

Teach Us to Pray, Part 1

(Adapted from Chuck Pike's 10/27/20 Lesson based on Tertullian's *On Prayer*)

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I. Introduction

- a. Many have taken the challenge to read through the Bible in a year, following various reading plans. It is very good that we are in the Scriptures, listening to God's voice, being comforted by His promises, putting His teachings into practice, and headed out each day armed with the sword of the Spirit!
 - i. "... in His law he mediates day and night, like a tree planted by streams of water, that produces its fruit in its season, and his leaf shall not wither and whatever he does shall prosper." (**Psalm 1**)
- b. Now, let's take it one step further: to have Christians in the Word of God AND praying! This is an extremely powerful combination. In my experience, it's hard to do both.
- c. 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 taught on this about two years ago, and we will look at it again today.
- d. My goals today:
 - i. *to open your eyes to the importance and power of prayer;*
 - ii. *to inspire you to pray as Jesus taught His disciples to pray; and*
 - iii. *to motivate you to continue to re-order your lives to prioritize consistent time in God's Word AND in prayer!*
- e. **Confession:** I myself am repenting and recommitting myself to praying as Jesus taught. I am finding great encouragement in this! Not looking down on anyone. This is not about sending anyone on a guilt trip. Instead, about following what Jesus taught and receiving the blessings from this!

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

- a. In **Luke 11**, one of Jesus' disciples said to Him, "Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples." Jesus responds with what we call "the Lord's Prayer."
 - i. **Question:** Why would they ask this of Jesus?

- ii. “So He said to them, ‘When you pray, say:....’”
- iii. We are to say these words. There is something special about these words, their meaning, that Jesus wants His followers to grasp, say, and mean.
- iv. We say these words each week in our liturgy.
 - 1. **Questions:** Do we grasp their meaning? Why are these words so important to Jesus? Why does He want His followers to pray these things?
- b. In His work *On Prayer*, Tertullian, an early Church teacher from Carthage (North Africa) who lived around 198 AD, illuminates the Lord’s Prayer clause by clause. He then provides colorful instruction on how we ought to pray (or not to pray!), backed by Scripture.
 - i. (Source: Tertullian, *On Prayer*, chapter 1; found in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 3, p. 681). Online link to Tertullian’s *On Prayer*: <https://ccel.org/ccel/tertullian/prayer/anf03>
- c. As I dug into how Tertullian understood the Lord’s Prayer, I realized that there is much more to this “little prayer” than first meets the eye!
 - i. This is not an easy prayer to pray (if you think about and sincerely mean what you are saying)!
 - ii. Tertullian believed that this Prayer is *the highest and best prayer*, the perfect prayer for Christians to pray. And even though it is short, it contains significant meaning.
 - 1. “[The Prayer] is as diffuse in meaning as it is compressed in words.”
 - 2. And “[i]n the (Lord’s) Prayer is comprised the epitome of the whole Gospel.”
 - iii. Tertullian makes the case that the Lord’s Prayer is our prayer foundation. We then build on that to add our own specific petitions.
- d. First, let’s read the Prayer. Then, we will consider Tertullian’s insights into the Lord’s Prayer, taking each clause at a time. In a second lesson, we will consider other helpful insights Tertullian gives on praying as Jesus taught.
- e. Read **Luke 11:1-4**

III. “Our Father in heaven”

- a. We start the prayer by acknowledging God as our Father.

- i. Tertullian makes the great point that “the name of ‘God the Father’ had been published to none...” until Jesus granted permission for us to address God as our Father.
- b. We are reminded of this special relationship throughout the New Testament.
 - 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)
 - ii. 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**)
 - iii. Jesus often refers to us as God’s children and even tells us that we should call no one else “father”. (**Matthew 23:9**)
- c. Being children of our Heavenly Father is a tremendous blessing, and we acknowledge this every time we begin this prayer.
 - i. Tertullian writes: “Happy [are] they who recognize their Father!” [Alaïda recognizing Timothy’s wonderful qualities!]
 - 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**)
- d. The challenge we have in regards to understanding God as our heavenly Father.
 - i. As we conclude our study of Deuteronomy, one of the most important reasons given by Chuck to study the book was 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 battles for them. (**Deuteronomy 1**)
 - 2. How we view God is the bedrock on which our faith is built.

- a. Do we see Him as caring for us, helping us, fighting for us?
- b. 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, manipulative, etc.?
- e. Every time we pray this simple opening phrase, we acknowledge the goodness of our Father in heaven. This helps us remember that we each have a perfect, heavenly Father who has adopted us as His son or daughter, who desires to go before us, protect us, comfort us, provide us, and save us. This is who we pray to.

IV. “Hallowed (holy) be your name”

- a. Tertullian saw two reasons to pray these simple 4 words.
- b. Reason #1: To glorify God.
 - i. It is appropriate to bless God’s name at all times and in every place, given all the blessings He bestows on us.
 - 1. We are recognizing (and praising the fact) that He (and His Name) are Holy.
 - 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 that some of those who were especially diligent in prayer would often add psalms of praise to God as part of their prayers. (in *On Prayer*, chapter 27)
- c. Reason #2: That God’s name *is made holy 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.
 - 1. Holy = “set apart” [for God’s special purposes]
 - ii. Instead, we are praying that God’s name will be made holy

in our lives. That we will be “set apart” for God’s special purposes.

iii. 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!**
5. **Question:** How does this prepare us for the day, when we pray that God’s name be made holy in us, our lives (as husbands, wives, fathers, mothers, employees, bosses, neighbors, friends, etc.)?

iv. “...when we say, ‘Hallowed be Your 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 also praying that His name will be revealed in those who have not yet experienced the grace of God (non-Christians), including our enemies!
That’s pretty cool! (workmates, neighbors, friends)

V. “Your kingdom come...”

- a. Tertullian says there are two aspects of God’s kingdom coming.
- b. First, like the prior statement, we are asking that His kingdom come in us. By making His name holy (by doing the will of our King Jesus), 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 God's people reign with Him in eternal glory.

ii. This is to be our great hope! And we should be praying for it to happen soon!

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 altar 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 when Jesus returns and the Kingdom is consummated). (*On Prayer*, chapter 5)

iii. Consider Jesus' parables that call us to be ready for His return

1. 5 wise, prepared virgins, who had their oil and were ready when the bridegroom returned (**Matthew 25**)
2. 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**)
3. The faithful, wise servant taking care of his fellow servants when his master returned. (**Matthew 24**)
4. The sheep, those serving the hungry, thirsty, stranger, naked, imprisoned, sick when Jesus returns (**Matthew 25**)
5. "Watch, therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming." (**Matthew 25:13**)

iv. **Challenge:** Start asking for Jesus to return today (or this week, or this month, or in a year!)

1. Watch how this will change your perspective and priorities!
2. Watch how the allures (shiny, glittering things) of

this world are exposed for the dross that they really are!

3. Praying for Jesus' kingdom to come helps us to be watchful and prepared for his return!

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

- a. We are not praying that God might be successful in accomplishing His will. He doesn't need our prayers to see His will come to be!
- b. Instead, we pray that His will is accomplished in all of us.
 - i. Tertullian states that it is God's overarching will that God's will is for us to walk according to Jesus' teachings.
- 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 over (surrender) to the will of the Father, and
 - iii. Our Father in Heaven grant us the capacity (strength, power) to do it.
 - iv. **Encouragement:** Doing God's will is difficult! Jesus knew we needed to pray a lot about doing God's will!
 1. Sometimes I don't know what His will is.
Sometimes I know, but don't want to do it.
Sometimes I know what it is and want to do it, but I don't have the strength/love/patience/etc.
- d. Tertullian then gets specific about the will of God, and what this looks like in our lives, looking at Jesus' own example:
 - i. “to preach [and spread the Gospel, which got Jesus killed],
 - ii. to do God's work [to demonstrate God's love], and
 - iii. to endure even to death [show our faithfulness].”
- e. This is the attitude Jesus demonstrated when asking His Father to 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)

- f. Doing God’s will is difficult. Takes more than we have.
 - i. All these needs are met in this Prayer!
 - ii. Tertullian reminds us that when we pray Your will be done, we are wishing what is best for us, because there is no evil in God’s will. (Maybe hard, but always good!)

VII. “Give us this day our daily bread...”

- a. Tertullian says that after we focus on “things heavenly” (the name of God, the kingdom of God, and the will of God, it is then appropriate to ask for “earthly necessities”!
 - i. “Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things [food and clothing] shall be added to you.” (Matthew 6:33)
- b. Jesus uses the image of the loving Father providing bread for His children to help us understand the Father’s generous nature:
 - i. “Does a father take away bread from his children, and hand it to dogs?”
 - ii. “Does a father give his son a stone when he asks for bread?”
- c. Tertullian also saw this request as not just referring to our material needs, but to our need for *spiritual bread* as well.
 - 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. Tertullian: “And so, in petitioning for ‘daily bread,’ we ask for perpetuity in Christ, and indivisibility from His body.”
 - 1. Being one with Christ and His body.
- d. When we pray this, we are praying for God to provide our physical and spiritual bread to sustain us, being comforted that our heavenly Father is able and will provide for His children!

VIII. “Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors...”

- a. 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. After recognizing the generosity of God in our prayer, we

address “His clemency.”

- i. A governor or president grants clemency – pardons people’s crimes. Shows mercy.
- c. Each time we pray this prayer, we are to come before God and confess our sins, acknowledging our own spiritual debt to the Father, and to receive forgiveness from Him.
 - i. “A petition for pardon is a full confession; because he who begs for pardon fully admits his guilt.”
 - ii. When we ask for pardon, we may be confident that we receive it by the blood of Christ. This should make us extremely grateful and set us free from the guilt and shame that come when we sin.
- d. In the Scriptures, debt is a figure for guilt, as in the Parable of the Unmerciful Servant (**Matthew 18:21-35**). Unlike that servant, after our debts are forgiven, we are to forgive our brother’s debt/sin against us.
- e. **Practical Application**
 - i. In this part of the Lord’s Prayer, we have the opportunity to reflect on and specifically confess our sins to God and to forgive others.
 - ii. I find this part of the Prayer to be extremely powerful: cleansing, freeing, producing humility and gratitude.

IX. “Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the Evil One”

- a. “Let no one say when he is tempted, ‘I am tempted by God’; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he Himself tempt anyone. But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed [by Satan!].” (**James 1:13-14**)
 - i. **Question:** How do we reconcile these two passages?
 - ii. (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.)
- b. Tertullian gives us a compelling answer, I think.
 - i. In the Prayer, we are asking the Lord to lead us away from temptations devised by Satan, and to deliver us (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 enter into temptation.”

1. They fell asleep. Were led into temptation and deserted him, because they went to sleep rather than praying!

iii. **Practical Application:** When I pray this,

1. it keeps me vigilant,
2. I am not surprised by crazy thoughts/temptations, and
3. I am reminded to stay away from temptation!

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!*

- i. *The honor of God in the ‘Father’;*
- ii. *the testimony of faith in the ‘Name’;*
- iii. *the offering of [our] obedience in the ‘Will’;*
- iv. *the commemoration of hope in the ‘Kingdom’;*
- v. *the petition for life in the ‘Bread’;*
- vi. *the full acknowledgment of [our] debts in the prayer for their ‘Forgiveness’;*
- vii. *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.”

XI. Practical applications for us

- a. Study, understand, grasp, and embrace the depth and importance of the Lord's Prayer.
- b. Pray the Lord's Prayer as a starting point, the foundation for specific, unique prayers for your life and needs.
- c. Too busy to pray? I don't think so! Are you too busy to....
 - i. Acknowledge and take comfort in speaking to your Heavenly Father
 - ii. To praise Him/His name for His goodness and holiness (as we will do in heaven)
 - iii. To ask for Jesus' Kingdom to come, to be reminded of that Final Day when all will be made right, and to be waiting, prepared for it
 - iv. To ask God for help to understand His will, to surrender to it, and for strength to carry it out
 - v. To humble yourself and confess your sin, and receive the Father's mercy, love, and forgiveness, and to forgive others from the heart
 - vi. And to ask for the Father to deliver you from Satan, and the temptation he has prepared for you, hoping to bring you down.
- d. Let us, as a church, learn to pray as Jesus taught His followers to pray!