. God has already told us a number of things that are His will for His children.

Second Peter 3:9 informs us that God’s will is that no one should perish, but all should come to repentance. That’s important to remember as we pray for the will of God to be done in the lives of the unsaved. First Thessalonians 5:18 tells us that giving thanks **in ALL things** is the will of God for us. Yet how often we find ourselves complaining about our circumstances?

First Peter 3:17 reminds us that the will of God for us may include suffering for doing what is right. Yet how often do we feel sorry for ourselves in those situations? First Thessalonians 4:3 reminds us of God’s will for us regarding sexual purity; part of our

sanctification. Is my desire, and yours, to see His will fulfilled in this area of our lives; or do we want to make room for accommodating the desires of the flesh?

We should also use the concept in this phrase when we are not sure what the will of God is. We often find ourselves in circumstances where we do not have a clear understanding of what God's will is. How do we pray then?

Otto Koning tells the story of being in a church prayer meeting where they were praying for a sister in the congregation who was suffering from cancer. Some of the members thought they should pray specifically for her physical healing. Others suggested that, not knowing the will of God in this particular circumstance, they should simply pray that His will would be done. Both sides appealed to Brother Koning for his support.

His response was something like this. "We do not know for sure what the will of God is for this sister in this situation. What we do know is that God wants to use every circumstance of our lives to bring glory to His name. So, let us agree together to pray that God will do in this sister's life and circumstance whatever will bring the most honor and glory to Him." Everyone agreed to this and fervent prayer was made to God for this suffering saint. Brother Koning later reported that the woman was physically healed.

So these are several ways in which we can obey this third imperative that relates to God's character, His kingdom, and His will for mankind.

If you and I truly take this teaching to heart, our prayers will change. We will have a new consciousness of God's holiness, a better understanding of His kingdom, and a greater desire to see His will accomplished on earth, just as it is in heaven.

The Final IMPERATIVE is,

A Recognition of Our Need

In this section of the prayer, verses 3 and 4, the imperatives all focus on our needs as human beings. In contrast to the imperatives relating to God, these are in ascending order; beginning with the least important, our daily food, and ending with the most important, the petition for deliverance from evil. Let's examine each of these petitions/imperatives just like we did the first three.

Give us this day our daily bread. This is the only petition among the seven that deals with the needs of the physical body. This is the least important part of our existence. The three remaining petitions all relate to our eternal existence.

Kenneth Wuest, in his *Word Studies in the Greek New Testament*, translates this imperative as; “Our bread for the coming day, be giving us daily.” Another gives the sense of this petition as “Give us this day the bread which this day’s necessities require.”

In Matthew 6:31 Jesus cited food and clothing as the two necessities of life. He told us not to be anxious for these things, but to trust God for their provision. So why, now, does He instruct us to ask for our daily bread?

To ask for something is not an automatic indication of anxiety. If that were true, Jesus’ subsequent teaching on prayer would make no sense. We humans have needs, and part of this model prayer is the recognition that we are powerless to meet most of them in our own strength!

Praying to God for His daily provision actually frees us from anxiety as we acknowledge our dependence on Him. It also reminds us that today is all we have; there is no promise of tomorrow. So often we like to know what the physical provisions are for days, months, and even years, ahead. But this model prayer brings us back to basics. “Our bread for the coming day, be giving us daily.”

The next petition is **forgive our sins as we forgive everyone indebted to us.** Here, we move from the physical needs to spiritual ones. Again, Kenneth Wuest helps us understand. “Forgive our sins as we are in the habit of forgiving those who sin against us.” This is an ongoing process, not a singular event.

Notice that the first clause deals with forgiveness we seek from God for our offenses against Him. The second deals with the forgiveness we need because of our offenses against one another. The importance of this imperative cannot be overstated. Failure to pray it and live it has led to terrible consequences in individual lives, in families, and in churches.

When we ask God’s forgiveness we are asking Him to discharge, to send away, to dismiss, or to wipe away our sins. He does that based on the efficacy of the blood of Christ. The power of Christ blood is sufficient to cleanse all sin; past, present, and future!

And Jesus explains that our prayer should spring from the willingness to forgive everyone who is indebted to us. In Matthew 5:23 and 24 Jesus gives this instruction. “*If you*

bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you; leave your gift there and going your way, first be reconciled to your brother; and then come and offer your gift.”

In my own experience I have, at times, approached the throne of God in prayer, only to be reminded of a broken relationship with another person. At that moment I have a choice. I can follow Jesus’ teaching and pursue reconciliation, or I can continue praying with the sense that my prayers are rising no higher than the ceiling of the room where I’m praying!

Matthew’s record of this prayer refers to our sins as debts; *“Forgive us our debts as we forgive those indebted to us.”* Luke mixes the metaphor by using both terms; sins and debts. The meaning is clear; *“As the debtor in the creditor’s hand, so is the sinner in the hands of God.”* Jesus Christ paid the debt of our sins; a debt we could never pay. For that reason alone we should be, yes, must be, willing to forgive the offenses of others against us. To do less is to devalue the sacrifice of Jesus for us.

Can you imagine how much different our marriages, families, churches, and nations would be if all those who profess to know Jesus as Savior and Lord would pray this prayer in all sincerity? But we refuse to do it and what is the result? Like the unforgiving servant in Matthew chapter 18 we are delivered over to the tormentors of worry, fear, guilt, lust, greed, etcetera.

Brother, sister, God has made every provision for our victory over these things; but all too often, a spirit of unforgiveness cuts us off from the source of spiritual power. How can we truly acknowledge God as OUR father; how can we truly hallow His name; how can we seek His kingdom and pray that His will be done, even as we refuse to forgive our brother?

Jesus, through the words of the apostle John, provides a sobering reminder to us on this imperative. *“If anyone says, “I love God,” and hates his brother [or refuses to forgive his brother], he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen”* First John 4:20. I urge you to give serious consideration to these words.

Lead us not into temptation is the next petition/imperative. I believe a better rendering of this is expressed this way; *“Bring us not into trial or testing.”* This wording avoids the implication of seducing or enticing which attaches to the word, lead. It is failure in testing that leads to the need for forgiveness! So you can see the connection to the previous petition.

Scripture portions like James 1:13 to 16 make it very clear that God NEVER tempts us to do evil. It is also just as certain that God does bring His people—as He did Abraham, and Christ Himself—into circumstances both fitted and designed to try them, or test the strength of their faith. So what do we make of this?

You know as well as I do that the circumstances of our lives and the weakness of our flesh expose us a variety of trials and tests every day. But Marvin Vincent offers us insight with these words; “Forbid that our evil desire should convert our temptable condition into actual temptation.” An example of this would be Peter’s experience at Jesus’ trial.

In Luke 22:33 Jesus had warned Peter to be on his guard because Satan wanted to test each of the Twelve. So this was precisely the prayer, “Bring us not into trial or testing,” which Peter should’ve prayed, but did not. Of his own accord, and in spite of difficulties, he pressed for entrance into the palace hall of the high priest. As you know, once he was there, he was sucked into the scene and atmosphere of temptation. And he fell grievously!

As we consider this petition I think of Job. Satan’s accusation against Job was that God had put a hedge of protection around him. He told God that if that hedge was removed, Job would curse Him to His face. We know how that turned out.

Almost every morning in my prayer time I ask God place His hedge of protection around me and my family. It’s my desire to do it every morning, but sometimes I forget or my normal schedule is interrupted. I believe this is one way to pray this petition against being led into trial and testing. And I believe it covers all areas of life; physical, emotional, and spiritual.

I close our consideration of this petition with these words; “Keep us out of situations in which, so far as we can judge, it would be beyond our present strength to keep from sinning.” This is not a coward’s prayer. No man is a coward for being afraid of his own desires. It marks the highest quality of courage to know what to be afraid of and to fear it. To pray that God will not bring us within the *possibility* of temptation, would be to ignore our humanity, or to pray to be taken out of the world. But we *may* pray, and *will surely* pray, the more keenly aware we become of the weakness of our flesh, that God will not suffer the trials of life to become temptations to evil.”

Deliver us from evil is the final petition of the seven. Here is the crux of the matter. Some have concluded that this is a reference to the Evil One, Satan. But taken in context with the

breadth of the other petitions, it seems likely that this refers to ALL evil; that includes Satan and evil men. We could read it “Deliver us from all evil of whatever kind.”

The Greek word, *poneros*, translated into the English word, evil, is also used by Paul in Second Timothy 4:18. There he writes “*And the Lord shall deliver me from every **evil** work, and will preserve me unto his heavenly kingdom.*” Paul’s confidence should inspire us to pray this petition with confidence in Christ’s ability!

The final petition, then, is only rightly grasped when regarded as a prayer for deliverance from all evil of whatever kind—not only from sin, but from all its consequences—fully and finally. That will only happen when we are present with the Lord! So it is fitting that are your prayers and mine are ended with this realization. What else can we desire which this petition does not carry with it?

As we have examined these imperatives of prayer, I trust your heart has been stirred as mine has. This study has challenged me and given me a renewed appreciation for the awesome privilege we have to address God in prayer. It has made me more thoughtful, more cautious, about bowing my head and almost mindlessly repeating words and phrases I’ve become accustomed to using. I want to be more intentional AND biblical in my praying. How about you? Will you ask Jesus to teach you how to pray?

Gracious Heavenly Father, we honor your matchless, holy, worthy name! We acknowledge your desire to expand your kingdom into the heart and life of every person you’ve created; and eventually over all the earth. We pray for your will to be done in our lives, in our families, in our churches, in our nations, even as your divine will is cheerfully and perfectly carried out in heaven.

And Father, we pray for the supply of our daily bread, the sustenance of physical life. But more than that, we pray that you would forgive our sins as we willingly forgive those who offend us. Don’t allow our testing and trials to overcome us to the point of failure; but deliver us from every wicked design of Satan and evil men. This we pray with confidence in the name and through the blood of the Lord Jesus, Amen.