

Teach Us to Pray, Part 2

David Adams – 2/15/26

I. Introduction and Recap of Part 1

- a. Two weeks ago, we worked through “the Lord’s prayer” from **Luke 11**, Jesus’ response when one of His disciples asked Him to “teach us to pray....”
 - i. This disciple must have seen something very different in Jesus’ prayer that they wanted to understand and imitate.
- b. We had help from Tertullian, an early Church teacher from Carthage (North Africa) who lived around 198 AD, who illuminates the Lord’s Prayer clause by clause in his work *On Prayer*. He is a colorful writer whose writing is infused with Scripture. His writing is not Scripture, but I believe he offers much wisdom and insight on effective prayer.
 - 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. Tertullian’s recap of the Lord’s Prayer
 - i. *“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!”*
 1. *“Our Father in Heaven” – we are invited to approach and honor God as a loving Father;*
 2. *“Hallowed be Your Name” – we ask that He would help us reveal His name to others, to make His holiness known to others by our example, just as Jesus did;*
 3. *“Your Kingdom Come” – to acknowledge and look forward to the return of Christ and the hope of the ultimate arrival of His eternal ‘Kingdom’;*
 4. *“Your will be done” – to understand and surrender to the Father’s Will, and to ask for strength to do it!*
 5. *By asking for our “daily bread” we are petitioning for both our physical and spiritual food that sustains our lives;*
 6. *We acknowledge our debts/sins before our merciful*

Father (keeping us humble and most grateful) and actively forgive others who sin against us; and

7. *We acknowledge and prepare ourselves for temptation, asking for God's protection and help to escape Satan's schemes.*

- d. 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.
 - i. “[The Prayer] is as diffuse in meaning as it is compressed in words.”
 - ii. And “[i]n the (Lord’s) Prayer is comprised the epitome of the whole Gospel.”
- e. Tertullian saw the Lord’s Prayer as our prayer foundation. We then build on that, adding “an outer superstructure of petitions” based on our needs and life situations.
- f. Today, we will look at other insights Tertullian gives in his work *On Prayer*, which can help us to pray as Jesus taught His followers. My goals for this lesson:
 - i. *to inspire and further equip you to pray as Jesus taught His disciples to pray; and*
 - ii. *to motivate you to continue to re-order your lives to prioritize consistent time in prayer (even as you hold on to your daily reading of Scripture)!*

II. Preparing Our Hearts to Pray

- a. First, address conflict with your brother or sister.
 - i. *“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....”*
 - 1. “The eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous, And His ears open to their supplications....” **(Psalm 33/34:16)**
 - 2. “The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective....” **(James 5:16)**
 - ii. *“...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.”*
 - 1. Tertullian likens coming before God in prayer to *bringing a gift to God at His altar*. When we bring our gift of prayer, we

should first address any conflict we have with others.

2. This calls to mind what Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount:
 - a. “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.” (**Matthew 5:23–24**, NKJV)
3. Tertullian recalls 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 return (from Egypt) to their father (in Canaan)!
4. “Husbands, likewise, dwell with [your wives] with understanding, giving honor to the wife, as the weaker vessel, and as being hiers together in the grace of life, that your prayers may not be hindered.” (**1 Peter 3:7**)
 - a. God has our sister’s backs!
 - b. Brothers, we'd better prioritize honoring our wives and treating them with understanding and love!

iii. How terrible to go a day without prayer!

1. “If ever we must be angry, our anger must not be maintained beyond sunset as the apostle admonishes [**Ephesians 4:26**]. **But how rash [foolish!] 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!
3. Also, our longing to pray to our Father should compel us to quickly resolve conflicts with one another.

b. Quieting our spirits before God

i. Tertullian says we need to be free from “mental perturbation”

1. “perturb” = to disturb, agitate; to confuse, disorder
2. “Nor merely from anger, but altogether from all perturbation of the mind, *the exercise of prayer should be free, uttered from a spirit such as the Spirit to whom it is sent. For a defiled spirit cannot be acknowledged by a holy Spirit, nor a sad by a joyful, nor a fettered by a free. No one grants reception to his adversary: no one grants admittance except to his [companion].*”

ii. **Question:** How do we quiet our spirits in order to come to the God of Peace to pray? (Here is what I came up with!)

1. **Answer #1:** “And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice.” (**Ephesians 4:30-31**)
2. **Answer #2:** “Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you.” (**1 Peter 5:6-7**)
3. **Answer #3:** Study the Psalms of David. Ask yourself, “How did David quiet his spirit? (raw honesty, reminded God and himself of who God is and of His promises)”
4. **Answer #4:** Say and mean the Lord’s Prayer! (the foundation, starting point for our prayers)

c. Praying with a humble spirit

- i. “But we more commend our prayers to God *when we pray with modesty and humility*, with not even our hands too loftily levated, but elevated temperately and becomingly; and not even our countenance over-boldly uplifted.”
- ii. “For the [tax collector] who prayed with humility and dejection not merely in his supplication [“God, be merciful to me a sinner!”], but in his countenance too [“standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven”], went his way ‘more justified’ than the shameless Pharisee [“God, I thank You that I am not like other men” and continues to list all the wonderful things he does].”

- iii. “The sounds of our voice, likewise, should be subdued; else, if we are to be heard for our noise, how large windpipes should we need! But God is the hearer not of the voice, but of the heart....”
- iv. “Do the ears of God wit for sound? How then, could Jonah’s prayer reach heaven from the depth of the whale’s belly, through the entrails of so huge a beast; from the very abysses, through so huge a mass of sea? What superior advantage will they who pray too loudly gain, except that they annoy their neighbors?...”
 - 1. Tertullian has a sense of humor!
 - 2. Consider our brothers and sisters locked up in prison, suffering “alone”, yet they are not! God sees, hears, and will reward their faithful prayers. Some of us may be there at some point.

III. When and Where Should We Pray?

- a. **Question:** When and where should we pray?
 - i. “Touching times of prayer nothing at all has been prescribed, except clearly, ‘to pray at every time and every place’”
 - 1. **Ephesians 6:18:** “praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints...” [context, our spiritual weapons],
 - 2. **1 Thessalonians 5:17:** “pray without ceasing”,
 - 3. **1 Timothy 2:8:** “pray everywhere”
 - ii. It will not be “unprofitable” to observe certain “commons hours” of prayer – certain intervals throughout the day.
 - 1. Third hour (when the disciples were praying together and the Holy Spirit descended upon them in **Acts 2**), the sixth hour (when Peter prayed and received the vision of the Gentiles coming into the Kingdom), and the ninth hour (when Peter and John were going to the temple “at the hour of prayer” and healed the lame man)
 - 2. **Tertullian says that while there is no requirement to observe specific hours of prayer, this is, in fact, a really good idea** (to set some boundaries and discipline to ensure we are praying!)
 - a. “Albeit these practices stand simply without any precept for their observance, still it may be granted

a good thing to establish some definite presumption, which may both add stringency to the admonition to pray, *and may, as it were by a law, tear us out from our businesses [to pray]; so that... we pray at least not less than three times in a day, debtors as we are to Three – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit: of course, in addition to our regular prayers which are due, without any admonition, on the entrance of light and of night.*”

b. He then references righteous Daniel, who, after being told he could pray only to the king, not to God, or be thrown into the lions’ den, continued to kneel down three times a day and pray to God!

c. “... [Daniel] knelt down on his knees three times that day and prayed and gave thanks to God, *as he was doing before.*” (**Daniel 6:11**)

i. Breaking out of his busy routine to pray regularly acknowledging the glory and honor of God, not the king he reported to!

d. **Question:** Are you too busy to pray?

i. Consider how busy Daniel was, overseeing one-third of the Medo-Persian empire under King Darius!

ii. Size by land area (best historical estimates): peaked shortly after Daniel (Darius I, c. 500 BC): ≈ 5.5 million km^2 (≈ 2.1 million square miles), the largest empire of the ancient world at that time. For perspective: it covered three continents—Asia, Africa, and Europe.

iii. Population estimate: 17–35 million people, roughly 30–40% of the world’s population.

iv. [\[en.wikipedia.org\]](http://en.wikipedia.org), [\[biblestudy.org\]](http://biblestudy.org), [\[worldhistoryedu.com\]](http://worldhistoryedu.com).

iii. We should pray before we eat and before we take a bath!

1. “But... it becomes believers not to take food, and not to go to the bath, before interposing a prayer; *for the refreshments and nourishments of the spirit are to be held prior to those of the flesh, and things heavenly prior to*

things earthly.”

- a. We pray to give thanks for the food, but also to refresh our spirits, before we refresh our bodies!
- iv. When your brother comes to visit you, don't depart without prayer.
- b. Where should we pray (in addition to everywhere)?
 - 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 (and extremely practical) points:
 1. When we pray in our room and in various secret places, we are demonstrating our faith that God hears us. This leads to confidence that He will hear us not only in our secret places, but everywhere else as well.
 2. Meaningful, consistent prayer demonstrates our faith in God. How much this must mean to our Father!

IV. Old World Prayer vs. Christian Prayer

- a. Prayer as our “Spiritual Victim”
 - i. Toward the end of *On Prayer*, Tertullian says that “the more diligent in prayer” will add Psalms to enrich their prayers.
 - ii. He then says something quite interesting:
 1. “And, of course, every institution [the church!] is excellent which, for the extolling and honouring of God, aims unitedly to bring Him enriched prayer as *a choice victim*.”
 2. “For [prayer] is the spiritual victim which has abolished [the Old Testament sacrifices].”
 3. Old Testament “victims” = the goats, rams, bulls, etc.
 - a. Growing up, we did not name the male lambs, only the females (“Judy”, “April”, “Violet”). I remember leading the males to the slaughterhouse, the victims for our dinner plate!

4. Tertullian makes the following points:
- a. God did not desire the victims of rams, bulls and goats. (**Isaiah 1:11**)
 - b. God desired and asks for a better offering from us: our prayers: a spiritual sacrifice that we offer at His altar.
 - c. He quotes Jesus in **John 4:23-24**
 - i. “But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him.”
 - d. “We are the true worshipers and the true priests, who, praying in spirit... a victim proper and acceptable to God, which assuredly He has required, which He has looked for to for Himself! This victim, devoted from the whole heart, fed on faith, tended by truth, entire in innocence, pure in chastity, garlanded in love, we ought to escort with the pomp of good works, amid psalms and hymns, unto God’s altar, to obtain for us all things from God.”
 - e. Consider:
 - i. “We have an altar from which those who serve the tabernacle have no right to eat.... [explains that Jesus was offered as a sacrifice and suffered outside the camp as the OT sacrifices were offered and then the bodies burned outside the camp.] ...*Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name.*” (**Hebrews 13:10, 15**)
 - ii. “... you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ....” (**1 Peter 2:5**)

5. Takeaway for us:

- a. Our prayer is a better victim than those OT animals! But like those OT sacrifices, our prayer is to be an offering we bring to the altar, characterized by:
 - i. Devotion from our hearts,
 - ii. innocence,
 - iii. purity,
 - iv. love,
 - v. “escorted [to the altar]” with our good works,
 - vi. with psalms and hymns,
 - vii. seeking God’s blessing!
- b. Tertullian contrasts “Old World Prayer” with Christian prayer (as Jesus taught us
 - i. “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.*
 - ii. ***“But how far more amply operative is Christian prayer! It does not station the angel of dew in mid-fires [Daniel’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.***
 - iii. “But in [the past], prayer used to call down plagues, scatter the armies of foes, and withhold the [blessing of rain]. Now, however, the prayer of righteousness averts all God’s anger, [by keeping] guard on behalf of personal enemies and making supplication on behalf of persecutors. Is it wonder if it knows how to [call down] the rains of heaven—(prayer) which was once able to [call down] its fires? [Elijah] ***Prayer is alone that which vanquishes God.***

1. From *On Prayer*, chapter 29 (the closing chapter of that work)

2. Points Tertullian makes:

a. We don't focus our prayer on destroying our enemies and relieving our suffering. Instead, *we pray for our enemies, petitioning on their behalf (Matthew 5:44) and that our Father would, in our suffering, supply us with endurance, as we look forward to our eternal reward.*

i. "... [I, Paul] do not cease to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers: that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ,... may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints...." (**Ephesians 1:16-18**, Paul's prayer for the Ephesians)

b. This type of prayer "vanquishes God" – He hears, listens, and honors such prayers.

c. Jesus' example: headed to and on the cross

i. "Not my will, but yours be done" (endurance)

ii. "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do...." (mercy to enemies)

iii. "Today you will be with me in paradise" (knows how this is going to end!)

c. **Question: What do we pray for?**

i. Tertullian then discusses the types of things Christians are to pray for, which are different than Old Testament prayer.

1. **Challenge:** Take inventory of your prayers, then compare them to this list!

ii. "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.

1. Tertullian says we pray for the following:
 - a. Those who have left the faith to bring them back
 - b. That the weak (spiritually?) would become strong
 - c. The sick to be healed
 - d. That the possessed would be cleansed
 - e. That the imprisoned would be set free
2. He says that our prayer:
 - a. Washes away our faults
 - b. Repels temptation
 - c. Extinguishes persecution
 - d. Consoles us in our suffering
 - e. Cheers our spirits
 - f. Protects those who are traveling
 - g. “governs those who are rich”
 - h. Raises up the fallen (in sin?) and helps us when we are about to fall, and helps us to remain standing (in the faith)

V. Conclusion

- a. Prayer is a powerful spiritual weapon
 - i. “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, keep vigil [in prayer both day and night]. Under the arms of prayer guard we the standard of our General; await we in prayer the angel’s trumpet.”
- b. Tertullian urges us to pray as all creation and even our Lord prayed!
 - i. “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.

1. [Note: The idea of animals praying may seem strange to us! However, consider what the Scriptures say in **Job 38, Psalm 104 & Psalm 147**]

ii. *“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!”*

c. Practical applications for us

- i. Study, grasp, and embrace the depth and importance of prayer (the wonderful Old Testament prayers, the Lord’s Prayer, the NT prayers and teachings on prayer).
- ii. Find your secret place (closet, room, woods, walk) that works for you.
- iii. Take breaks throughout the day. Set alarms. Figure out how to pull yourself out of your daily “business” to pray.
- iv. Deal with your heart as you come to our Heavenly Father.
 1. Start with the Lord’s Prayer as a starting point, the foundation for specific prayers!
 2. Deal with conflicts with others before you come to the altar.
 3. See prayer as your spiritual victim, offering praise and thanksgiving to the Father.
- v. What distracts you from prayer? Drastically curb or eliminate it. Don’t neglect this remarkable gift and spiritual weapon, with which you can “vanquish God”!
- vi. Pray together as couples, families, when brothers and sisters come over.
- vii. Let us, as a church, pray as Jesus taught His followers to pray!