

## Lord, Teach Us to Pray

Sermon 72510

TEXT: Luke 11:1-13

THEME: Luke's version of the Lord's Prayer has Jesus giving us a pattern for prayer that we can use confidently and expectantly

SUBJECT: Discipleship; prayer

PURPOSE: To explore the pattern of prayer given to us by Jesus in Luke, that we may use it meaningfully and confidently

Did you miss some phrases from the Lord's Prayer as Jean read it from the Gospel of Luke this morning?

Did you know that there was more than one version of the Lord's Prayer in the Bible, and that the full version of the prayer we use has some additions to what we read in the scriptures?

Yes, there were some phrases missing in the reading this morning. The version the church traditionally uses is closer to the version you will find in Matthew 6: 9-13. The closing words of the Lord's Prayer don't appear with the Lord's Prayer version in the Bible, but were added by the church for its use in worship. The phraseology probably comes from some Jewish prayers.

This morning I am not going to give you a full comparison of the two versions of the Lord's Prayer, Matthew vs. Luke. I simply want to focus on what we learn about prayer from Luke's version. To begin, I would invite you take your bulletin and turn to the Lord's Prayer, as it is printed on page 4. I will lift out the phrases that appear in Luke. If you have a pencil or a pen, you might like to underline the phrases that appear in Luke.

The version of Luke to which I refer is from the New Revised Standard Translation. (You will find differences in the last two lines of the prayer between the NRSV and the NIV.)

Father,  
Hallowed be your name.  
Your kingdom come.  
Give us each day our daily bread.  
And forgive us our sins,  
    As we forgive those who are indebted to us.  
And do not bring us to the time of trial.

Before taking a closer look at the Prayer in Luke, we do need to take note of what prompts Jesus to give his disciples this prayer. You would think that this would have been one of the first things Jesus would teach his disciples, but he didn't! He either didn't think it was necessary to teach them this before now, or, being the good teacher he was, he didn't think there was any sense in trying to teach his disciples this prayer until they asked for it!

That's what happened, according to Luke. Finally, 11 chapters into the Gospel (and nearly half-way through it), one of the disciples asks Jesus to teach them to pray. Why? He just saw Jesus at prayer, again. While it takes 11 chapters before the teaching is given, we have seen Jesus at prayer several times already in Luke, and I don't need to say that we'll see him in some very deep prayer in a few chapters! You could say the disciples finally asked Jesus to teach them to pray, because they saw the impact prayer had on Jesus and his ministry. Besides that, John the Baptist had taught his disciples to pray. It was actually a very common thing for a Rabbi to do: give his followers a prayer that distinguished them as a community of disciples.

Jesus waited until the disciples began to be curious about the power of his prayer life, and until they were ready to have the teaching. Now, finally, they're ready!

So, here's how he taught them to pray:

**Father:** We come to God in light of a parental relationship. We come to God in light of God's goodness and care for us. We come to God because we know that God wants and plans good things for us. We come to God because we know God wants us to come to God. We come to God as children, humble and open. We come in awareness that we are part of a family, part of a community. No one of us has unique or sole claim on God, nor does God leave out anyone who would come to God as a member of God's family!

**Hallowed be your name:** I find it intriguing that we can't give up using this word, "hallowed," in the prayer. Where else do we use this word? What does this word mean for us today?

I think of the child that said, "I know what God's name is!"

The teacher responded, "You do? What is God's name?"

The child answered, "Harold."

"Harold?" the teacher said. "How did you come up with that name?"

"Because it's in that prayer, 'Our Father, Harold would be your name!'"

What *does* "hallowed" mean? It means "holy," "sanctified" (oh-oh, there's another word we hardly use these days), "honored." Actually, to be holy is to be set apart for sacred

purposes! Hey, maybe that's why we still use the word "hallowed" in the Lord's Prayer! We know it means "holy," and we set apart God in God's holiness by saying, "Hallowed be your name!"

As we pray this prayer, we are inspired to think of God's holiness and to honor God for God's holiness. This also leads us to awareness that part of our job as members of God's family is to uphold the holiness of God and God's name in the world today. Certainly, part of the meaning of this phrase is that everybody would some day soon honor the holiness of God's name!

**Your kingdom come.** Here we are clearly confronted by Luke's viewpoint. The coming of Jesus is the inbreaking of the kingdom of God in the world today. It's coming now, but it's not completed. To pray this prayer is to pray that it would be a reality soon—definitely in our lives and in the life of our faith community, but also for all of the cosmos to know, to want, and to live in the fullness of God's reign.

To pray this phrase is to seek God's will and to enact it in our lives as disciples and as a community of faith.

**Give us each day our daily bread.** In this phrase, we are confronted by Luke's special concern for the plight of the poor. (Matthew just says, "Give us *this* day....") I think this underscores the daily struggle that the poor and hungry have in order to have adequate nutrition. So the prayer, for Luke, seeks God's ongoing provision for the poor—indeed, for all of us.

This is a reminder to us of how God provided manna for the Hebrew people during their 40-year journey through the wilderness to the promised land. God did it faithfully. The people were to gather no more than what they needed for the day, except for on Friday, they could gather two days' worth so they wouldn't have to work on the Sabbath. If they gathered too much and stored it for themselves, the amount that exceeded the daily need rotted. Of course, they could gather and share the extra with others who didn't have enough.

So, as we pray for daily bread each day, we are led to think of our daily needs, and God's provision for them. We are reminded that our excess is to be shared with those who don't have enough. We are reminded, most of all, that all that we are and all that we have are gifts from God! The well-known Presbyterian preacher and writer, Bruce Larson, pointed out poignantly that we receive God's gifts only as we become a channel for giving them to others!

**And forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us.** This translation from the NRSV (New Revised Standard Version) apparently comes the closest to the original language, and is very poignant. Again, it underscores Luke's concern for the plight of the poor. It is obvious we can receive forgiveness only to the extent that we're willing to offer it to others. But Luke has underscored the fact that the

poor need to be freed from the bonds and the obligations of financial debts that they owe others and may never have the ability to repay.

**And do not bring us to the time of trial.** This phrase is a difficult one. We read in the letter of James that God doesn't play around with people and tempt them. But we also know people of biblical stories, like Job, and probably even some people in our own experience, who have had terrible times of trial and tribulation. So what is correct? Dare we say life is both ways. God doesn't test us out of some sense of masochism. But it is a fact of life both that many do experience times of trial or persecution and that probably all of us face temptations.

So what does it mean to pray this part of the prayer? I think we can pray it literally. At the same time, we can pray it with the confidence and expectation that God will be with us and deliver us through the trials and temptations that do come our way.

Finally, I think this prayer reminds us of what Jesus did for us on the cross. He conquered temptation, sin, evil, and death itself by his victory over the cross, by his resurrection. To pray this prayer, then, is to pray that we can, indeed, share in Jesus' victory, even when we do face—and succumb—to temptation and trial!

I do need to point out that this prayer is not simply intended to be repeated in rote fashion. We certainly can and do use the Lord's Prayer in this manner. But it is more intended to be a pattern for us to use in our times of prayer, a guide to help us reflect on these things as we pray.

The teachings in the verses following the Lord's Prayer in Luke are fairly obvious in their meaning. They encourage us to persist in prayer, because we can count on God. They encourage us to pray in confidence, because we know that God wants good things for us. Jesus points out clearly that if we weak and sometimes sinful humans can and do give good things for others, surely we can count on God's desire to give us good things.

Do Jesus' teachings offer a formula for us to get what we want? No, we will not always get what we ask for. But we can count on God answering our prayers according to our need and for our own good, and according to God's will for us.

The last verse of this morning's reading (13) contains a surprise. Remember, Jesus said, "If you who are evil give good things to your children when they ask, then how much more will God give the Holy Spirit when you ask for it?" The best thing we can ask for and that God offers us is the Holy Spirit! Above all things Jesus wants us to ask for and that God wants to give us is the Holy Spirit. The Spirit will sustain us in our relationship with God through Jesus, and the Spirit will sustain us in service and witness in the world on their behalf!

I close with this:

In his book on prayer, Richard J. Foster (a former religion professor at George Fox College in Newberg) referred to the heart of God as “an open wound of love.” He described the Father as the one who “aches over our distance and preoccupation”...who “mourns that we do not draw near to him”...who “grieves that we have forgotten him.”

Seeing the heart of God from this viewpoint is compelling. How could we not rush headlong into the arms of the God who loves us so much, the one who longs to commune with us? How can we realize that God is waiting daily to meet with us, to speak with us, to hear us?”

“Father, hallowed be your name....!