

Teach Us to Pray

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References: **Luke 11**, Acts 4:23-33; 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18; Luke 11:1-4; Isaiah 6:3; Matthew 6:33; 1 John 1:9; Psalm 66:18; 1 Corinthians 10:31; Ephesians 3:21; Acts 2:42

Introduction

Good evening. Good evening to everyone there online. And that's quite a crowd there on the screen. So good to see that. I'm very encouraged by that. Thank you. I'm very encouraged that you pray for myself and my wife so much, and you seem to be inviting us back here. It's the grace of God. We thank you, dear assembly, for your love and your fellowship with us. Let's open our Bibles to Acts chapter 4. Book of Acts chapter 4.

After that prayer meeting we just had, I feel like a lion in a den of Daniels. Thank you. That prayer meeting was just very well—very good. Lots of caring people praying for many people. It's so encouraging. Acts chapter 4, verse 23. This is a situation where Peter and John have been spoken to kind of harshly by the religious leaders of the time. And they're saying, "Don't teach in this name. Don't preach in this name." And they say, "Well, we need to listen to God and not to you." So in verse 23, they were finally let go. Being let go, they went to their own company...

[Acts 4:23-33 NKJV]

²³ And being let go, they went to their own companions and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said to them. ²⁴ So when they heard that, they raised their voice to God with one accord and said: "Lord, You are God, who made heaven and earth and the sea, and all that is in them, ²⁵ who by the mouth of Your servant David have said:

"Why did the nations rage,
And the people plot vain things?

²⁶ The kings of the earth took their stand,
And the rulers were gathered together
Against the LORD and against His Christ.'

²⁷ "For truly against Your holy Servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered together ²⁸ to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose determined before to be done. ²⁹ Now, Lord, look on their threats, and grant to Your servants that with all boldness they may speak Your word, ³⁰ by stretching out Your hand to heal, and that signs and wonders may be done through the name of Your holy Servant Jesus." ³¹ And when they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God with boldness. ³² Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul; neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common. ³³ And with great power the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And great grace was upon them all.

And the Lord will bless the reading of his word to us this evening. Now, there's a prayer meeting. The place was shaken where they were assembled together. Every time I read that, I'm in awe. And one more scripture in 1 Thessalonians. 1 Thessalonians chapter 5. 1 Thessalonians chapter 5 and starting at verse 16. 1 Thessalonians 5:16 says,

[1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 NKJV]

¹⁶ Rejoice always, ¹⁷ pray without ceasing, ¹⁸ in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

Why Don't We Pray More?

Pray without ceasing, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus. So, I think you figured out already my topic for tonight is **prayer**. Amen. And I must admit I'm feeling quite inadequate in presenting this message in an assembly of yours, the assembly as yours, that has this wonderful time of prayer. Again, I say it's very encouraging. So, I'm going to ask a couple of questions, and I'm directing the questions at myself as well.

My first question is, why don't we pray more? And that's very much four fingers pointing back at me. Why don't we pray more individually, collectively, corporately? Probably there's many that are on the same—have the same issues that I do because prayer sometimes seems to be almost a labor. There's almost everything else seems to be okay to do, but when it comes to time to prayer, it seems that only times when our lives are in desperate need that we pray, or when somebody else is in desperate need, then we pray. But when things are

going very well, then it seems to be almost the last thing on the list, right? So we have a checklist of things we want to do. "Oh, yeah, there's prayer here on the bottom. Yeah, right, we should be doing that." So why don't we pray more?

Why do we pray? We know that God is able to do anything and everything, more than we ask or can conceive. But we read here in the New Testament passages that we just read just now, and the New Testament talks a lot about prayer. It seems that prayer was very prevalent. Amen. What is prayer?

A quick definition from D.L. Moody. He asked a gathering of young people for a definition of prayer, and one young man responded, said, "Prayer is an offering up of our desires unto God for things agreeable to his will in the name of Christ Jesus and with confession of our sins and thankfulness for his mercies."

Prayer seems to be asking God for our needs and interceding on the behalf of others and expressing our thanksgiving. And I'll add to that, true prayer seeks God himself. I know it's true, and I sometimes, or I could say even often in prayer, I don't really have the words that I know I need, but I don't think it's the words that I'm saying that are the most important. I think it's in my attitude and my relationship to who I'm praying to that seems to be the more important. And I don't know, maybe you can understand what I'm saying by that. It's something very personal. Is it important to pray? I think the answer is very obvious.

Examples of Prayer

But we have some incredible examples in the New Testament as well. And the number one example, the one that—maybe you're like me again—it's almost baffling. The Lord Jesus Christ prayed, and he prayed often. Through the Gospels, we read of Jesus Christ praying, deity praying to deity. There's one alone among the olive trees, on his knees, praying, sweating, as it were, great drops of blood, and yet not too far away, there's three men sleeping. Oh, Lord, I don't want to be one of those three men sleeping. But how often is it me? Yet the one praying goes on to win the greatest victory ever known, the greatest triumph, the triumph of the crucified, and the other three turn and ran.

We read a lot about the apostles and the disciples praying, what we just read in the book of Acts. They had been with the Lord. They'd seen and heard him pray. They witnessed the miraculous results. And they saw the Lord devoted to pray. And yet, interestingly, they never asked to be taught how to do miracles. They never asked how to preach or teach. The only thing they really asked of the Lord was, "Teach us to pray." And that's where I want to go this evening is the Lord—what we call or the world calls the Lord's Prayer, when really it is the disciples' prayer. Amen.

There's so many promises in John chapter 14 and 15 and 16 about him answering prayer: "Abide in me and I in you, and you will ask what you will and it will be..." I don't want to go off on that too deep because time is fleeting away here. And their prayers—the disciples' prayers after the Lord's ascension—were proof that they believed in his promises. Paul prayed just days after Paul's Damascus Road conversion; it is said of him by the Lord himself, "Behold, he prayeth." Through Paul, throughout Paul's epistles, he exhorts saints to pray.

Even here in 1 Thessalonians, we just read that, pray without ceasing, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus. Throughout Paul's epistles are wonderful examples of Paul praying. He seems to sometimes just break in. He's teaching doctrine or something. He's talking about something, and all of a sudden he just breaks in in prayer. And those prayers are wonderful models of prayer.

The early church prayed, as we just read here in Acts chapter 4. They knew that if they would be successful in the commission that they'd been given, that the only way was with the help of God through the power of his Holy Spirit and in prayer. So, as to put it in simple terms, we can easily understand that they never asked for lighter loads. They always asked for **stronger backs**. They never asked for deliverance, and they always asked for courage and boldness. Now, does that sound like me? No, sometimes I pray for a lighter load. And quite often I'll pray for deliverance. But they prayed for stronger backs. They prayed for courage and for boldness. They knew the task that was set before them was way beyond their capabilities. They knew that constant contact with the Lord was the only way that they were ever going to accomplish the furtherance of the good news, the gospel of Jesus Christ. And you'll remember last week when I was here, I spoke about or reminded us of Ephesians 6, the armor of God. And I was talking a lot about truth in the first item.

The first item of the armor of God was the belt of truth. But when you look through that list, the closing item was prayer—prayer and supplications. So, I think of it as an army. And they have all the equipment. They have the training. They have all that they need. But the one thing that they really, really, really need is instruction from the leader. Otherwise, it's just chaos. I don't know, maybe I'm dating myself here, but in 1995, the United States invaded Iraq, and they went in really fast and took over very quickly. It wasn't too long, they arrested Saddam Hussein. But the first thing they did as an army is they took out all the communications. That army, the Iraq army, was so defeated and so disabled because they took away the communications. We need the communication if we're at war and if we have a gospel to preach. We need our orders from headquarters.

It is the will of God. Pray without ceasing. In everything give thanks, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus. So when we look at the New Testament, we realize that prayer is quite

prominent. There's a lot of scripture references to prayer. We acknowledge the importance of prayer. And we saw that there was many examples of prayer from the Lord himself, the apostles, the disciples. A lot of examples for us. But you remember the disciples didn't ask for how to do miracles or how to preach or teach. They asked, "Lord, teach us to pray." So let's look at Luke chapter 11 and read that very familiar passage. Luke chapter 11, and verse 1.

[Luke 11:1-4 NKJV]

¹ Now it came to pass, as He was praying in a certain place, when He ceased, that one of His disciples said to Him, "Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples."

² So He said to them, "When you pray, say: Our Father in heaven, Hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done On earth as it is in heaven. ³ Give us day by day our daily bread. ⁴ And forgive us our sins, For we also forgive everyone who is indebted to us. And do not lead us into temptation, But deliver us from the evil one."

The Model for Prayer

So let's take a couple of lessons from this prayer. I know that this prayer is maybe a little concerning to us individually, trying not to be very repetitious in our prayers, right? Even the Lord Jesus Christ admonished, you know, vain repetitions in prayer. But then we have this prayer here, and he says, "If you do pray, pray like this." So we want to not be just in vain repetition, but we also want to see what does this prayer example here really teach us. So I want to look at it that way.

So the first phrase there is "Our Father." We can stop there, period. The very first is the acknowledgement of God, our Father. The name escapes me... Martyn Lloyd-Jones, that's the name. Martyn Lloyd-Jones has a very substantial book on the Sermon on the Mount. I've not read the whole thing, but I read a portion of it, particularly about this prayer, which is also in Matthew. And he mentioned, he was talking about just that first phrase, "Our Father, which art in heaven." And this is the one thing that I took away from it: there's times in our life when we're praying and we don't know what to say. The burden is heavy or it's just too confusing. And Martyn Lloyd-Jones says if you can just say "Father," it is enough. The Spirit will already translate. The heart is crying, "Abba, Father." I think that's a wonderful start. We know who we're praying to, and he is our Father in heaven.

"Hallowed be thy name." Hallowed is another way of saying holy. And holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts, Isaiah chapter 6 says.

[Isaiah 6:3 NKJV]

And one cried to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; The whole earth is full of His glory!"

And holy means there is none other. It's a separate entity. There's nothing, there's no other God. He is holy, separate. Just a couple of days ago, I gave a little booklet, kind of a gospel book to a young man. He's saved. But he opens up right at the beginning, and it says—this is regarding the holy, Holy Bible—and he looks and he says, "Wow, I never knew that." Bible means a library of books. It's okay, yeah. And holy just means unique. Nothing like it. Holy, holy, holy. There is no other God. And he is our Father. Hallowed be thy name.

Next phrase: "Thy kingdom come." Is this not a good reason to pray? Thy kingdom come. I've learned over the years, there's a lot of confusion about the kingdom. But the Lord Jesus Christ, he is a prophet, priest, and king. I think we've all heard that phrasing before. When he was here on earth, he was the prophet. "Art thou the prophet that should come?" Now he's seated at the right hand of God the Father as our high priest, ever interceding for us. That's his role now, is the high priest, after the order of Melchizedek. But the day is coming, and I think it's very soon, when the Lord Jesus Christ is coming back with us, to rescue Israel and to set up his throne in the city of David, on the throne of David. It's the consummation of everything that's happened throughout all of human history to come to this point where the Lord Jesus Christ will actually sit on his throne and take the dominion back, which was given away way back in the Garden of Eden. Right now we have a ruler in this world, he's not a good ruler. It's the devil. But the day is coming when the Lord Jesus Christ will sit on the throne of David. "Thy kingdom come, Lord." I can't wait. And we will be ruling and reigning with him for a thousand years. I mean, that's a big topic. In the Sermon on the Mount, he says, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God."

[Matthew 6:33 NKJV]

But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.

We should be working and praying towards that kingdom come.

Next phrase: "Give us this day our daily bread." Daily bread. Praying for our present needs, not for stockpiling. This is praying for what we need to serve him, to work for him. We need supplies. So we ask, "Give us this day our daily bread."

Next phrase: "Forgive us our sins." Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone that is indebted to us. Is sin and unforgiveness among us as believers, is that detrimental? Yes, very much. Again, over the years—and I don't have huge experiences, but I have seen so much—only forgiveness could solve huge issues between brothers and sisters and even between assemblies. "Lord, forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone that is indebted to us." So we need to forgive, we need to be forgiven. And then First John 1:9 says:

[1 John 1:9 NKJV]

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

We need to maintain that fellowship, that fellowship with the Father, and that of course, as First John says, then our fellowship with one another is maintained as well. So we need to pray that.

And then the last: "And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil." And the devil would like nothing better than to have us break down in our relationships one with another and our relationship with the Heavenly Father. And I think I don't have to speak just for myself. I think I can speak for everyone in this room. We know the devil is working full-time against us and against the assembly. Psalm 66 says,

[Psalm 66:18 NKJV]

If I regard iniquity in my heart, The Lord will not hear.

Deliver us from evil. Deliver us from the evil one. Satan can laugh at our toiling. He can mock us for our lack of wisdom. He can ridicule our failures. But he fears when we get down on our knees and pray in the Spirit and in the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ. The devil doesn't mind if we are occupied with much doing. But it's the united assembly in prayer that is the greatest threat to him. So please, dear brothers and sisters, stay in prayer, because you have been this evening. It's a vital, vital part of the battle.

The Assembly and the Model Prayer

So, that's a look at the prayer from an individual perspective. Just a quick little thought that maybe all these items and all these different thoughts is something that the assembly could use as a model for prayer.

So personally, I'm to serve a holy, loving, and gracious, and merciful, almighty, all-knowing, and ever-present God. I am to serve him. Is that not true of the assembly? 1 Corinthians 10:31 says,

[1 Corinthians 10:31 NKJV]

Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.

Ephesians 3:21:

[Ephesians 3:21 NKJV]

to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever.
Amen.

Abba, Father. How much I need him personally, how much we need him as assemblies. And we put it right there at the first.

Personally, I take from this prayer model that I pray for his kingdom to come. Should that not be true of the assembly? That glorious day. I think we all want it to come. Thy kingdom come. Personally, I'm to ask for my daily needs. But again, is that not true of the assembly? We have a lot of needs in gatherings. Do we need money? Do we need evangelists? Do we need teachers? We were praying for that even this evening, weren't we? Do we need open doors, open hearts, open minds to receive the good news? "Give us this day our daily needs."

And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. Is that not also true of the assembly? If we profess to be a company of forgiven sinners, we need to also forgive each other and others even outside the assembly. Are there relationship issues among us—relationship issues that are hindering the work of God, hindering our relationship with our Heavenly Father, and of course hindering our relationship with each other? The Spirit of God will not work outside the assembly unless there is unity within the assembly. I remember Jack Spender saying once years ago, and it stuck with me, "The Lord will not put live chicks under a dead hen." No. I can't see that really happening here because this

assembly does prosper and you do have a wonderful outreach. Yet, if we don't deal with sin among us, all fruit bearing will cease because we're not in right relationship with the Father and we're not in a right relationship with each other.

And I know personally I need all the protection I can get from the wiles of the devil. Does not the assembly need that as well? As I said, all the things that we do, he's pretty well okay with. But when we pray, that bothers our enemy because he knows that's communicating with headquarters. So there we have the model prayer: "Our Father, which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, as in heaven, so on earth. Give us day by day our daily bread, and forgive us our sins. For we also forgive everyone that is indebted to us, and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil."

Communicating with Headquarters

So why don't we pray more? Back to an original question. Do we doubt God's love? Do we doubt his wisdom? Or his power? Or his promises? I don't think so. Do we really want his will to be done? And his name to be glorified? Or are we like the church in Laodicea? We're so rich with goods and in need of nothing. That one convicts me. Are we lukewarm because of all the wonderful things that we have?

Or is it as Harry Lacey—I'm not expecting you to know who that is, but he was asked why people are faithful at the breaking of bread meeting, but not that faithful to the prayer meeting. And he suggested that the remembrance meeting has an element of ritualism to it that appeals to the heart. We are doing something. The prayer meeting has no such element. So to look in this room at all these people here coming to a prayer meeting, that is very encouraging. It means that it's very serious to you.

Prayer meeting is **work**, and it should have all the prominence of all the participation that all the other functions of the New Testament assembly participate in. You'll remember I mentioned Acts 2:42 last week.

[Acts 2:42 NKJV]

And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.

And doctrine was the first one, because it was truth. It was foundational. And on that foundation, we establish our fellowship one with another. We continue participating in

steadfastly, and we break bread together, and that anchors our souls to the cornerstone of the church, the Lord Jesus Christ. And they continued steadfastly. Prayer is the last item.

And that is the expression of our unity. And we continue steadfastly in unity with the head of the church, with a unity of purpose. "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done." So in his name and in his authority and according to his will, we pray and for his glory.

Before I conclude, I just want to say a little thought about the word **amen**. It's just a word, amen. Now, it doesn't necessarily say that you have to say it out loud, but I think it would be great if you did. And the reason I say that is it's your acknowledging of what's just been prayed for, that you're in full agreement with it. Amen. Thank you. Yeah, "I agree with that prayer, Lord." Amen. It doesn't mean that you don't agree if you don't say it out loud. But by saying "Amen, amen," you make that prayer your own as well. Lord, amen.

Can we imagine—and this is my concluding thought—can we imagine if the whole assembly was united for one purpose and in one mind and in prayer? I mean, I see a huge number here on the screen. I lost count. I think we're almost up to 30 people there and in here. I mean, again, I feel like maybe I'm speaking to the choir here. George Mueller prayed, and thousands of orphans were cared for. Amen. Amen. D.L. Moody prayed, and lots of people got saved. Charles Spurgeon had amazing success in his messages and that. Someone had asked him how that was possible—I'm paraphrasing the story here. He said, "Oh, come with me. I'll show you the engine room." He took the people down into the basement, opened the door, and there was quite a few people in there praying on their knees. He says, "This is where it's happening. This is why we have so much success. The engine room." So the assembly needs to work at prayer.

Agonize at prayer, be united in prayer, believe in prayer, and believe in the God who answers prayer. Knees bent, time sacrificed, and personal priorities discarded. Let me say that again. We may not all be able to bend our knees, but our hearts are bent before him. So with a bent attitude, we've sacrificed time to be here. It's a sacrifice—we're bent, and all our personal priorities have been discarded because we're in prayer to our beloved Savior, our Father in heaven, which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Dearly beloved, there's work to be done. Let's close in prayer.

Closing Prayer

Father, thank you for these thoughts. Thank you for your word that gives us these thoughts, that helps us to not just read these things, but through your Holy Spirit you give us deeper insights and help us to grow in grace and the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ and help us to be more united in our time in fellowship and also in prayer.

Father, we are convicted to pray more. We are convicted to pray aright. And we don't want to just be repetitious in this prayer that's given to us in Luke and in Matthew. We don't want to be repetitious, Father, but we want to take these items and be very conscious of them because it was the Lord Jesus Christ himself, our Savior, that gave us these points: Our Father, which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, as in heaven, so in earth. Give us day by day our daily bread, and forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone that is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.

We pray these things united in prayer, collected as one, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.