

“Who Taught You How to Pray?”

Luke 11:1-13

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Who taught you how to pray? Perhaps it was a Sunday school teacher, a pastor or one of your parents. If you are like many believers, you probably learned by observation. No one taught you to pray like they taught you how to tie your shoes, ride a bike or drive a car.

Whose prayers move you and stir your heart? Do you listen to them and long to be able to pray like them?

I have heard many prayers. I'm sure that doesn't surprise you. Preachers hear lots of prayers and I recall some of those I have heard, or at least the people that prayed them. Mrs. Marjorie Warren is one.

She was a member of the third church I pastored. She was on the pastor search committee that called me to that church. The first time I met with the members of this committee, Mrs. Warren was asked to pray. I immediately knew why. Her prayers would melt your heart and move you to tears. I recall opening my eyes and looking around the room. I knew Jesus had to be sitting next to her holding her hand.

I wonder if the disciples opened their eyes and looked for God when Jesus prayed. I don't know if they did, but they must have seen or heard something that impressed them because they asked Jesus to teach them to pray.

Why did the disciples do this? Didn't they know how to pray? Sure they did. They had been praying since childhood. As a matter of fact, believers in every great religion pray. It is the one thing that all religious people have in common.

Why, then, did the disciples ask Jesus to teach them to pray? This was a common request of a rabbi. Every rabbi taught his disciples to pray. John did, as Luke tells us, so Jesus' disciples naturally expected him to teach them.

The timing of the request was interesting, though. It came after Jesus had been praying, which occurred frequently in Luke. Jesus prays all the time in Luke. He prayed after he was baptized. He prayed before he called his disciples. He prayed on the Mount of Transfiguration and before the first prophecy of his passion. He prayed when he faced adversity.

In contrast, Matthew doesn't record Jesus praying until the fourteenth chapter. In John, he doesn't pray until the final week of his life. In Luke, however, he prays all the time and one of those prayers served as the catalyst for his request. Again, I wonder why.

Do you think they sensed something about the way he prayed, the words he used or the impact prayer had upon him that was missing in their lives? Perhaps. Whatever the reason, though, they asked Jesus to teach them to pray and he obliged.

“When you pray, say: **‘Father, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread. Forgive our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us. And lead us not into temptation’**” Luke 11:2-4.

You are probably wondering why I left some words out of the Lord's Prayer. This is not exactly the prayer we are accustomed to praying and you are right. This is because we use Matthew's version of the Model Prayer in public, which is longer and more

formal. Luke abbreviates the Lords' Prayer, making it more personal and direct without losing any of the significant ideas.

He also attaches a couple of parables about the friend at midnight and a trustworthy parent to emphasize the importance of persistence in praying. According to Jesus, the most important thing about praying is to keep at it. If prayer is this important on our journey of faith, let's examine the prayer Jesus taught his disciples.

Jesus began with the simple title, **Father**. I like a God whose title is Father. It makes me feel good about life and gives me a sense of security and confidence. This is because I have warm memories of my own father.

My dad died twenty-five years ago last Tuesday. I miss him and can hardly believe it has been that long since I last saw him. He was a good father, loving and responsible. Every time he saw me after I grew up and left home, he would ask, "Are you doing ok? Is everything going well? Do you need anything?" I don't have to tell you how that made me feel. I knew I was never alone as long as my parents lived and they would be there for me if I needed them.

The word that Jesus used to address God in this prayer was the same that children used in speaking to their fathers. It communicated love, trust, compassion, mercy, security and accessibility. Even the two stories that Luke attached to the Lord's Prayer indicate this. God would never ignore or trick His children. He loves them too much.

Philip Yancey writes in his latest book, Prayer: Does It Make Any Difference?, "Jesus virtually invented private prayer. No one in the Old Testament addressed God as Father. Jesus did it 170 times."

German scholar, Joachim Jeremias, believes a new way of praying was born with this word, Father. "Jesus talked to his Father as naturally, as intimately and with the same sense of security as a child talks to his father."

I like a God who can be addressed as Father, don't you?

"Hallowed be your name." "I know God's name," a child said to his mother. "You do," she replied, "and what is it?" "Harold," the boy explained. "Why Harold?" the puzzled mother asked? "Because it says so in the Bible. 'Our Father, which art in heaven, Harold be thy name!'"

Intimacy does not undermine majesty or respect. To call God, Father, does not make Him any less God. Certainly He is different because of his nature and ability, but this doesn't make Him unapproachable. It should, however, make us more respectful, humble and appreciative.

"Your kingdom come," No phrase is used more often in scripture. Jesus came on the scene preaching the good news of the Kingdom of God. I believe he prayed and proclaimed this with a deep sense of joy and commitment because he knew and trusted God's heart. He understood that people that sought God's heart would create a world filled with justice, righteousness, mercy and peace.

I have a friend who says that we know heaven will be all right. Our task while we are here is to make earth like heaven. I believe this is what Jesus meant.

"Give us each day our daily bread." In a world where starvation was common and only the elite knew for certain where their next meal was coming from, how might this petition have touched the poor? Surely it lifted their spirits to know that God was aware of their plight and cared about their basic needs. They had to be encouraged to know that prayer could deal with urgent, real life issues, which was no small matter to the

“have-nots” of the world for whom food was a desperate, daily hope. Hopefully, this portion of the Lord’s Prayer reminded them that everyone needed to eat each day and bread was not only to be gratefully received but also generously shared.

“Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us.” Jesus knew that every person needed to be released from the bondage of guilt and hatred. He was aware, though, that everyone did not live close to the temple or have funds to provide a sin offering. Neither was necessary in Jesus’ understanding of God’s kingdom, however, to find grace and share it with others. All anyone needed was a repentant and grace-filled heart.

“Lead us not into temptation.” Forgiven people long to sin no more. They see the pain it causes and want no part of it.

What do you think the disciples and Luke’s readers were tempted to do? Collude with their oppressors? Serve Caesar instead of God so they could provide for their families? Were they tempted to withhold forgiveness? Seek revenge? Take up arms against their enemies? I suspect they were and so are we. Jesus knew that all his followers needed God’s help to remain faithful and committed to ushering in God’s kingdom.

I like the questions that Kathie Collins raises about the Lord’s Prayer and believe we need to consider them this week. How do people in our world hear the Lord’s Prayer? Who or what in our life do we treat as holy? What does the kingdom you long for look like? How do the prayers of our leaders reflect the kingdoms for which they long? Who in our world has daily bread and who does not? Which sins wake you in the middle of the night with whispered demands to be named? Who is the debtor in your life that is begging for forgiveness? How might you finally offer that forgiveness? What need in your life is so large that its “unfulfillment” keeps you in a perpetual state of temptation?

Let me return to the question in my introduction as I conclude. **Who taught you to pray?** I hope Jesus is included on your list. He is certainly on mine and from him I have learned that prayer is intentional. It makes me aware of God and His presence in my life. It also makes me aware of my needs, one of which is to be humble.

He has taught me that prayer is an invitation to converse with a loving and responsible God that desires a relationship with me. We’re in this life together and must work out the details as we go on our common journeys. The most responsible thing I can do is include Him in my life and form a lasting partnership with Him.

Persistence is an important element of prayer, too. In the midst of struggles or silence, he encourages me to keep asking, seeking and knocking with the assurance that the God we call Father is on this journey with me working at all times on our behalf.

Do you have this kind of relationship with God? Have you included Him in your daily celebrations, struggles and challenges? Do you want to do this?

I know He desires this kind of relationship with you because He loves you like a parent loves a child. Open your heart to Him now and begin that conversation. Ask Jesus to help you. He will teach you just as he did his disciples. Then you can teach your own children what you learned.

