

He, therefore, is **truly happy** who has all that he wishes to have, and wishes to have nothing which he ought not to wish.--Augustine, Letter 130 to Proba if we **pray** rightly, and as becomes our wants, we say nothing but what is already contained in the Lord's Prayer. And whoever says in **prayer** anything which cannot find its place in that gospel **prayer**, is **praying** in a way which, if it be not unlawful, is at least not spiritual--Ibid.

Fasting, and abstinence from gratifying carnal desire in other pleasures without injury to health, and especially frequent almsgiving, are a great assistance in **prayer**; so that we may be able to say, *In the day of my trouble I sought the Lord, with my hands in the night before Him, and I was not deceived.* For how can **God**, who is a Spirit, and who cannot be touched, be sought with hands in any other sense than by good works?--Ibid.

The address puts us into the proper attitude of prayer. It indicates our filial relation to God as 'Father' (word of faith), fraternal relation to our fellow-men ('our,' word of love), and our destination of 'heaven' (word of hope)."--NPNF, series 1, vol. 6, pg. 39n7.

Sermon 25, How to Pray, Matthew 6:5-13

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Proposition: Jesus teaches us to pray by teaching us a prayer — and this, in turn, convicts us of our failures to pray.

When my babies were born four months ago, they came out and yelled. It was clear that nothing was wrong with their lungs! Well, in the same way, none of God's children are born dumb. "And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, 'Abba, Father!'" (Gal 4:6 NKJ). Have you been born again? If so, then the Spirit within you immediately prompted to you cry out and address God as "Father." But that reality, in turn, indicates that it took God the Holy Spirit to begin to teach you to pray. What I want to show you from our text this morning, as we take a large-scale overview of the Lord's Prayer, is that Jesus too teaches us to pray. He teaches us to pray by teaching us a prayer.

Why should you listen? Because you need to talk to your Father. You need to know how to talk to your Father. If He's not your Father in Jesus Christ, then you should listen to hear what kinds of things Christians say to their Father, and what kinds of things their Father does for them.

I. Jesus Teaches Us to Pray, vv. 5-13

The parallel passage in Luke tells us that Jesus taught this prayer in response to a request from the disciples asking to be taught to pray. This morning, I simply want to point out two of the large-scale applications of the fact that Jesus taught His disciples to pray.

A. You Must Pray

First of all, you must pray! I know that many of you do pray. You tell me about your prayers. I know in my preparation and preaching of these sermons to you that at least some of you support me through prayer. You intercede with God on my behalf, that I might be able to open my mouth boldly, as I ought to speak. I cannot tell you how grateful I am for that. But I fear that some of you pray very little. Some of you perhaps, have no planned prayers at all in your day, or maybe only ten-second "Thanks, Lord" prayers before your meals. Brothers and sisters, this is not what Jesus wants for you. It's not what I want for you. It's not what your praying brothers and sisters in this church want for you.

Notice how Jesus talks here: "When you pray," He says — twice! And then, He gives an imperative: "Pray then like this." Prayer is not optional. Prayer is not something that super-Christians do but regular Christians can afford to neglect. The central Christian claim is that we are personally united to the Son of God. If you never speak to Him, can anyone really believe your claim to know Him?

My snarky disposition drove me to rudely underline this point. I was doing pulpit supply last year at a church which had, years before, been attended by a distant acquaintance of mine. My acquaintance's family had left that church, apparently under highly strained circumstances. I

knew a little of this history, but I couldn't resist asking about the family after worship. So I said to one of the elders, "Do you know the so-and-sos?"

"Oh, yes, of course! Mr. So-and-so is one of my good friends," he said.

"That's just wonderful," I said. "When was the last time you talked to him?"

This elder was caught and he knew it. He made the best of a bad situation and said, "2007" before quickly changing the subject. I happened to know that the so-and-so family lived less than 20 miles from the church.

But honestly, though I must warn you not to imitate my prying example, do any of you truly believe that this man was good friends with the so-and-sos when he hadn't spoken to them in 8 years? Of course not. But by the same token, if you have not spoken to God beyond "please" and "thank you" and "deliver me from Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton" over the last week, month, year, decade — do you really expect anyone to believe that you are close to God?

If you want to know God, you must pray. If you want to obey Jesus, you must pray. If you want to exercise your birthright as a Christian, you must pray. If you want to conquer sin, you must pray. If you want to hear better preaching each Sunday, you must pray. If you want to get your daily bread, you must pray. If you want to see God's name hallowed and His Kingdom coming, you must pray. If you want anyone to believe you when you say that you know God, you must pray. I could spend the entire rest of the sermon making statements of this form. No matter what you want to do, you cannot do it without God's help! Prayer is a necessary part of life. It's not optional, but mandatory. That's the clear statement of Jesus and the clear teaching of Scripture from cover to cover.

B. You Must Be Taught to Pray

But secondly, you must be taught to pray. Jesus didn't teach the disciples how to eat. He didn't instruct them on the finer points of Tae Kwon Do. He never explained to them how to mow their lawn or do carpentry. You can learn those things by yourself, or from other human beings. But you can only learn how to pray from God Himself.

Think about this in a whole different register. Guys, how do you learn to talk to girls? Do you learn it by talking to guys? By playing video games? By reading comic books? As most of us may remember from Junior High (or be living as we currently attend Junior High), you can only learn to talk to girls by talking to girls.

Well, do you think that talking to God would be easier than talking to girls? Both are natural, in the sense that you were made to do both. God made us to talk to Him, just as He made us to talk to each other. But just as most of us had to learn to talk to girls at some point, so Jesus explicitly tells us that we need to learn how to talk to Him.

With that in mind, I plan to spend the next several weeks preaching on the Lord's prayer. We will have at least one sermon on each petition of this mighty prayer, plus one on its preface and another on its conclusion. And I would challenge you, brothers and sisters: don't just be a hearer of the word. Be a doer. If you don't already have a scheduled time where you pray all by yourself, just you and God, then put one into your schedule and stick to it. It doesn't have to be

long; most of us could take five minutes out of our Facebook browse time and never even miss it. Schedule five minutes to just talk to God. If you're feeling really adventurous, schedule twenty or thirty. Just talk to Him! We'll talk about how for the rest of today and for the next several weeks.

II. Jesus Teaches Us a Prayer, vv. 9-13

Jesus wants us to pray. That much is absolutely certain. But more than that; He taught us a particular prayer that “covers all the bases.” This prayer will explain to you what your priorities in prayer ought be, and what kinds of things to ask for.

A. Its Preface: Relationship, v. 9b

And believe it or not, the first thing the prayer teaches us to do is call out to our Father. Now, what does the word “father” indicate? It indicates a relationship. You aren't calling on a stranger; you are calling on someone you've known for your whole life, ever since you were born again. Indeed, the first thing you need for prayer is relationship. You don't talk to someone you don't know and don't want to know. But if you want to know God, if you want to have a relationship with Him, then you need to talk to Him!

1. Relationship to God: Our FATHER

So that's the first words out of Jesus' mouth when He teaches us a prayer: our Father! You are related to God. You are blessed to be a child of God! Peacemakers are called sons of God. People who love their enemies are recognizable as sons of God. We've seen those teachings of Jesus in previous weeks. But today, Jesus emphasizes that prayer depends on knowing that God is your Father.

How does God become your Father? Well, it's not something you can do. You can't make Him your Father. A Father makes you his child, and not vice-versa. But by being united by faith to Jesus, the Son of God, you can become a child of God. God has promised to adopt everyone who is united to His Son. “But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God” (Joh 1:12 ESV)! If you're not a child of God, then recognize that you have no grounds to expect that God will answer your prayers. My kids can ask me for things that the rest of you don't want to ask me for and know you probably won't get from me! In the same way, God listens to His children more than to those who are not His children.

2. Relationship to Church Family: OUR Father

But secondly, Jesus teaches us that we ought to pray together with others. That's why He uses the plural “our.” I want to challenge you to schedule a time when you pray with your family. Pray with your spouse. Pray with your children. If you already have such a time, that's wonderful! That's part of what this prayer teaches us. But if you never pray with your husband, if you never pray with your wife, if you never pray with your children and grandchildren, you are missing out. In fact, Jesus' “our” isn't limited to biological family; it is the voice of the church family. That's why, when we worship leaders pray during the service, we use plural pronouns. “We” and “us” and “our,” not “I” and “me” and “mine”. Why? Because we are praying on behalf of the

whole church. So pray together. I urge you. I plead with you. Don't miss this opportunity. Don't fail to lead your spouse and children into the presence of the living God, *our Father!*

B. Its Petitions: God's Glory, Our Needs, vv. 9c-13a

But prayer involves more than simply going into God's presence and affirming our relationship with Him. Prayer consists of asking God for things, offering our desires up to Him. Prayer is the breaching charge that blows open Heaven's gate. Prayer is the key in the door of heaven, turned by the hand of faith. Prayer is the hand that shakes the fruits down from the tree of promise. Do you believe these things? Do you seek God and wrestle with Him to fulfill His promises?

Well, Jesus explains to us what kinds of things it is urgent for us to pray for.

1. For Worship: Hallowed Be Thy Name, v. 9c

We must pray for worship! This petition relates to the recognition throughout the church and the world of just how holy God really is.

Do you think the average American on the street thinks of God as holy? Do you think that we in here have any adequate conception of how holy God is? Does the thought of sinning literally strike fear into your heart? Unless and until it does, then you are ignorant of the holiness of God. So pray for worship! Pray that the holiness of God's name would be known, and that God would be worshipped for it.

2. For Citizenship: Thy Kingdom Come, v. 10a

Pray for citizenship — not American citizenship, or Serbian citizenship, but Heavenly citizenship. God's kingdom is His dynamic rule and reign. It's an activity, not a place. Some Bible versions actually translate it as "God's reign." Do you want to see God reigning over everything, especially your own heart? Do you want to live under His rule, not the rule of petty thieves and tyrants and bureaucrats? Do you want to see the nations converted and made obedient to the will of God? Do you want to see justice for the poor and needy, justice for cop-killers, rehabilitation for lawbreakers, food for everyone and opportunity for everyone? Then pray for the coming of the Kingdom. God's kingdom is what you were created for. It's what we all long for — an unending era of peace and justice and love and freedom, with righteous government ruling righteous citizens, and all of us living with everyone we love and rejoicing that they love the same things we love. This vision can't be achieved by human political means. It can only come about through the rule of the Prince of Peace. Do you pray that Christ would hasten the day of His second coming and our reigning with Him in glory?

3. For Partnership: Thy Will Be Done, v. 10b-c

Do you really want to know, obey, and submit to God's will? Do you have a burning desire to see everyone stop sinning? I'll tell you what burns me up. It's not traffic. It's people who can't stand traffic. If you get hot under the collar when forced to sit on a clogged roadway, then I don't want to be in the car with you on a clogged roadway! But just as it is sometimes God's good providence that sets you on a clogged freeway, so it is sometimes God's good providence that puts a road-raging passenger in a car with me on a clogged freeway. Regardless, if we took this

petition seriously we would not be bothered by traffic, red lights, and other inconveniences. We would instead joyfully submit to God's will, knowing that whatever He ordains is right.

4. For Stewardship: Give Us This Day, v. 11

Do you pray for stewardship? Do you ask that God will provide for your physical needs, and thus, by implication, that He will teach you to use correctly the things you have? Do you recognize that the things you earn and the things you eat only do you good because God enables them to? Most of you enjoy bread, noodles, cookies, and cakes from time to time. Those are all good foods. But they make my stomach hurt, and I know that they cause problems for some of you too. Well, anything you eat or enjoy could be a problem for you. Only God makes it possible for you to benefit from the things you have.

5. For Fellowship: Forgive Us Our Debts, v. 12

What drives people apart? Unforgiven, un-dealt-with sin. If you've done something to someone, and never made it right, then you hate the sight of that person and that person hates the sight of you. One reason we have cops and judges and prisons is to deal with unforgiven sins that destroy relationships and provoke people to commit murder. Well, the fact of the matter is that the biggest broken relationship of all is with God. That's right: if you give yourself over to sin, God doesn't want to talk to you. He wants nothing to do with you. He's created a place called "Hell" where He will put everyone who is determined to hang on to his sin at any price.

Do you ask for forgiveness of sins? Do you recognize that you have offended God and need to be reconciled to Him?

I don't know about you, but I find it maddening when someone has really done something nasty to me, and then pretends like nothing is wrong. That co-worker who got you in trouble with the boss, but then wants to chat at the water cooler like nothing happened, or that sibling who got you in trouble for playing video games at the wrong time and then wants to show you something cool like nothing happened — those things drive us crazy. Well, brothers and sisters, guess what: we are the ones who have offended God. We are the ones who have done the thing He can't stand. We are the ones who then go back and pretend like nothing's wrong, pray like we haven't done anything to Him, open a discussion without ever acknowledging that the relationship needs some repair! That's why we open our service in this church with a confession of sin and assurance of pardon. That's why you ought to include a request for forgiveness in every prayer you make.

6. For Discipleship: Lead Us Not Into Temptation, v. 13a

Finally, do you think that you have the strength to resist evil on your own? Do you imagine that you can say "No thanks" to Satan whenever you want? Jesus doesn't think so. Jesus tells you to pray against temptation. You have a traitor within the gates; you have a fleshly nature that loves sin. The least little thing can set it off. So pray for discipleship. Pray that the Father will grow you in your ability to resist evil. Pray that the Son will deliver you from evil. Pray that the Spirit will empower you to resist evil.

C. Its Conclusion: Doxology, v. 13b

But prayer is not just about petitions. Prayer is about praise. That's why Jesus concludes with a doxology. Many of you may have this doxology relegated to a footnote. It does not appear in some early manuscripts of the NT, and the Latin church fathers didn't know about it. I believe that Jesus did in fact say it, and that it dropped out of some copies of the text very early. But the fact is that by far the majority of manuscripts have it, and that even if they didn't it is virtually identical to a doxology prayed by David in 1 Chronicles.

We can talk more about whether this doxology is really a part of the New Testament. For now, we should see what it teaches us.

1. Encouragement in Prayer

It encourages us in prayer. We just talked about 6 massive petitions. These things are not tiny requests. These are big requests, huge things to ask. But remember, we are asking them from the God who has the kingdom, who has all power, who has all glory forever and ever. We're not asking a genie. We're not asking an earthly monarch. We are asking the Omnipotent God, God Almighty! And so, we should be encouraged to keep asking.

When you're asking someone for something that you know it's easy for that person to give you, you are a whole lot more motivated to ask than if you're asking for a really long shot. For example, you can negotiate aggressively with your mom for an Oreo, because it's easy for her to grant that request. But if you're asking a TSA agent to let you skip the line — well, now, that's not really something he can give you. His job is on the line, and maybe he's even looking at prison time if he grants such a request.

Well, for God to bring in His Kingdom is as easy for Him as it is for your mother to give you a cookie. For God to hallow His name is as easy as it is for your spouse to give you a kiss. So why don't ask Him?

2. Praise in Prayer

But this doxology also teaches us to praise God. Do you praise God for His rule, for His might, for His glorious majesty? How often? If you recorded your prayers on your phone this week and brought the recording next Sunday and played it in Sunday School, what would we hear? Mostly, "Lord, please give me this and that?" Or, "Lord, you are an amazing, indescribably great God! We praise you for your work of creation, providence, and redemption. We glorify you for your creativity in giving us starfish and music," etc.? Praise God!

3. Assurance in Prayer

But finally, we say "Amen" because we are assured of being heard. Do you know what Amen means? It means "so be it."

Do you have the guts to add a "so be it" after your other forms of speech? When you're talking to your secretary, do you say, "Send this letter to so-and-so, and call your counterpart over in the next county. So be it!"? I don't think so. And yet, we have every right to add an "Amen" to our prayers, because we know that God loves to give to us, and that He loves to answer prayer.

IV. Jesus Convicts Us of Prayerlessness

Well, family of God, pray! You must pray. Jesus teaches you to pray. If you're not a believer, if you have no right to call God "Father," you see what you're missing. You see how many privileges the children of God have! And so, aside from the challenge to schedule a prayer time for yourself privately, and another for yourself with your family, every day this week, I want to leave you with three questions.

A. How Often Do You Pray?

If you only talk to your spouse once a month, you don't need me to tell you that you have a terrible marriage.

B. How Gladly Do You Pray?

If you only talk to your spouse grudgingly, because you have to, you don't need me to tell you that your marriage is in trouble.

C. How Obediently Do You Pray?

But finally, this one hits close to home. How obediently do you pray? I talk to many people who never go to church, never worship God in the way He tells us to, who nonetheless tell me, "I pray all the time. I pray every day. I even pray with my family." Oh yeah? You claim to talk to God all the time, but you don't do what He says? You speak to God for twenty minutes, flat on your face, and then get up and watch some porn? You talk to God and then yell at your kids? You talk to God daily but never gather with His church to worship Him? These things shouldn't be this way. There's a disconnect there. Talking to God requires that you seek to obey God. Prayer that's not coupled with obedience is offensive to God.

So what do you do if you do pray, but then go disobey? What do you do if you're like every Christian ever born again? Go pray some more. Get with God and confess your sin and ask Him to deliver you from it. He will. The fact that He tells you to ask for forgiveness indicates that He promises to forgive those who ask. That applies whether you're a Christian or not, whether you've ever wanted to be saved or not. Ask, you will receive. Pray, and God will shower His good gifts on you. Try it. Amen.