

The Way to Pray

By
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Matthew 6:9-13

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.

One of the most asked questions by new believers (and some veteran believers) is, “How do I pray?” Typically, this question generates almost as many different answers as there are people who try to answer it. In this teaching, we will take a look at the answer Jesus gave his followers, when they asked this very same question of Him, and see how we can apply it to our lives today.

YOU'RE NOT THE FIRST ONE TO ASK

As I stated in the intro, this is one of the most asked questions in the church. Typically, it goes right along with, “How do I study the Bible?” **Unfortunately, it is also one of the most “unasked” questions as well.**

There could be many reasons for this question to go unasked. Probably the most common would be: embarrassment, an assumption that it should come naturally, or ignorance about the importance of prayer.

Some believers may feel too embarrassed to ask the question because they don't want to appear ignorant. I believe this concern is brought about by the general assumption in the church that it should come naturally. While most leaders in the church would never make that assumption, somehow, many lay-people come to believe it is true. Psychologically, it probably developed from people's desire to want to “fit in” and be immediately accepted into their new environment when they first come to Christ. Sadly, this has led to many believers walking around, and functioning, in churches with this, and many other questions left unanswered.

Because people seem to be “doing fine” with very little knowledge about prayer or other spiritual matters, it seems that many believers come to believe that prayer, Bible study, and spiritual growth are of little importance, or relevance, to the everyday Christian. They seem to feel that, as long as their leaders have a firm grasp on these matters, everything will work out alright. If they run into a problem bigger than they are, they can go to the leaders for help. I believe that this has led to many of the bizarre and destructive organizations that have been produced by the Church over the ages. As we've learned over and over again in our previous teachings, it is extremely important that every believer be accountable for themselves before God and

should develop their own relationship with Him. (If you know the Truth, you won't be deceived by a lie!)

Jesus' followers found themselves in the same boat as many believers today (Luke 11). They had embraced the person, ministry, and teachings of Jesus, but they had no real idea of how to apply these things to their lives personally. You see, most of them had grown up with a religion that kept God separate from man. Only special, very holy men could even dare address God about spiritual matters. Even their repentance of sin had to go through a special High Priest. They had little to no interaction with the power of God as individuals. When they did, it was God who initiated it, and then it was an experience that happened to them or around them. **Christ's arrival on the scene was the first time man actually interacted with God inside them!** This was the first time they were allowed to have a personal relationship with God and go to Him in prayer for themselves.

The early believers had a hard time leaving the ways of the past behind and implementing this "new-fangled" concept of personal relationship. In fact, after Jesus' resurrection and ascension to Heaven, the early church leaders became divided over whether or not to keep to some of the "old ways" or give way completely to the new. (*For more info, read the writings of Peter and Paul in the New Testament.*) This confusion about the "new ways" Jesus was teaching only added to their desire to understand them and to learn exactly how to implement them. This is why we find them asking Jesus, in Luke 11, to teach them to pray.

Before we go any further, some of you may have noticed that our main text for this teaching is from Matthew 6 and that I just referred to Luke 11. This is because the same prayer is included in both books.

All 4 of the Gospels are retellings of the life, teachings, and ministry of Jesus. Sometimes they feature different, or additional, events. Sometimes they contain the same events from a different prospective. Each writer, operating under inspiration of the Holy Ghost, created their work from their own individual perspective. Certain things apparently stood out more to different writers. **The miraculous thing is that they do not conflict with one another, rather, they compliment and/or complete on another.** I have chosen to use the version of the prayer in Matthew 6 because it contains a closing that is omitted in Luke 11. However, both versions use similar language and hold the same basic prayer principles we will examine in this teaching.

WHAT JESUS TAUGHT

In answering His followers, Jesus gave them an outline (or structure) by which to pray. Notice, He said, "***After this manner therefore pray ye***". (Mat. 6:9) Another word for manner is "style". **In other words, Jesus was telling them to pray in that style or format.** He was not necessarily telling them to use the same words He did. Rather, He wanted them to follow this style or format when they prayed.

Now, this doesn't mean that they couldn't use His exact wording. He was actually encouraging them to pray using their own words, while following his pattern. I realize that there are some who would disagree with me on this and insist that we ONLY use His exact wording. However, earlier in Matthew 6, **Jesus warned His followers about using “vain repetitions” when they pray.** This was something that the heathen and idol worshipers did. They chanted, or repeated, the same prayers over and over like spells or some secret access code to try to get what they were seeking. **Jesus reminded His followers that their Father already knows what they need before they ask it**, so just ask and move on. **The number of times, speed, or volume you use when you ask have no bearing on the matter.** The Father is actively involved our lives and is waiting on us to come to Him with our needs.

Some may still disagree with me on this, but each person has to make their own choice on the matter. While I do not believe it is a sin to use the exact wording of Christ's prayer, I do believe that its exclusive use in prayer dramatically reduces our potential for deepening our communion and relationship with the Father. You'll see what I mean shortly.

Let's examine His prayer closely and see if we can begin to understand what He was showing us:

“Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name.”

Principle #1 – Begin your prayer with a declaration of faith and worship.

Hebrews 11:6 informs us that, “*without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.*” In His use of the above statement, Jesus demonstrates that He has faith in God. He verbally recognizes who God is and what He does. God is our Father and a father provides the needs of his children. Secondly, after He demonstrates His faith, He offers worship. Because God is the heavenly provider, Jesus declares that His name should be set apart, revered, and declared as special, or holy, above other names.

“Thy kingdom come.”

Principle #2 – Seek first the Kingdom of God, His authority and ways. (Mat. 6:33)

This is the first type of request made. Before we concern ourselves with our personal needs, or the needs of others, we need to focus on the needs of Kingdom of God. This is the time when we should pray for our church, leaders, community, government, and the world, that God use them or transform them to serve the purposes of His Kingdom. We are seeking the spiritual and physical benefits of His Kingdom for the Earth. We show that His business and ways are top priority and that we prefer them to man's. This is also an act of praise and worship in that we recognize and declare His Kingdom and authority above all else.

“Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.”

Principle #3 – Seek God’s guidance, plan, and purpose for your life.

This is really a continuation of the last principle. Here we are submitting ALL things to His will. We are asking that His will be done instead of ours. Our own desires or wants are covered by this statement as well. **This is the perfect time to bring “special requests” to the Father.** By special, I mean those outside of our actual needs. These would include such things as dreams, desires, goals, and other things we may want, but not necessarily need. **By submitting these things to the Father’s will, we show Him that we want Him to govern our lives and show us what is best for us.** We acknowledge that our “Father knows best.” We show God that we place our trust in Him above all else, including ourselves.

“Give us this day our daily bread.”

Principle #4 – Make your needs known and trust God to provide.

Here we acknowledge God as our provider and demonstrate our faith by trusting Him to supply our daily needs. **This is the time to seek God for the actual day-to-day needs we have such as food, clothing, shelter, money to pay the bills, good health, and so on.** Personally, I include such things as mental, emotional, and spiritual needs as well. I believe God wants to take care of ALL our daily needs, not just the physical ones. **This is a good time to seek the anointing of His Spirit that we will need to take care of any/all tasks that come before us each day.** If it’s true that each new day presents new challenges, then we need fresh anointing to deal with them. I don’t spend a lot of time praying in this area for the basics. I focus more on any unusual or “day-specific” needs that arise.

“And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.”

Principle #5 – Confess your sins to God and grant forgiveness to men.

When we sin against someone, or wrong them, we become indebted to them until we can make it right or, at least, apologize. **Here, we are asking God to forgive our sins, both against Him and men.** *“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”* (1 John 1:9) **We also show God, and ourselves, that we forgive those who sinned against us.** This is important because *“if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: but if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.”* (Matt 6:14-15) In other words, if we want God to not hold our sins against us, then we must not hold the wrongs of others against them. I often take this a step further and pray for God to forgive and bless those who have wronged me. (Matt 5:44) Please note that this part of the prayer seeks God’s forgiveness only. It does not eliminate the need for us to repent and/or make amends to those who we may have sinned against. I believe we should do this as often as is appropriate. Besides making the other person feel better, it shows that we really believe what we say we do...

“And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil”

Principle # 6 – Ask God to help you not sin and live right.

This is the point at which we seek God's help for our spiritual weakness. **Two things are happening here. 1) We are asking God to help us to not do wrong. 2) We are asking God to deliver us from the sinful habits or tendencies we already have.** By praying this way, we are demonstrating our dependency upon God for the help we need to stop sinning. We are acknowledging that we lack the power and ability needed on our own. We need His Spirit and power to live right. We also show our faith in God's grace and mercy to cover us and keep us in His family. (2 Cho 12:9)

“For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.”

Principle # 7 – End your prayer with a declaration of faith and worship.

This is both a closing declaration of praise and a completion of the previous section. **This is why we are asking God's help in becoming a sinless Christian. It's also why we have prayed to Him and asked all of the things we prayed for previously.** He is God. He reigns and rules supremely, and without equal, over everything else that exists, or shall exist. He has ALL power and thusly deserves ALL glory. Not only are we acknowledging who He is but, once again, we are declaring our faith in His ability to accomplish more than we could ever ask, hope, or dream for.

CLOSING THOUGHTS

Did you notice the order of things here? First, we declare who God is and that we believe it to be true. Second, we seek His will and intervention for the whole Earth and for others. Next, we seek His will and intervention for ourselves. Lastly, we close by, once again, declaring who God is and that we believe it to be true.

I find it particularly interesting that we are told to both open and close our prayer time with praise and worship. You may be wondering exactly, “*Why is that?*”

It's very simple really. **The bible tells us that God inhabits praise.** (Ps 22:3) The Hebrew word for inhabit used is “*yashab*” which means: to dwell or cause to dwell. **In other words, God shows up when we praise!** It's not because He loves to hear His name or hear flattering things spoken of Him, as many suppose. Rather, it is because praise and worship are declarations of faith!

We've already learned that faith pleases God and is necessary before we can come before God (or get His attention). **God will grant an audience and listen to those who come before Him in faith.** For those who cannot see the importance of praise and worship in the church, or the daily life of a believer, I would point you to the example

Christ provided in our main text. Christ obviously thought it was important enough to mention. **I don't know about you, but I would much rather know that I have God's attention and interaction in ALL my spiritual activities than to hope I do!**

Something else to point out is the use of the word “*us*” in Christ’s prayer. To me it shows the importance of praying for the entire body of Christ. **We can't be selfish and just focus on our particular part of the body.** It would be like the toe only worrying about itself while the leg has an injury. There’s no point in even having a toe if you can’t use the leg properly to walk in the first place. **We are all one body. What affects one part, affects the whole. We need to focus on the entire body, as well as our own little part.**

Lastly, I don’t want to leave you with the impression that this is the ONLY way to pray or that you have to use this format for *every* prayer situation. **I believe that this format is designed specifically for our daily personal prayer time in our “prayer closet”.** (Mat 6:5-6)

As you will see throughout the New Testament, there are different types of prayer used in different situations. For example, Paul talks about praying in the spirit (*an unknown tongue*) AND with the understanding (*using your normal language and words that are understandable to you and any listeners*). (1 Cho 14:15-20) The Lord’s Prayer deals with praying with the understanding but, by no means, excludes you from praying also in the spirit. In fact, sometimes, I flow back and forth between the two during the course of my prayer time. Other times, my praise and worship at the end leads me into praying in the spirit. (*I don't really have time to go into praying in the spirit or the other possible prayer types and situations here, but I will try to address them in greater detail in a future teaching for those who may be interested.*)

The whole purpose of this teaching is to familiarize you with the basic principles of prayer as given to us by Jesus. You will need to choose how you want to implement these concepts into your own prayer life. Personally, I hope you will add them all. You wouldn’t believe the difference it has made in my prayer life over the years!

If you take nothing else away from our time together, I hope you will at least choose to add praise and worship to the beginning and end of all your prayers. The whole point of prayer is to talk to God. It certainly would help to know He’s listening.

TRY THIS AT HOME!

If you don’t know what else to say at this point, try starting with simply reading the Lord’s Prayer aloud. As you become more familiar with the format, start branching out. Maybe you can use Christ’s words and then add to, or expand upon, them with your own specific prayers. I do this a lot. Christ’s words provide an excellent starting point and help to keep you flowing in the right direction. Many of you may even abandon the original wording of Jesus and use your own words exclusively. It’s your call - whatever

works best for you and God. **The goal here is to follow the order or format Jesus laid out for us.** The phrasing and wording is incidental.

If you have any questions or comments about this month's teaching, you may feel free to contact me via email (shannerowe@freshrainonline.com), by phone at (317) 462-3634, or by postal mail: Rev. Shane Rowe, 1555 E. Main Street, Greenfield, IN, 46140.

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