

## Teach Us to Pray

(Adapted from Chuck Pike's 10/27/20 Lesson based on Tertullian's *On Prayer*)  
David Adams – 3/17/24

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### I. Introduction

- a. About four years ago, I heard a lesson from Chuck that really made an impact on my prayer life. This was a lesson based on Tertullian's short work, *On Prayer*. I have recently relistened to Chuck's lesson and again found it extremely helpful as I grow in my ability to pray as Jesus taught His followers to pray.
  - i. *My goal today: to open your eyes to the power of prayer and to encourage you to pray more and differently, as Jesus taught His followers to pray.*
- b. The first Christians prayed a lot. They were praying all the time and with great power. Let's take a few minutes and walk through the book of Acts to get a sense of the role of prayer in the early church.
  - i. After Jesus ascended to heaven, the twelve and several of the sisters gathered together and "continued in one accord in prayer and supplication." (**Acts 1:14**)
  - ii. After the Holy Spirit descends in **Acts 2**, the Christians "continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread and in prayers."
  - iii. In **Acts 3**, Peter and John head to the temple at the hour of prayer, the ninth hour (3 PM). They find and heal a lame man.
  - iv. In **Acts 4**, after being commanded not to speak about Jesus, the Christians gather together and "raised their voice to God with one accord" and pray, quoting **Psalm 2** and petitioning God for great boldness.
  - v. In **Acts 6**, when trouble arises in the church due to some of the widows being overlooked in the distribution of bread, the leaders realize they are getting pulled away from the ministry of the word and of prayer. Appoint seven men to address the issue; "we will **give ourselves continually to prayer** and the ministry of the word."
  - vi. In **Acts 8**, Peter and John go to Samaria and pray that the Samaritans would receive the Holy Spirit. Simon, a sorcerer, becomes a Christian but his heart is revealed to be "poisoned by bitterness and bound by iniquity." Peter commands Simon to pray for forgiveness.

- vii. In **Acts 9**, a righteous woman named Tabitha falls sick and dies. Peter comes, prays, and she rises from the dead!
- viii. In **Acts 10**, we find Peter praying on a housetop around the sixth hour (noon).
- ix. In **Acts 12**, James is killed with the sword, and Peter is arrested and thrown in prison. "Peter was therefore kept in prison, but constant prayer was offered to God for him by the church." He is miraculously rescued by an angel, escapes, and comes to the house of the Christians, and they are praying for him.
- x. In **Acts 13**, Barnabus and Paul are sent out with prayer and fasting.
- xi. In **Acts 14**, Barnabus and Paul start churches in Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch. "So when they had appointed elders in every church, and prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed."
- xii. In **Acts 16**, in Philippi, Paul and his companions meet a girl possessed by a demon "as we went to prayer." Paul and Silas are then thrown into prison. "But at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them."
- xiii. Etc.!

c. Questions:

- i. Why did they pray so much?
- ii. How were their prayers so effective?
- iii. Answer: Because Jesus taught the apostles to pray.
- iv. Let's read what Jesus said when His followers asked Him how to pray. Read **Luke 11:1-4**

1. **Goal: that we may also pray as they did!**

**II. The Lord's Prayer as the Foundation for Our Prayer Life**

- a. When I heard Chuck's lesson on prayer four years ago, I was struck by how the early Christians understood Jesus's words, "When you pray, say...."
  - i. We are to say these words. A prescribed prayer, different than the spontaneous, "from the heart" prayers, which had been my

experience.

- b. In His work *On Prayer*, Tertullian explained the meaning of the Lord's prayer clause by clause.
  - i. If you understand the meaning of each statement in that prayer, this is not an easy prayer to pray (if you think about and sincerely mean what you are saying).
  - ii. In fact, it is extremely challenging!
  - iii. This "little prayer" is much more than first meets the eye!
- c. Tertullian was an early Christian writer from Carthage, in North Africa. Scholars believe that *On Prayer* was written around 198 AD.
  - i. (Source: Tertullian, *On Prayer*, chapter 1; found in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 3, p. 681).
  - ii. Online link to Tertullian's *On Prayer*:  
<https://ccel.org/ccel/tertullian/prayer/anf03>
- d. Tertullian pointed to this prayer that Jesus taught as the highest and best prayer, the perfect prayer for Christians to pray.
- e. In fact, he makes the case that as Jesus ushers in the New Covenant with new laws, He provides us with a new way to pray!
  - i. "... Jesus Christ our Lord ... has determined for us, the disciples of the New Testament, a new form of prayer; for in this particular [our prayer] also it was needful that a new wine should be laid up in new skins...."
  - ii. Goes on that just as Christ came to either change or supplement or perfect the Law of Moses in specific ways, one of these was prayer. There is a change in how we are to pray, which Jesus taught.
- f. Also, Tertullian makes the case that while this is a short, brief prayer, it contains significant meaning.
  - i. While short, "it is as diffuse in meaning as it is compressed in words."
  - ii. The Prayer embraces our responsibilities in prayer and
  - iii. "In the (Lord's) Prayer is comprised the epitome of the whole Gospel."
- g. Tertullian makes the case that the Lord's Prayer is our prayer foundation.
  - i. (We lay the foundation of a building first. Once we do that, we can

add the rest of the house.)

- ii. After praying the Lord's Prayer (the foundation), we can add our own specific petitions. (from *On Prayer*, chapter 10)
  - 1. "Since, however, the Lord, the Foreseer of human necessities, said separately, after delivering His Rule of Prayer, 'Ask, and you shall receive' (**Luke 11:9**) and since there are petitions which are made according to the circumstances of each individual; our additional wants have the right—*after beginning with the legitimate and customary prayers as a foundation*, as it were—of rearing an outer superstructure of petitions, yet with remembrance of the Master's precepts."
- h. We will now go through Tertullian's explanation of the Prayer's various phrases, to unpack its deep and "diffuse" meaning.

### III. "Our Father in heaven"

- a. We are to start the prayer by acknowledging God as our Father.
  - i. "But as many as received Him [referring to Jesus], to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name...." (**John 1:12**, NKJV)
    - 1. Also, "For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, 'Abba, Father.'" (**Romans 8:15**)
  - ii. Jesus often refers to us as God's children and even tells us that we should call no one else "father". (**Matthew 23:9**)
- b. Being children of our Heavenly Father is a tremendous privilege we are given, and we acknowledge this every time we pray this prayer.
  - i. Tertullian writes: "Happy [are] they who recognize their Father!"
  - ii. He contrasts this to the opening of the book of Isaiah:
    - 1. "I have begotten and brought up sons, but they have rejected Me. The ox knows its owner and the donkey its master's crib; but Israel does not know Me, and the people do not understand Me.' Alas, sinful nation, a people full of sins, an evil seed, lawless children. They forsook the Lord; they

provoked to anger the Holy One of Israel.” (OSB, **Isaiah 1:2-5**)

2. To be called “children of God” is a right and an honor. It carries with it the responsibility to honor God by respecting and obeying Him as our Father.
- c. The challenge we have in regards to understanding God as our heavenly Father.
- i. As we begin our study of Deuteronomy, one of the most important reasons given by Chuck to study the book is that we might see God as He truly is.
    1. We see God acting throughout the history of the Jews as a *loving, protecting Father* carrying his children, and fighting their/our battles for us. **(Deuteronomy 1)**
    2. How we view God is the bedrock on which our faith is built. Do we see Him as caring for us, helping us, fighting for us; or do we see Him as distant, angry, harsh, exacting, hard to please, looking to smite us when we make a mistake, disappointed in us, overly permissive, indulgent, etc.
  - ii. At our recent men’s midweek, we discussed how we view God and how, fortunately, and perhaps unfortunately, the reality is that for most of us, the foundation of our view of God is how we view (or viewed) our biological/earthly fathers and the relationship we have/had with them.
    1. Most likely, there are examples of our fathers that were maybe really good, really bad, or a mix of good and bad.
    2. Many of us had fathers who were good providers, and we never doubted we would be taken care of, and this has helped us to view our heavenly Father in the same way.
    3. Many of us had fathers who really valued our accomplishments, and we felt we had to earn their love by the things we did. And we bring this into our relationship with our heavenly Father.
    4. It is really important that we separate our view of our earthly fathers from God. They are not the

same!

5. We honor and love our earthly fathers, with their strengths and weaknesses, because they disciplined us as they thought best. But we can rejoice (be happy!) that we have a Heavenly Father perfect in love, disciplines us for our good, cares for us, and fights with us in our battles.
- d. Every time we pray this simple opening phrase, it helps us to remember that we each have a perfect heavenly Father, who has adopted us as His son or daughter.

#### IV. “Hallowed (holy) be thy name”

- a. We pray this for two reasons.
- b. Reason #1: To glorify God.
  - i. It is appropriate to bless God’s name in every time and every place given all the blessings He bestows on us.
  - ii. By doing this in our daily prayer, we get a head start on praising God with the angels in the glory to come (at Christ’s return and the resurrection of the dead).
    1. “In like wise, therefore, we too, candidates for angelhood, if we succeed in deserving it, begin even here on earth to learn by heart that strain hereafter to be raised unto God, and the function of future glory.”
  - iii. Tertullian points out (in *On Prayer*, chapter 27) that some of those who were especially diligent in prayer would often add psalms of praise to God as part of their prayers. (Consider Psalm 103, for example.)
- c. Reason #2: That God’s name would be hallowed in all mankind!
  - i. God does not need our prayers to make His name holy or more holy! He is holy and will always be holy. He does not need our help with this!
  - ii. Holy = “set apart” [for God’s special purposes]
  - iii. Instead, we are praying that God’s name will be made holy in our lives.
  - iv. This is what Jesus came to do:

1. "I have come in the Father's name." (**John 5:43**)
2. "Father, glorify Your name." (**John 12:28**)
3. "I have manifested Your name to men." (**John 17:6**)
4. **We are to follow Jesus' example!**
- v. "...when we say, 'Hallowed be Thy name,' we pray this; that it may be hallowed in us who are in Him, as well in all others for whom the grace of God is still waiting; that we may obey this precept, too, in praying for all, even for our personal enemies."
  1. (Source: *On Prayer*, chapter 3; ANF 3.682)
  2. We are praying that our lives as Christians (living as the light of the world, obeying God, living holy lives, and showing the love of God to others) can bring glory and blessings to the name of God.
  3. We are also praying that His name will be revealed in those who have not yet experienced the grace of God (non-Christians), including our enemies!

## V. "Thy kingdom come..."

- a. Tertullian says there are two aspects of God's kingdom coming.
- b. First, like the prior statement, we are asking that this be done in us. By making His name holy (by doing His will), we are bringing God's kingdom, His laws, and blessings into this world.
  - i. Tom Jones' phrase: "The kingdom of God breaking into this world."
- c. Second, we are to pray that the kingdom come in its finality, and to come quickly!
  - i. When the trumpet will sound, a loud shout from an angel, and the Lord returns in glory; when God's enemies are vanquished, the dead are resurrected, the new heavens and new earth are formed, and when God's people will reign with Him in the eternal glory.
  - ii. This is to be our great hope!
    1. "Our wish is that our reign be hastened, not our servitude protracted. Even if it had not been

prescribed in the Prayer that we should ask for the advent of the kingdom [which it is!], we should, unbidden, have sent forth that cry, hastening toward the realization of our hope. The souls of the martyrs beneath the alter cry in jealousy unto the Lord ‘How long, Lord, do You not avenge our blood on the inhabitants of the earth?’ [**Revelation 6:10**]” (which will come at the end of the earth when the Kingdom is consummated). (*On Prayer*, chapter 5)

iii. Consider Jesus’ parables: promising blessings to the faithful when Jesus returns to consummate His kingdom:

1. The faithful wise servant taking care of his fellow servants, made ruler over God’s household. (**Matthew 24**)
2. 5 wise, prepared virgins, the door opened to attend the wedding/wedding feast of the bridegroom and his bride (Christ/the Church). (**Matthew 25**)
3. The ones faithful with the 2 and 5 talents: “Well done, good and faithful servant... I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of the Lord.” (**Matthew 25**)
4. The sheep, those serving the hungry, thirsty, stranger, naked, imprisoned, sick: “Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world...” (**Matthew 25**)

iv. **I seldom pray earnestly that God’s Kingdom come (Jesus’ return)!** This week, woke up in the middle of the night, starting praying God’s Kingdom would come (the trumpet, the shout, Jesus’ return, resurrection from the dead)....

1. Kind of sets perspective on your day!
2. Woke up, didn’t happen. But, maybe it will come today, or tomorrow!
3. Jesus tells us to pray His kingdom will come!

## VI. “Thy will be done on earth as in heaven...”

- a. Again, we are not praying that God might be successful in



accomplishing His will. His will to be accomplished!

- b. Instead, we pray that His will is accomplished in all of us.
  - i. God's will is for us to walk according to His discipline, including to preach, to work, and to endure even to death.
  - ii. This is the attitude Jesus demonstrated when He asked that the Lord remove the cup of suffering that was before Him:
    - 1. (Jesus *prayed*) "Father, if it is Your will, take this cup away from Me; nevertheless, not My will, but Yours be done." (**Luke 22:42**, NKJV)
- c. Tertullian says that when we pray "Thy will be done..." we are praying for several things:
  - i. "He supply us with the substance of His will" [to know what His will is],
  - ii. We give ourselves up to the will of the Father, and
  - iii. He grants us the capacity to do it."
- d. Doing God's will is difficult. Takes more than we have. We are to be praying for our capacity to do His will!

## VII. "Give us this day our daily bread..."

- a. Tertullian says after we focus on "things heavenly" (the name of God, the will of God, and the kingdom of God), it is appropriate to move to "earthly necessities"!
  - i. "Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things [food and clothing] will be added to you." (**Matthew 6:33**)
- b. Tertullian also saw this request as not just referring to our material needs, but to our need for *spiritual bread* as well.
- c. Jesus is "the bread of life".
  - i. "And Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger." (**John 6:35**, NKJV)
  - ii. Jesus' body is reckoned (considered to be) in bread, "This is my body" (**Matthew 26:26**)
  - iii. "And so, in petitioning for 'daily bread,' we ask for perpetuity in Christ, and indivisibility from His body."

- iv. We obtain spiritual strength and healing through Christ's body/our spiritual bread.
- d. Bread is used in many parables (our spiritual food):
  - i. "Does a father take away bread from his children, and hand it to dogs?" [David and Ezra]
  - ii. "Does a father give his son a stone when he asks for bread?" [David and Ezra]
  - iii. "Nay, even that nocturnal knocker knocked for 'bread'" (knocking at midnight, his neighbor gives him bread for his persistence).
- e. We are to be praying for our physical and spiritual bread (to be more like Christ, full of love, overcome sin); and God will give it to us!

### **VIII. "Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.."**

- a. After recognizing the generosity of God (to provide for us), we should address "His clemency" [mercy/lenience]
  - i. A governor or president grants clemency – pardons people's crimes.
  - ii. Tertullian asks: What good is it if we are fattened with bread, like a bull is fattened for the slaughter? (We must also receive forgiveness.)
- b. In the Scriptures, debt is a figure for guilt; as in the Parable of the Unmerciful Servant (**Matthew 18:21-35**). Unlike that servant, we must forgive our brother's debt/sin against us.
- c. Each time we pray for our debts to be forgiven (every time we pray this prayer), we confess our sin and acknowledge our own spiritual debt to God, and our need for forgiveness from Him.
- d. With the measure we use toward others (in forgiving those who sin against us), *the Lord will measure to us*, in turn.
- e. Me: when I pray this prayer daily, when I get to this part,
  - i. Opportunity to reflect on and confess my sin and
  - ii. To forgive others who have sinned against me.

### **IX. "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the Evil One"**

- a. The Lord Himself does not tempt us to sin; we are asking the

Lord to protect us from Satan, who is the one seeking to tempt us.

- b. (While God will not tempt us, He does put His people to the test! Tertullian reminds us of God calling Abraham to sacrifice Isaac, in **Genesis 22**. God is providing an opportunity (a test) for Abraham to prove his faithfulness, that he held nothing dearer to him than God.)
  - i. In the Prayer, we are asking the Lord to lead us away from temptations devised by Satan, and to convey us away from the Evil One.
  - ii. Tertullian reminds us of what Jesus said to His disciples in the garden: “Pray that you not be tempted.”
    - 1. They fell asleep. Were led into temptation and deserted him, because they went to sleep rather than praying!
- c. When Satan tempts us...
  - i. “Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall. No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.” (**1 Corinthians 10:12-13**)
  - ii. When we pray the Prayer daily, we are reminded to be prepared for temptation. (Not to be caught off guard.)
  - iii. God will both 1) limit the temptation to what we can handle, and 2) provide a way of escape – lead us out.
  - iv. We face daily temptation as Christians! Don’t be fooled. These are opportunities for Satan to drag us into sin, or for us to prove our faith as God allows this as a test.
    - 1. Anger, jealousy, lust, cowardice, lying, foolishness, not doing the good that is before us to do (do or say the thing that calls us to be Christlike).
    - 2. When you get to the end of the day, thank God for the tests. If you fell, ask for forgiveness. If you overcame, thank Him for delivering you!

## **X. Tertullian’s recap of the Lord’s Prayer (from *On Prayer*, chapter 9)**

- a. “In summaries of so few words, how many utterances of the

prophets, the Gospels, the apostles—how many discourses, examples, parables of the Lord, are touched on! How many duties are simultaneously discharged! The honor of God in the ‘Father’; the testimony of faith in the ‘Name’; the offering of obedience in the ‘Will’; the commemoration of hope in the ‘Kingdom’; the petition for life in the ‘Bread’; the full acknowledgment of debts in the prayer for their ‘Forgiveness’; the anxious dread of temptation in the request for ‘Protection’.

b. “What wonder? God alone could teach how he wished Himself prayed to. The religious rite of prayer therefore, ordained by Himself, and animated, even at the moment when it was issuing out of the Divine mouth, by His own Spirit, ascends, by its own prerogative, into heaven, commending to the Father what the Son has taught.”

i. Jesus, God, the Holy Spirit telling us how to pray to the Father!

## XI. A Few Other Golden Nuggets When Approaching God in Prayer (from *On Prayer*, chapters 11 & 12)

a. Before we even begin praying, there are some things we need to take care of! First deal with conflict with your brother.

i. Tertullian wrote in chapter 11 of *On Prayer*: “That we may not be as far from the ears of God as we are from His precepts, the memory of His precepts *paves for our prayers a way unto heaven*; of which precepts the chief is, that we go not up unto God’s altar before we compose whatever of discord or offense we have contracted with our brethren.”

ii. This calls to mind what Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount:

1. “Therefore, if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. *First be reconciled to your brother*, and then come and offer your gift. Agree with your adversary quickly, while you are on the way with him, lest your adversary deliver you to the judge, the judge hand you over to the officer, and you be thrown into prison.” (**Matthew 5:23–25**, NKJV)

iii. We also have the example of Joseph in **Genesis 50:15-21**, who forgave his brothers for their wickedness toward him. He tells them not to argue as they had back to their father!

iv. We must deal with anger quickly and pursue personal

righteousness (including in our relationship with others) to pray as God intends.

1. “If ever we must be angry, our anger must not be maintained beyond sunset, as the apostle admonishes. **But how rash is it either to pass a day without prayer, while you refuse to make satisfaction to your brother; or else, by perseverance in anger, to lose your prayer?**” (from *On Prayer*, chapter 11)
  2. Whenever we have conflict with others, let us reconcile quickly so that we don’t have to go a day without prayer!
- v. “Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord: looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled...” (Hebrews 12:14-15, NKJV)
- b. Husbands must also first repent of lack of love for their wives.
- i. “Husbands, likewise, dwell with them [*your wives*] with understanding, giving honor to the wife, as to the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life, that your prayers may not be hindered.” (1 Peter 3:7, NKJV)
- c. Jesus’ command to pray in secret.
- i. “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.” (Matthew 6:6)
  - ii. Tertullian makes the following point:
    1. When we pray in our room and secret places [acknowledging Him as Father, glorifying His name, asking for His kingdom to come, etc.], we are exercising our faith that God hears us. This leads to confidence that He will hear us in our homes and everywhere else as well.

## **XII. The Higher Level of Prayer Jesus Has Provided Us**

- a. From *On Prayer*, chapter 29 (the closing chapter of that work):
- b. “For what has God, who exacts it ever denied to prayer coming from ‘spirit and truth’ [Jesus]? How mighty specimens of its efficacy do we read, and hear, and believe! **Old-world prayer, indeed, used to free from fires, and from beasts, and from famine; and yet it had not (then) received its form from Christ.**

- c. **“But how far more amply operative is Christian prayer!** It does not station the angel of dew in mid-fires [Danie’s three friends], nor muzzle lions [Daniel], nor transfer to the hungry the rustics’ bread; it has no delegated grace to avert any sense of suffering; but it supplies the suffering, and the feeling, and the grieving, with endurance: it amplifies grace by virtue, that faith may know what she obtains from the Lord, understanding what—for God’s name’s sake—she suffers.
- d. “But in days gone by, prayer used to call down plagues, scatter the armies of foes, withhold the wholesome influences of the showers. Now, however, the prayer of righteousness averts all God’s anger, keeps guard on behalf of personal enemies, makes supplication on behalf of persecutors. Is it wonder if it knows how to extort the rains of heaven—(prayer) which was once able to procure its fires? [Elijah] Prayer is alone that which vanquishes God.
- e. “But Christ has willed that it be operative for no evil: He had conferred on it *all its virtue in the cause of good*. And so it knows nothing save how to recall the souls of the departed from the very path of death, to transform the weak, to restore the sick, to purge the possessed, to open prison-bars, to loose the bonds of the innocent. Likewise it washes away faults, repels temptations, extinguishes persecutions, consoles the faint-spirited, cheers the high-spirited, escorts travelers, appeases waves, makes robbers stand aghast, nourishes the poor, governs the rich, upraises the fallen, arrests the falling, confirms the standing.
- f. “Prayer is the wall of faith: her arms and missiles against the foe who keeps watch over us on all sides. So let us never walk unarmed. By day, be we mindful of Station; by night, of vigil. Under the arms of prayer guard we the standard of our General; await we in prayer the angel’s trumpet.
- g. “The angels, likewise, all pray; every creature prays; cattle and wild beasts pray and bend their knees; and when they issue from their layers and lairs, they look up heavenward with no idle mouth, making their breath vibrate after their own manner. Nay, the birds too, rising out of the nest, upraise themselves heavenward, and, instead of hands, expand the cross of their wings, and say somewhat to seem like prayer.
  - i. [Note: The idea of animals praying may seem strange to us! However, consider what the Scriptures say in **Job 38, Psalm 104 & Psalm 147 - CP**]
- h. “What more then, touching the office of prayer? Even the Lord Himself prayed; to whom be honor and virtue unto the ages of the ages!”

### **XIII. Practical applications for us**

- a. Study, understand, grasp, embrace what Jesus taught about prayer.
- b. Pray!
- c. Find your secret place (closet, room, woods, walk)
- d. Me: I walk to work. Gives me 30 minutes every day.
- e. Take breaks throughout the day. Walk and pray. Set alarms.
- f. Fasting: more time to read and pray.
- g. Pray together as couples, families, when brothers and sisters come over.
- h. Lose the phone. Box next to door. Turn it off. Let your desires, affections, weariness, emptiness turn to God, not the world, entertainment, etc.
- i. Let us as a church pray as Jesus taught His followers to pray!