

The Lord's Prayer

How Not to Pray

Part 1 – September 28, 2008



Prayer Questionnaire:

- Do you have a regular time set aside for prayer?
- Do you often feel guilty about the quality of your prayer life?
- Does your prayer life suffer when times are good?
- Do you struggle to pray consistently?

I love God. And I want to please God. So, why is prayer so taxing and so demanding, so often? Even if you're good at setting time aside and sticking to a schedule, sometimes prayer just ends up feeling like a chore.

Many believers conclude that prayer just doesn't really work for them. The lights stay on, the bills get paid, and the dog gets fed whether they pray or not ... so ... you know.

But, it's like the old, OLD joke about the customer who returns his new chainsaw, and he's really mad because he'd been using it all day and barely cut a half cord of wood. The manager takes the saw from him, pulls the cord, and fires it up. And the poor, stunned customer jumps back and he sheepishly says, "So *that's* what that string was for!"

Before we conclude that prayer isn't working like it should, we need to ask ourselves just how we've been trying to use it. And we're certainly not alone in our need for instructions:

One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he finished, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples." -
Luke 11:1 NIV

As far as we know, the disciples never asked Jesus to teach them about personal counseling, public speaking, or miracle working. But, one of the bolder ones did say: "Teach us to pray". This unnamed disciple was probably Andrew, because Andrew had formerly been a disciple of John the Baptist.



Jesus' disciples were *not* beginners when it came to prayer. Hardly! Their Jewish heritage required a disciplined practice of prayer that began in early childhood: They *opened* and *closed* each day with their confession of faith (*Deut. 6:4-5*) and prayers. They prayed three fixed times *during* the day. And they prayed *before* and *after every* meal. Some historians estimate the Jewish men during Jesus' life prayed on average three to four hours a day!

If *these* guys needed help, I don't feel so bad. Their request wasn't about quantities or schedules. But they could see - in contrast to Christ - that something was lacking.



Often, when Jesus was tired, He'd go away to pray. (But, wait a minute ... being "too tired" is my excuse for *not* praying!) Sometimes He'd pray and fast for days on end. And instead of coming back all drained and cranky, he'd come back all recharged and composed. Prayer somehow seemed to *refresh* and *restore* Him. For Jesus, prayer was a delight not a duty. He didn't settle for prerecorded prayers at predetermined times; He actually enjoyed getting away and *conversing* with His God.

And all they wanted to know was: How do you pray like *that*?!

What went on out there? How did He pray? What did He say? Here's the thing: He told 'em! He gave up his "secret".



And in typical Jesus fashion, His answer is simultaneously comprehensive and concise; just 52 words in the NIV. Our new series is simply called, "The Lord's Prayer," and we will be unearthing its treasures over the next several weeks.

I want to be more consistent in my prayer life. It's hot, then cold, on again, off again. I feel like the guy who cried out each week at church for God to fill him with His Spirit. One week his wife yells out, "Don't do it, Lord, he leaks!"

Our goal will not just be to *know* more about the pattern of His prayer, but to cultivate the passion to pray as Jesus prayed.

But did you know that the prayer comes with a "warning"? Just before Jesus answered (possibly Andrew) and gave His disciples this model prayer, he gave them a three-part warning:

And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. - *Matthew 6:5 NIV*



First, He warns them: "do not be like the hypocrites"

Are you like the hypocrites for professing to be a believer but failing to pray consistently? No. Failure doesn't make you a hypocrite, insincerity does. The real question is: When it comes to your relationship with Christ, are you in secret, what you present in public?

But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. – *Matthew 6:6 NIV*

Reward you with what? This is an incredibly important question, because Jesus promises that God will reward us if we pray privately and sincerely.

So, if you have prayed earnestly and alone and yet you have not perceived your reward, only one of two things can be true: Either Jesus is lying; or, you have the wrong idea of what your reward should be.

When my kids were young I'd bring little gifts home. They'd say, "What'd you bring me?!" And I'd say, "Check my coat pockets!" If they said, "What'd you bring me?" and I didn't have anything, I'd say, "ME!" And you can imagine what a let down that was.



But, as they matured they stopped their childish demands (just go with it for the sake of the analogy!), and began to embrace me and appreciate me for who I am and what I offer *relationally*. They grew up and realized that love was reciprocal. It's about presence, not presents

Q: Your Father will reward you with what?

A: His presence, assurance, affection, and guidance.

And if you don't consider that reward enough, I'm afraid you are serving him for the wrong reasons. If my prayer life isn't maturing in intimacy and relationship I will burn out ... because you can only beg for so long!

And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. – *Matthew 6:7 NIV*

The Greeks and Romans would repeat incantations over and over in order to move the hand of their unloving, uncaring pagan gods.

In First Kings 18, Elijah has a showdown with 450 pagan prophets to see whose god would send down fire onto an altar.

Then they called on the name of Baal from morning till noon. ... Elijah began to taunt them. "Shout louder!" he said. ... Perhaps he is deep in thought, or busy, or traveling. ... So they shouted louder and slashed themselves with swords and spears, as was their custom ... they continued ... until the time for the evening sacrifice. But there was no response ... – *1 Kings 18:26-29 NIV condensed*

Then Elijah, after thoroughly soaking his altar in water, lifted up a thirty-second prayer to the one true God. And he said ...

... let it be known today that you are God in Israel and that I am your servant and have done all these things at your command. Then the fire of the Lord fell and burned up the sacrifice, the wood, the stones and the soil, and also licked up the water in the trench. - 1 Kings 18:36; 38 NIV



The purpose of prayer isn't to bend God's will to meet our own, but to bend our own will to meet His! Effective prayer acts like a spiritual chiropractor: It adjusts my spirit into alignment.

Pagan magic attempts to control supernatural powers for personal gain, whereas prayer is a process of surrender so that we might become instruments that God can use for His glory.

Yet, there is no other prayer more often recited insincerely in public, or mechanically in private, than the Lord's Prayer. But Jesus has fairly warned us, this is not a prayer to be uttered without earnest authenticity.

And this prayer was not given as an incantation to somehow get God to answer to *us*. Just the opposite! It gives us the correct answers to God's biggest *questions*:

Q: Who do you take me for, and what am I to you?

A: Our Father which art in heaven

Q: That being so, what is it that you really want most?

A: To bless your name, to see your kingdom, and to do your will.

Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven

Q: So what are you asking for right now, as a means to that end?

A: Provision, pardon, and protection.

Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil

Q: How can you be so bold in asking these things?

A: Because *You* have the authority, and *You* have the power, and it will glorify all that is true and loving and holy about *You*.

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

The Lord's Prayer is a judgment; a judgment not meant to condemn, but to awaken us to what we lack.