

# *Lord, teach us to pray*

Luke 11:1-13

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Pastor Jim Rademaker

In 1891 a Persian scholar wrote to an American Christian missionary scholar, Dr. Cornelius VanDyke. The Persian gentleman sent a gift to VanDyke to commemorate his visit. With the gift, he included a covering note:

A souvenir to the esteemed spiritual physician and religious philosopher, his Excellency, the only and most learned who has no second in his age, Dr. Cornelius VanDyke, the American. As a souvenir presented to his loftiness and goodness and to him that is above titles, who is a propagator of knowledge and the founder of perfections, and a possessor of high qualities and owner of praiseworthy character, the pole of the firmament of virtues and the pivot of the circle of sciences, the author of splendid works and firm foundations, who is well versed in the understanding of the inner realities of soul and horizons, who deserves that his name be written with light upon the eyes of the people rather with gold on paper, at Beirut, in the month of Rabia, in the year 1891, by the most humble. (Ken Bailey)

In the sermon on the mount in Matthew 6, Jesus said, *"And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words." Pray then like this: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name."* In our text today, Jesus teaches the same thing in a different context. *Now Jesus was praying in a certain place, and when he finished, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples."*

Surely the disciples knew how to pray. The Jews had their prayers, and their times for prayer. They prayed the psalms in the Temple. They sang them as they made their way to Jerusalem for the feasts. They had table prayers to pray before and after meals. They prayed in the mornings and evenings. If anyone knew how to pray, they did. They'd been doing it all their lives. They had already been taught how to pray. What did they need to learn about prayer? (James Douthwaite)

You know how to pray. Many of you have been praying all your lives. Yet still, after all your praying, do you ever feel like you don't really know how to prayer? So maybe we can understand the request of the disciples. *Their* request is *our* request as well, isn't it? *Lord, teach us to pray.*

Why is it so difficult to pray at times? Why do we need to be taught to pray? Because, in many ways, prayer is not natural for us. Not since the Fall. Not since Adam and Eve first sinned in the Garden, turning away from God. There have only been three human beings in history for whom prayer was natural. Adam and Eve, in the beginning, when conversation with God was as natural as God walking in the garden in the cool of the day. And then there was Jesus. Prayer was as natural to Jesus as eating and drinking are to us. He prayed perfectly, without needing to be taught. (William Cwirla)

Here's a sampling of Jesus in prayer:

**John 17** Jesus' longest prayer. (Jesus' high priestly prayer.) Very conversational. Directed towards the things of God, relationship with God.

**Mark 1:35** *Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed.*

**Luke 5:16** *"But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed."*

**Luke 6:12** *One of those days Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray, and spent the night praying to God.*

**John 12:27-28** *"Now my heart is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. Father, glorify your name!"*

**Matthew 26:36** *Then Jesus went with his disciples to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to them, "Sit here while I go over there and pray." ... and he began to be sorrowful and troubled. Then he said to them, "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will."*

**Luke 23:46** *Jesus called out with a loud voice, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit."*

When we pray, what's often the focus? It's on me. My will. What I want. On my plans and wishes and dreams. The focus is down here, in my life, on earthly matters. Notice anything different in Jesus' prayers? His focus was where? Above. On His Father and things of His Father. That's the first thing Jesus teaches us about prayer.

Like us, the disciples might not have thought much about their prayer life and what it meant. Maybe they had fallen into the habit of just going through the motions. They may not have known any better ... until they observed Jesus in prayer; how Jesus prayed from the heart. How naturally it flowed from Him. How personal it was. How it centered on the Father. Could they pray like that? Could you?

"Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples." And he said to them, "When you pray, say: "**Father ...**" Plain and simple, not like the Persian scholar. Relational. Jesus' Father is also Father to those who would follow Him! *Father, hallowed be your name.* What a way to begin praying! Would you ever think of that on your own? I certainly wouldn't.

Father, **may your name be holy**; set apart. Luther puts it this way in his Small Catechism: What does this mean? God's name is holy in itself, but we pray that it may be holy also among us. That our Heavenly Father would be set apart above all else; honored, in word and deed; in all we think, in all we say, in all we do. All – set apart to our Heavenly Father. That His name be honored.

Pray **that God's kingdom would come**. His kingdom of grace and faith in people's hearts; in my own heart, again and again, over and over again. That He would work through me to spread God's kingdom of grace and faith in Jesus to others. That the kingdom of *God* would come. Not *my* kingdom. Not *my* agenda. Not *my* plans. Pray that *God's* kingdom would come. To them, the disciples; to us; and to all. That *Jesus* would come to us and to all. Pray for this, Jesus says.

Again, Luther: What does this mean? The kingdom of God truly does come of itself, without our prayer, but we pray in this petition that it may also come to us. How is this done? The kingdom of God comes to us when our heavenly Father gives us His Holy Spirit, so that by His grace we believe His Holy Word, and live a godly life here on earth and in heaven forever. What is meant by the kingdom of God? The kingdom of God is the kingdom of grace in which God rules in the hearts and lives of believers and which one day will become the kingdom of glory in heaven where those who are saved are with Christ in perfect happiness forever.

**Your will be done** on earth as it is in heaven. (from Matthew 6) What does this mean? The good and gracious will of God is done without our prayer; but we pray in this petition that it may also be done among us. When you pray, don't pray for your will to be done. That could be disastrous. It's not always good to get what we want, is it? How do we know anyway what would really be good for us; for our life of faith; for the good of others; for an eternal perspective.

As James 1 says, *Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.* Heavenly Father, I don't even know what the best thing would be, so may your good and gracious will be done, not mine. Help me daily die to my will and live for You and that which You will.

And pray that your Heavenly Father would **provide for all your needs**; that you would depend on Him; look to Him; be dependent on Him every day, all day long. Give *us* each day *our* daily bread. Not just me, but *us*. Luther: What is meant by this? God truly does give daily bread to all, even the wicked, without our prayer; but we pray in this petition that He would make us *aware* that these gifts come from Him as a gift and enable us to receive these gifts with thanksgiving.

What is meant by daily bread? By daily bread we mean everything that is required to satisfy our bodily needs, such as food and clothing, house and home, fields and flocks, money and property, pious parents and children ... godly and faithful rulers, good government, seasonable weather, peace and health, order and honor, true friends, good neighbors and the like.

And pray to your Heavenly Father, that He would **forgive us our sins**. They are many. Forgive us. Forgive our neighbor. Forgive our enemies. And work in us forgiveness of those who have wronged us, that we would continually forgive, as we're continually forgiven.

And **lead us not into temptation**. Luther: What does this mean? God tempts no one to sin, but we pray in this petition that He would so guard and preserve us, that the devil, the world, and our own human nature may not deceive us nor lead us into error and unbelief, despair and other great and shameful sins; but when tempted, we

may finally prevail and gain the victory. Don't let the devil twist and distort God's Word, God's gifts, so that we doubt God's love for us and be led into false belief or despair. Keep our faith right, and keep our faith strong; us, together; all of us together; family; God's children.

If you were left to pray on your own, is this the way you would pray? That God's your Heavenly Father? That His name be holy, set apart in your life? That His kingdom of grace and faith would come to you and others daily, not your own kingdom? That His will would be done in your life, not what you necessarily want? That you would be totally dependent on Him for everything? That God would forgive you for all of your daily sins and that you would forgive others, even your enemy, instead of looking for ways to get back at them? That you would be led out of all the temptations you face daily, instead of indulging in them and enjoying them for the moment?

Left to your own, is that how you would pray? Not me. Like the disciples, for all our praying, we don't know how to pray. Like them, we need Jesus to teach us how to pray; to turn our eyes; to turn our hearts; to turn our minds; our lives, away from self, and to our Heavenly Father. The way it was always meant to be. The way it was for Adam and Eve in the beginning. The way it was for Jesus.

And then, Jesus concludes with a story about a friend in need. And what a great promise Jesus gives us. Just ask, He says. Knock on my door anytime, day or night, for I'll always be there to open it for you. To listen to you. To commune with you. To care for you. To provide for you. I'm not like the one who didn't want to get up. I got up. I came down from heaven, all the way to the cross, for you. With good gifts. And with the best of gifts, the Holy Spirit, who points you back to Me. (Douthwaite)

As it was for the disciples back then, so it is for us today. Lord, teach us to pray. Focusing, not on ourselves, but on our Heavenly Father. That His name be set apart in us and our world. That His kingdom of grace and faith come to us and to our world. That His will be done in us and in our world. Totally dependent on Him. Trusting Him, confidently knowing that our Heavenly Father knows what's best; that He only gives the best gifts there are; gifts out of this world. Gladly. Just ask.

*I give you thanks, O Lord, with my whole heart; before the gods I sing your praise; I bow down toward your holy temple and give thanks to your name for your steadfast love and your faithfulness, for you have exalted above all things your name and your word. On the day I called, you answered me; my strength of soul you increased.*

(Psalm 138)