

The Lord's Prayer - Part 1

Luke 11:1-4

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Luke 11:1-4 says, “Now it came to pass...” which is one of Luke’s favorite statements “...as He was praying in a certain place....” Jesus is praying, but it doesn’t tell us where. “...when He ceased, that one of His disciples said to Him, ‘Lord, teach us to pray, as John...” that is, “John the Baptist” “...also taught his disciples.’ 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. Give us day by day our daily bread. 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.”

Now we come to one of the best-known and -loved texts in all the Bible—The Lord’s Prayer. It’s right up there with Psalm 23. The Lord’s Prayer has been read, prayed and sung millions of times, yet it has not lost its luster. It has been studied, analyzed, preached and volumes have been written about it, but its depths have never been plumbed. It has been called the greatest prayer of the Christian church. No wonder; it came from the lips of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

The first 13 verses of Luke 11 are all about prayer. This section emphasizes the prayer life of Jesus. All the Gospels make reference to Jesus praying, but there are more examples of and references to Jesus praying, teaching and instruction on prayer in Luke than in the other Gospels. So Luke has been called “the Gospel of prayer.”

Martin Lloyd Jones said, “Man is at his best and greatest when he is on his knees before God and comes face to face with God.”

There are two, foundational disciplines that are necessary for growth in the Christian life. The first is the reading and studying of God’s Word. The second is time spent in prayer. These are two, absolutely essential foundations for the spiritual life. You must spend time in the Word of God. You’re not going to grow apart from the Bible, from reading God’s Word. So we take in the Word of God, we pray and that starts a fire burning in our bones that would transform our lives. So I call the Word of God and prayer “the dynamic duo” of the Christian life. We need both in order to grow in our walk with the Lord.

We’re going to spend the next several weeks on the subject of prayer. I pray that God would use it to stir our hearts and bring us into a deeper, more intimate prayer life with the Lord.

First, I want to look at the background and setting for The Lord’s Prayer. Verse 1 says, “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.’”

The end of chapter 10 was the finishing of the story about Mary and Martha, where Martha was

encumbered with much serving, so she got upset with her sister, Mary. Martha said to Jesus, "Tell her to help me" to prepare the meal (Luke 10:40). But Mary had "chosen that good part"; she had sat at Jesus' feet to hear His words. So we transition from that to The Lord's Prayer, where Jesus was sitting at the feet of His Father praying. That inspired the disciples to say, "Lord teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples." They wanted to learn to pray the same way.

I see in verse 1 three reasons why we should pray. Number one, because Jesus prayed. That in itself should be a good-enough reason why we should pray. Jesus prayed, so we should pray also. Jesus prayed at His baptism, on the mount of transfiguration, in the garden of Gethsemane and all night before He picked His disciples. All through His life, because of His humanity, which speaks of creature needs, He was dependent on His Father and spent time in prayer.

Reason number two is that John the Baptist prayed. It doesn't mention him praying, but it is implied. If John taught his disciples to pray, it's implied that he himself prayed. So they wanted to pray, because John prayed. John was great. Jesus said, "Assuredly I say to you, among those born of women there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist" (Matthew 11:11). Even this great prophet, John, needed to pray. If he needed to pray, we need to pray.

Number three, the disciples prayed. Again, it's implied. If they asked Jesus to teach them to pray, that implies they learned to pray and that they prayed.

So Jesus prayed, John the Baptist prayed and the disciples prayed. Thus, we should pray. In the epistles, we are encouraged to pray as well.

I want to give you six points to the background or setting of The Lord's Prayer. First, it is not truly the Lord's prayer; it is the disciples' prayer. This is not a prayer that Jesus would actually have prayed for Himself. Jesus prayed but this is not His prayer. If you want what Jesus prayed, in His own words to His Father, it is found in John 17, Christ's great, high-priestly prayer. It is a marvelous prayer, to listen to the Son of God talk to His Father in heaven. It is Jesus' recorded prayer.

But Jesus never would have prayed, "Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who is indebted to us." He wasn't a sinner, so He didn't need to repent as we do. So this is not an actual prayer that Jesus would have prayed.

Second, this is not a prayer to simply be recited. Sometimes people will read prayers, or they have form prayers they recite, such as from a prayer book. The Lord's Prayer is not a form prayer to be recited.

I know in verse 2, it says, "When you pray, say..." But in Matthew 6:9, which is a more full, complete rendition of The Lord's Prayer, where it is recorded in the sermon on the mount, it says, "In this manner, therefore, pray..." That means that Jesus gave them a pattern for prayer. In Matthew 6, there are two things that Jesus warned us of before He gave The Lord's

Prayer, or the model after which the disciples should pray.

Matthew 6:5-6 gives us Jesus' two warnings about prayer. He warned us not to pray hypocritically like the religious community and the Pharisees. "And when you pray, you shall not be like the hypocrites. For they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward." It doesn't say they love to pray for God's glory; they love to pray to be seen and not heard by God. That's their reward. That's hypocrisy.

And verse 6 says, "But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly." He's talking about not praying publicly to be seen by men. This is a warning not to pray as the hypocrites. You don't pray to show off.

Sometimes when people pray they use these big voice intonations and emphasis praying in the perfect King James English to impress others who hear it. One of the dangers of public prayer is that we pray to impress men, not to talk to God. Their hearts aren't engaged and they're praying just to impress others.

The second warning about prayer is in verses 7-8, a warning about mechanical prayer that is done by the pagans. "And when you pray, do not use vain repetitions as the heathen do. For they think that they will be heard for their many words." They say a lot of words. "Therefore do not be like them. For your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him."

When Elijah met with the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel, he had them go first to call on their god. From morning to noon they cried out, "O Baal, hear us!" But Baal didn't hear them. They thought by much speaking their god would hear them. This is mechanical prayer.

I'm not against form prayers or reciting written prayers, if your heart is engaged, if you mean what you say. Otherwise it makes no sense at all. We need to have our hearts and our minds centered on God, praying to God, not trying to impress people and thinking that flowery words will win my favor with God.

Then starting in Matthew 6:9, Matthew goes into The Lord's Prayer. So don't pray hypocritically or mechanically; we're to pray from our hearts.

Back in Luke 11:2-4, notice what Jesus did not teach. First, He did not teach a posture of prayer. Some people say that when you pray, you have to fold your hands, close your eyes and bow your head. That's not in the Bible. Someone said that posture was invented by Sunday school teachers to keep kids from goofing off in class.

The Jews prayed with their eyes wide open and with their hands reaching up to heaven. But the Bible has no teaching on one's posture during prayer. In the Bible, people prayed standing, lifting up their hands, sitting, lying down—my favorite position for prayer—kneeling, lifting their eyes, bowing, placing their head between their knees, pounding their chest and facing the

Temple.

Second, neither did Jesus speak about the place of prayer. People get so hung up about where to pray. “You have to pray at church. You have to pray in the temple.” People prayed during battles, in a cave, in their closet, in a garden, on a mountain, by a river, by the sea, in the streets, in God’s temple, in hell, in bed, in the belly of a whale—Jonah, on a housetop—Peter, in prison—Paul, in solitude, in the wilderness and Jesus prayed when He was hanging on the Cross. 1 Timothy 2:8 says, “I desire therefore that the men pray everywhere.” If you happen to fall headfirst into a well and you’re upside down, you’d better be able to pray.

Third, nor did Jesus tell us we had to pray during a specific time. In the Bible, people found time praying in the early morning, midmorning, three times a day, in the evening, before meals, after meals, at the ninth hour, at bedtime, at midnight, day or night. When Paul and Silas were in prison in Acts 16, they prayed at midnight when the prisoners heard them praying and worshipping God. So it doesn’t matter what time it is when we pray.

So what is The Lord’s Prayer? Four, it is a pattern for prayer revealing the priorities of true prayer. The prayer breaks into two parts. The first part is vertical; it has to do with our relationship to God. Verse 2 says His name—“Our Father”; His kingdom—“Your kingdom come”; His will—“Your will be done.” So the purpose and pattern and priority of prayer is His name, His kingdom and His will.

This is so very important. The purpose of prayer is not to overcome God’s reluctance and to change God; it’s laying hold of God’s willingness and me aligning my will to God’s will. It’s like time exposure to God. And after I pray, I’m broken, humble, dependent, and I align my heart, my mind and my will on God. I center on God.

The second part of the prayer is the horizontal part. It’s fourfold. It’s “Give us...forgive us...lead us...deliver us.” So it’s “Give us day by day our daily bread,” verse 3. “Forgive us our sins,” verse 4. “Do not lead us into temptation,” verse 4. “Deliver us from the evil one,” verse 4.

So we first focus on God and then on our needs.

Five, the prayer defines the spirit or attitude of true prayer. The Lord’s Prayer conveys the attitude, the heart or the spirit of true prayer. There are 10 points I want to mention about this. First, the Lord’s Prayer describes the unselfish spirit of prayer; it only contains plural pronouns—“our” or “us.” There is no “me” or “my.” This is meant to remind me that I am part of a community of other believers. So when I pray, I should remember others who are in need.

Second, The Lord’s Prayer speaks of prayer as a childlike spirit—“Our Father.”

Third, the prayer speaks of a worshipful spirit. True prayer is a worshipful spirit—“Hallowed be Your name” or “Let Your name be considered holy or sanctified.”

Fourth, this prayer speaks of a loyal spirit—“Your kingdom come.”

Fifth, it speaks of an obedient spirit—"Your will be done."

Sixth, it speaks of a dependent spirit—"our daily bread." "Lord, provide for me."

Seven, true prayer speaks of a repentant spirit—"Forgive us our sins."

Eight, it speaks of a gracious spirit—"We also forgive everyone who is indebted to us."

Nine, it speaks of a humble spirit—"Lead us...deliver us."

And ten, it speaks of a confident spirit—"Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen" (Matthew 6:13).

These are 10 characteristics of the true spirit of prayer.

Six, The Lord's Prayer speaks of the Person to whom we pray. We are praying to "Our Father in heaven," verse 2. So prayer focuses on God as our Father. To whom do we pray? To God our Father.

The Lord's Prayer first starts with the Person of prayer. It's God's name, God's character that is to be hallowed.

Secondly, the prayer moves to God's program, verse 2. "Your kingdom come. Your will be done."

Thirdly, it moves to God's provision, verse 3. "Give us day by day our daily bread."

Then, fourthly, it moves to God's pardon, verse 4. "Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who is indebted to us."

Fifthly, it moves to God's protection, verse 4. "And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one."

God's Person is the focus, verse 2; God's program is the focus, verse 2; God's provision is the focus, verse 3; God's pardon is the focus, verse 4; and God's protection is the focus, verse 4.

Prayer is to be to God the Father, through God the Son, in the power and energy of God the Holy Spirit.

The next point I want to make is, what are the blessings and benefits that come into our lives when we understand that we are praying to God, who is our Father? Jesus said, in verse 2, "When you pray, say: Our Father in heaven." The first step in prayer is not asking for something but centering your heart and mind on God as your Father. The first thought that we are to have is that God is our Father.

When Jesus said, "Father," it's most likely—we can't be 100% sure—that He was speaking in Aramaic, using an Aramaic word. He was probably using the word "Abba." Abba was used by

the younger children when they were infants talking to their father. Today it would be the equivalent to “Daddy” or “Papa.” What a picture! Jesus actually introduces the concept that God is our “Abba.”

When we had our first child, one of the exciting things was when she first said, “Daddy.” They do say “Mama,” but I think they say “Daddy” first. And then the grandkids come along and say, “Grandpa.” It just thrills my heart! I wish I had them first; they’re so much fun! They’re so cool! To hear that just thrills my heart!

In the Old Testament, God is only referred to as “Father” 14 times. In the Gospels, Jesus used the word “Abba” for Father 60 times. In the Old Testament, it was only used corporately for the nation of Israel, never personally or individually.

So Jesus introduced this radical concept that God is our Abba, God is our Father. That is a marvelous truth! When Jesus came to reveal God, He revealed God as our Abba. Every time Jesus prayed He said “Father” or “My Father” or “Holy Father” or “Righteous Father.” So when Jesus used the word “Abba,” it must have blown the minds of the disciples.

The foundational awareness of all our praying is that God is our Abba. God is not so far out there that He doesn’t listen, He doesn’t care, He’s not concerned. Rather, He’s my Papa, my Daddy. I’m His child.

We need to be warned against the false idea of the universal fatherhood of God. By creation, God made all men, but only by regeneration, by being born again into God’s family, do we become sons and daughters of God. In Galatians 4:6, Paul said, “Because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, ‘Abba, Father!’” The understanding of this relationship is fundamental to your spiritual health.

If you want to know where someone is spiritually, find out if they understand what it means that God is your Father.

Do you know that God is your Abba? Can you turn to Him and say, “Daddy, Father, Abba”? He knows what you need even before you ask. That’s one of the blessings of knowing that I’m His child and He’s my Father. It brings to me an understanding of my personal relationship to God; that God is personal, that He is Father. He knows, He loves, He feels, He wills, He has a kingdom, that His will should be done on earth as it is in heaven. And it implies that God will provide for me.

What father doesn’t want to provide for his children? If sinful, earthly fathers love and provide for their children—if you ask your father for a piece of bread, he’s not going to give you a stone to chew on. “How much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him!” (Matthew 7:11). And Matthew 6:26 says, “Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father...” “Abba” “...feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?”

The next time you're discouraged, go to a fast-food restaurant or In-N-Out or someplace where you'll see French fries laying around. These big, fat birds hang around and eat the fries. I have to pay for mine; they get theirs free. It's not fair.

Jesus said, "Are not two sparrows sold for a copper coin? And not one of them falls to the ground apart from your Father's will" (Matthew 10:29). Take notice of that. He provides.

Verse 3 of The Lord's Prayer says, "Give us day by day our daily bread." He doesn't provide our greeds; He meets our needs. My Father knows what I need, and He takes care of me.

He also pardons my sin, verse 4. He forgives us of our sins, our trespasses. How marvelous that is! We'll see the heart of the father toward his prodigal son, in Luke 15. He forgave the prodigal and even sought to restore his older brother.

Then He protects us, verse 4, by not leading us into temptation but delivering us from evil.

He provides, He pardons, He protects and He takes care of us. I don't need to fear, because He's my Father, who loves me, forgives me, takes care of me and watches over me.

When my kids were young, I used to enjoy going into their bedroom after they fell asleep and pray over them. When kids are sleeping, they look angelic. When they're awake, sometimes they look demonic. I'm kidding—kind of. But when they sleep, they look like little angels.

So I can't help but think that God watches over me when I sleep. He never slumbers. He never sleeps. When I go to bed at night, my Father is watching over me. My Father cares about me. He protects me. He pardons me. He guides me and leads me. What a beautiful thing it is to be God's child.

You ask, "How do I know that? How can I be sure that God can really do that? How is He able to do that?" The answer is in verse 2 of our text: "Our Father in heaven." He is my Abba but He's also in heaven.

"In heaven" is not God's postal address. But rather it indicates His infinite elevation above me and other people. It speaks of His transcendence. We have God's imminence—He's near, He's my Abba, but we also have God's transcendence—He's my Father who is in heaven. He's not only my loving Father, my heavenly Father, but He has power. So it speaks of intimacy and majesty.

"Our Father" awakens love in our hearts. "Who art in heaven" engenders awe. These together constitute worship." It's easy to get sentimental about God our Father. But we also need to keep in mind that He's also in heaven and that He rules over all things. God is holy and righteous.

Whenever Jesus prayed, He used the word "Abba," "Daddy" or "Papa." He taught us to do the same. So we too must pray with that awareness; that God is my Father.

But there was one time when Jesus did not use the word “Abba” when addressing God in heaven. It was when He was hanging on the Cross. When He was hanging on the Cross and the sins of humanity were placed on the sinless, Son of God, He cried out, Psalm 22:1, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” Every other time Jesus prayed it was “Abba, Abba.” But now when the sins of the world were placed upon the Son of God, He cried, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?”

This is one of the most amazing things in the Bible; that the Son of God, who has known communion with His Father for all eternity, would now in some mystical way we can't comprehend be separated from the love of God the Father. “For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him” (2 Corinthians 5:21).

The thing that really blows my mind is that Jesus was separated from the Father so that you and I would never have to be separated from Him. Never. Jesus said, “I will never leave you nor forsake you” (Hebrews 13:5).

That didn't end His time on the Cross. The very last word that Jesus spoke on the Cross before He died was “Abba.” He came back to “Abba” and said, “Father, Into Your hands I commit My spirit” (Luke 23:46).

We can do the same. No matter what we're going through, no matter what is happening, we can say, “Abba, I trust You. I commit myself to You.”