

Jesus Teaches About Prayer

SESSION IN A SENTENCE: Jesus taught His disciples to pray with faith, persistence, and dependence on God.

BACKGROUND PASSAGES: Luke 11:1-13; 18:1-8

It's amazing to watch a toddler's explosion of language. He goes from aimless, haphazard babbling to a few simple words to full-on sentences seemingly overnight. From "Ball" to "My ball" to "I want that ball" to "I want that ball, please." From wordless crying to very articulate demands. From limited communication skills to holding entire conversations. Just like that, she begins to take part in the day-to-day communication that we so often take for granted.

Learning to pray is like that.



What are some ways growing in prayer is like growing in communication as a child?

Group Time

Point 1: Pray with dependence on God (Luke 11:1-4).

¹ 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.” ² And he said to them, “When you pray, say:

“Father, hallowed be your name.

Your kingdom come.

³ Give us each day our daily bread,

⁴ and forgive us our sins,

for we ourselves forgive everyone who is indebted to us.

And lead us not into temptation.”

When Jesus teaches His disciples how to pray, the first thing He tells them to do is to recall **God’s glory and holiness**, that He would be “hallowed.” God’s kingdom and His will, which reflect His glory and holiness, are foremost on Jesus’ mind, as they should be foremost on all of ours. Without a firm belief in the fact that God’s glory and holiness matter, our prayers are for naught.

 Why should God’s glory and holiness matter for our prayers?

Jesus’ model prayer teaches us that God is concerned with both our physical needs and our spiritual needs through three simple requests—for **bread**, for **forgiveness**, and for **protection**. Jesus here captures our physical and spiritual needs and reminds us to rely on the God who sustains us in all of them. God cares intimately for each one of us in every minuscule aspect of our daily lives, both the physical and spiritual, so of course we can depend on Him.

 What are some reasons we struggle with dependence on God?

Point 2: Pray with faith in God (Luke 11:9-13).

⁹ And I tell you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. ¹⁰ For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened. ¹¹ What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will instead of a fish give him a serpent; ¹² or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? ¹³ If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!”

Prayer is not a passive activity but an active one. The language of *seeking* and *knocking* implies action and initiative, not just wishful thinking. Prayer, then, makes us active participants in the plan that God has for us, not just wide-eyed bystanders. But the act of prayer also requires faith in our good God to know what is best for us, whether that is what we ask for or not.

 How has God answered your prayers, whether in ways you asked or in ways even better than you imagined?

When Jesus taught His disciples to pray, He taught them to address God as Father. This was not an afterthought but an encouragement to see God as just that: Father and Sustainer. Contrary to some fathers on earth who ignore and abuse their children, Jesus paints a picture of God as a good and loving Father who delights to give us good things. The supreme gift He gives is Himself through the presence of **the Holy Spirit**.

Prayer and Providence: The Bible teaches that although God has a plan for this world that He promises to fulfill, prayer is often the _____ God uses to accomplish His divine purpose. In this sense, it is true that “prayer _____ things,” and it is also true that God uses prayer to change our _____ so that our will comes into conformity with His.



Voices from Church History

“Prayer is a sincere, sensible, affectionate pouring out of the heart or soul to God, through Christ, in the strength and assistance of the Holy Spirit, for such things as God hath promised, or according to the word, for the good of the church, with submission, in faith to the will of God.”¹

—John Bunyan (c. 1628-1688)

Point 3: Pray with persistence to God (Luke 18:1-8).

¹ And he told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart. ² He said, “In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor respected man. ³ And there was a widow in that city who kept coming to him and saying, ‘Give me justice against my adversary.’ ⁴ For a while he refused, but afterward he said to himself, ‘Though I neither fear God nor respect man, ⁵ yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will give her justice, so that she will not beat me down by her continual coming.’” ⁶ And the Lord said, “Hear what the unrighteous judge says. ⁷ And will not God give justice to his elect, who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long over them? ⁸ I tell you, he will give justice to them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?”

Jesus told a parable about a very familiar figure in Scripture: the widow. His overall point with this story was not about caring for widows and orphans, people who were vulnerable on the edges of society, but how Jesus frames this parable is important. Notice that the judge is *not* the hero of the story. Instead, the praiseworthy and victorious character is the widow, who persistently approaches the judge to find justice for herself against her adversary.



Why should Christians be concerned with justice in the world?

The widow receives justice because of her persistent pleas, not because of the judge’s character or compassion for the woman. And this is where we get the main point of the parable. More than justice for widows, Jesus was teaching us something about the God we serve. Jesus compared this unrighteous judge to His Father in heaven, the ultimate righteous Judge, and the contrast was sharp. If the unjust judge gave justice because of the woman’s persistence, then how much more will we receive justice in response to our prayers because our Judge stands *ready* and *willing* to help us! So be persistent in prayer.

How would you assess the health of your own prayer life?



Non-Existent

Persistent and Faithful

Daily Study

Day 1: Read Luke 11:1-4

The model of prayer that Jesus teaches here is a shorter version of the “Lord’s Prayer” (or as some prefer, the “Disciples’ Prayer”) that most believers know. In fact, if you grew up in the church, you could probably finish each phrase without even thinking about it in the King James Version: “Our Father, who art in _____, hallowed be thy _____.”

By giving us this prayer, Jesus isn’t giving us the formula that we must use every single time we go before the throne of God. If that were so, the Psalms likely would not be included in the Bible since the psalmists tended not to phrase things in this way. Rather, Jesus is giving us a model for prayer and teaching us several important truths: We pray to a sovereign God whose soon-coming kingdom is advancing every day, and yet, even in the midst of His lofty, heavenly kingdom, He is concerned with forgiving us of our sins and growing us in His likeness as we forgive others. These simple words are the bedrock of our theology and practice, and as we pray them to the only One worthy of them, we end by asking Him to help us not be tempted to take our eyes off of Him.



As you re-read this well-known prayer, how can you see the gospel embedded in its words?

Day 2: Read Luke 11:5-8

Think of your very best friend in the world. Maybe you grew up together or went to the same college. Perhaps you were roommates once upon a time, a bridesmaid or a groomsman. You would do anything for this person because your love for him or her is so great. Now imagine that this person banged on your door in the wee hours of the morning for some bread.

The man in Jesus' story even mentions the fact that his children are asleep, and if you've raised small children, you know how precious those hours of slumber are. No matter how much you love your friend—and perhaps you love your friend and are comfortable enough to be honest with him—you may not want to give him any bread.

In Jesus' story, though, it isn't because of one friend's love that he gives the other bread but because of the other's persistence. Jesus uses this story to highlight the love of the Father, which is so great that there is no hour too late for Him to hear the cries of our hearts.



When was the last time you prayed persistently about something?

Day 3: Read Luke 11:9-13

We all know the story of Aladdin and his magic lamp. The genie who popped out of that ancient light fixture owed whoever rubbed the lamp three wishes with very few exceptions. Anything Aladdin dreamed of—from love, to riches, to power—was literally at his fingertips.

When we read the way Jesus teaches about prayer in this passage, we might be tempted to picture God a bit like a magical genie. All we have to do is ask, and we'll be given whatever we want, right? Whatever door we knock on, God will open it, and whatever we seek, it will be given to us.

This would be a very dangerous proposition, but of course, it isn't what Jesus was teaching. Notice that Jesus refers to God as *Father* here. And just like a father, God sometimes has to tell His children “no” when they make a request. Like pouting two-year-olds or petulant teens, we may not always like the answer that God gives us, but the point Jesus was driving home is that God *will* answer. Because of His love for us, we can trust whatever His answer might be.



How can prayer reveal God's will to us?

Day 4: Read Luke 18:1-8

The widow in Jesus' story does not give up easily.

Again Jesus was teaching His listeners a lesson in persistence. God is not a cruel judge whose arm has to be twisted in order to do right by us. He is an all-wise Father who delights in caring for His children, but our persistent prayer is a way for us to grow more and more in reliance upon God. It constantly refocuses our hearts as we cry out to Him, keeping His name on our tongues and His promises on our minds. It increases our faith by consistently reminding us whom we serve and to whom we are to submit every desire of our hearts.

As we pray and read God's Word, these heart desires become more and more in line with God's will for us. Through prayer, we are not convincing God to do the right thing. He is already going to do right by us. Instead, we are reminding ourselves to endeavor to understand and appreciate the will of God.



How can prayer teach us to trust the Lord?

Day 5: Read Matthew 6:5-8

Before launching into the how-to of prayer in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus told His listeners how *not* to pray.

Our prayers are meant for the glory of God alone, not the glory and honor of ourselves. Jesus was not telling us to avoid praying in public. We know this because Paul gave instruction about public prayer in his epistles (1 Tim. 2:8). Rather, Jesus was telling us to guard our *motives* when we pray, whether we're in public or in private. Our goal is not to be seen for our eloquence or piety but to communicate with God in a way that blesses His name and blesses those who might hear us. We are not praying for the earthly reward of a pat on the back but to communicate with the Father who has already secured our eternal reward in Jesus.



How can we make sure we are praying for God's glory and not our own?

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Jesus was born to die—a jarring statement indeed, but one that is quite true.

Christmas and Easter are fused together, linked hand-in-hand in such a way that each is dependent on the other for its meaning. The theology of such a statement is solid but incomplete, for Jesus was not born to die immediately but rather some thirty years later. Jesus' life, then, was not utilitarian—existing just so it could be taken away and picked up again—it had greater meaning and purpose. What Jesus did during those thirty years of walking the earth mattered; He lived a life of perfect obedience to the Father. He satisfied the demands of righteousness that we could not so He might take away our sin when we trust in Him and so His righteousness might be credited to us, making us fully pleasing to the Father (2 Cor. 5:21).

In this volume we delve deeper into the marvelous truth of the incarnation to see still further glimpses of Christ's glory on earth. His righteousness did not occur in a vacuum but rather among people, ordinary people like you and me. In each unit of this volume, we will look at Jesus' interactions with people as through a prism, making slight turns to see different yet equally brilliant perspectives of Jesus' works. In Unit 22, we will see Jesus' power to heal coupled with His deep compassion for people, even those who were marginalized in society. In Unit 23, we will see Jesus' riveting teachings empowered by His divine authority. And finally, in Unit 24, we will see Jesus' miraculous power over nature, revealing His identity as Creator God.

Each ray of light we will see points to the same truth: that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God given for our salvation. Jesus was indeed born to die, but He lived so that we too might live.

UNIT 22**SESSION 1**

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2. J. C. Ryle, "What It Costs to Be a True Christian," December 4, 2019, www.the-highway.com/cost_Ryle.html.

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2. John Onwuchekwa, *Prayer: How Praying Together Shapes the Church* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 43.

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