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Luke 11:1-13; Matthew 6:5-15  
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### Starting Out in Prayer

As part of my ordination, I was required to complete a unit of Clinical Pastor Education. In essence for one summer during seminary I served as a chaplain in training at a Catholic hospital with several other interns. We each served on call in the hospital, meeting with patients and caring for their spiritual needs. Then we gathered as a group for a time of processing what we had learned or encountered on the hospital floors.

In our group we had Lutherans, a few Presbyterians, as well as several Jewish students from a Rabbinical Seminary. Our Jewish friends were fascinated by how we “Christians” prayed and talked to God. I remember specifically one of them asking me, “When you pray, you pray like you know God. How is that?” To us Christians, God is someone who could be known through the person of Jesus Christ. To our Jewish friends, God was completely other. So holy. That God could not be addressed personally. So they talked of God, but not to God.

That is the essence behind today’s teaching on prayer as we touch on The Lord’s Prayer. It is located in both Matthew, as part of a longer teaching in the Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount, and in Luke when Jesus’ disciples noted how Jesus’ prayer life was so much more rich and powerful than anything they had experienced before. So one of them asked him, “Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples.”

I’ll be reading from Matthew 6:5-15.

Jesus said, **5** “And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. **6** But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. **7** And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. **8** Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

**9** “This, then, is how you should pray:

““Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed be your name,

10 your kingdom come,  
your will be done,  
on earth as it is in heaven.  
11 Give us today our daily bread.  
12 And forgive us our debts,  
as we also have forgiven our debtors.  
13 And lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from the evil one.

**14** For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. **15** But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.

Let us pray. Prayer of Illumination.

I shared with you last week how important The Lord's Prayer was in my early prayer life. It was all I knew. We say it every week here in worship as a body of Christ. It is easy. Memorable. Hits all areas of prayer. Adoration. Confession. Thanksgiving. Supplication. But it's also all too easy to take for granted.

Martin Luther said, "To this day I am still nursing myself on the Lord's Prayer like a child, and am still eating and drinking of it like an old man without getting bored of it."

What I aim to do today is to explain how this was not something new that Jesus taught them. I want to explore it's profound simplicity and great depth. We'll consider how we might incorporate it into our daily prayer lives. And finally, we'll look for God's invitation to pray as Jesus taught.

When we hear Jesus disciples request, "Lord teach us to pray." I don't think that they were not accustomed to prayer. In fact Jewish people were obligated to pray at least three times a day. Once in the morning. Once in the afternoon. And once in the evening. The Talmud taught that two of these prayers coincided with the twice daily sacrifices in the temple and were instituted by Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.<sup>1</sup>

So Jesus' followers knew WHEN and WHAT to pray. They just didn't know HOW to pray like Jesus prayed. Personally as if they knew God themselves.

Pete Greig in *How to Pray, A Simple Guide for Normal People* suggests that Jesus took a very familiar Jewish prayer called the Kaddish and adopted and adapted it make it more personal.<sup>2</sup> Listen to this.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.chabad.org/library/article\\_cdo/aid/3169553/jewish/Why-Do-Jews-Pray-Three-Times-a-Day.htm](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/3169553/jewish/Why-Do-Jews-Pray-Three-Times-a-Day.htm)

<sup>2</sup> Pete Greig, *How to Pray, A Simple Guide for Normal People* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2019), 78.

The Kaddish prays, “Magnified and hallowed be His great name (which Jewish people could not even say.). In this world which He created according to His will. And may He establish His kingdom during your life.”

Sounds very similar doesn't it. But Jesus made it personal. As if we are speaking to God directly.

“Our Father in heaven. Hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come, Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.”

It's poetic. In Greek it even rhymes to make it even easier to remember.

Brilliant isn't it.

But let's look more in-depth at this beautiful little prayer that so many of us let roll off our tongues without considering what it truly means.

British theologian N.T. Wright said, “The Lord's Prayer correctly understood is one of the high roads into the central mystery of Christian salvation and Christian experience.”

It begins with Adoration. “Our Father in heaven. Hallowed be Your name.”

Pastor Tylor Staton writes, “Adoration is the place of prayer where we discover that God's love is the defining relating of every square inch of creating, including you and me.”<sup>3</sup>

God is our Heavenly Father, who is holy. He is to be magnified. Lifted up simply for who He is apart from what He does. This is why last week during prayers of the people, at the beginning we took time to adore God for who God is. God is loving. Compassionate. Forgiving. Kind. Loves us like a father, who knows exactly what we need before we even ask for it. Who welcomes us right before His throne with grace and confidence, assured that He listens to our prayers and answers them in His time and His way. When we call God Father, we not only are reminded of who God is, but we remind ourselves of who we are as His beloved children.

As I mentioned earlier, to our Jewish friends, God is so holy that His name can't even be said by sinful lips. But we say, “Hallowed be your name.”

The Greek word used for Hallowed is *hagiozo*. It means to sanctify, make holy, venerate.

It is the way through which we enter the holy of holies in the temple without fear or condemnation. Before we bring our needs, Jesus calls us to worship. We acknowledge the greatness of God. The otherness of God. But we also call Him Father.

The Greek word for Father is *pater*. It means parent, one from whom we've come, and one who cares for us as children. This is a radical invitation into intimacy with the Creator. We are not distant subjects, but beloved children.

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<sup>3</sup> Tylor Staton, *Praying Like Monks, Living Like Fools* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2022), 59.

While Jewish people might believe this of God, they would never say it. It was blasphemy, because they believed by claiming God as one's Father, you put yourself on equal footing with Him. That was one of the charges that got Jesus crucified.

"Your kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

This is intercession. We are interceding on behalf of our world. We claim that God's kingdom is perfect and unbroken, untarnished by sin. But our world is not. As we intercede, we ask that as God's will unfolds in our broken world, that it would be restored, renewed, and made whole, as it will be one day in heaven. And we boldly ask that God uses us to make that happen in our lives and in the lives around us.

"Give us this day our daily bread."

This is petition. We ask God for exactly what we need. Daily bread represents everything physically, emotionally, relationally, and spiritually.

Calvin said that we should come before God with the disposition of a beggar.<sup>4</sup> So like beggars asking for bread, we ask God to supply us with our daily needs. We don't worry about what we needed yesterday or what we will need tomorrow. We only consider this day.

I don't know about you but I find this very challenging because we live with such affluence that I don't worry about what I need today. So my thoughts are naturally directed down the road. Will I have enough for retirement? Will my retirement last throughout my life? Etc. Those are first world worries.

Jesus said, "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; whoever seeks finds; and to them who knock, the door will be opened to them."<sup>5</sup>

James, the brother of Jesus, says, "You do not have, because you do not ask God. When you do ask, you do not receive because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures."<sup>6</sup>

Boy is that convicting! Which leads us into...

"Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors."

How many of us when we get to this part of the Lord's Prayer we say "debts?" How many of us say "tresspassess?" Let me see if I can break down why we have these two different versions.

Matthew's version of the Lord's Prayer uses debts and debtors.

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<sup>4</sup> Timothy Keller, *Prayer, Experiencing Awe and Intimacy with God* (NY, NY: Penguin Random House Books, 2014), 100.

<sup>5</sup> Luke 11:9-10

<sup>6</sup> James 4:3

The Greek word that Matthew uses is *ophelemia*. It means something owed or due, or morally a fault. What was Matthew before becoming a follower of Jesus? A tax collector. His job was to collect tax debts owed to the Roman government. So it seems quite natural that Matthew used economic terms to convey a spiritual idea like faults.

Luke's version literally reads, "Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone indebted to us."

The Greek word for sins is *harmartia*. It means offenses, the way we miss a mark or bullseye in archery. A trespass would be the way that arrow strays beyond its intended boundary.

Only English speaking Catholics and Lutherans use the word "trespass." It was first used in the Tyndall translation of the Bible in 1526 which King Henry VIII used. This version was adopted by the Anglican Book of Common Prayer and eventually English Speaking Catholics and Lutherans. It comes from the notion of overstepping God's boundaries for how we are to treat one another. When we break this code, we "trespass" or sin against God and one another. So we can see how translation and tradition can have big effects on what we believe and what we pray today.

Whichever one you use, it really doesn't matter. I think God gets the point. We need to forgive others as we have been forgiven by God.

Matthew provides a little extra commentary at the end of this teaching prayer about forgiveness. Jesus said, "For if you forgive others when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins." Later Jesus said, "I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."

Corrie ten Boom tells the story about how she and her family were sent to German concentration camps for helping Dutch Jews escape the Nazis during World War II. Her sister died there. We can only imagine the horrors she experienced.

Several years after the war, she was speaking in Munich, Germany when a former Nazi guard approached her and thanked her for the message about how Jesus had washed away his sin. And then he reached out to shake her hand. She could not reach out her hand in return.

"Lord Jesus," she prayed silently, "forgive me and help me to forgive him." She still could not reach out her hand.

"Jesus I cannot forgive him," she prayed again, "Give him your forgiveness."

She reached out and took his hand in hers. Then she felt the most incredible thing. A current seemed to pass from her to him, and a love sprang into her heart

for this man that was indescribable. She said, “When Jesus tells us to love our enemies, He gives, along with the command, the love itself.”<sup>7</sup>

So let’s take that to heart. God has given us the power to bind or let loose. Let’s us set our selves and those who sin against us free. I certainly don’t want to be reminded when I get heaven some day, “Hey Chris, about that person you wouldn’t forgive in life...let’s have a chat about that.”

Who do we need to forgive today? The keys to theirs and our freedoms are in our hands.

And finally “lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.”

The Greek word for temptation is peirazmos. It means to put something to the test. Perhaps in the same way that Jesus told Satan not to put God to the test when He was tempted in the desert.

The Apostle Paul exhorted the Church in Corinth, “If you think that you are standing firm, be careful that you don’t fall. No temptation has seized you except what is common to everyone. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, God will also provide you a way out so that you can stand up under it.”<sup>8</sup>

Here we ask for God’s guidance and protection. Life is a spiritual battle, and we need God’s strength to resist temptation and overcome evil. This is a humble admission of our weakness and a plea for God’s deliverance

My friends, scripture tells us that Satan is like a roaring lion waiting to devour us. But we also know that we have been freed from the grips of sin and death. The best way I think of Satan is of a lion with no teeth. His roar might be loud and scary, but what harm can he really do us?

So how can we incorporate The Lord’s Prayer into our daily prayer lives? If Muslims have a call to prayer five times daily. And Jews three. Then we Christians ought to remember to pray in the morning, at meals, at midday, and before we go to bed. What if we were more intentional and stopped at midday to say the Lord’s Prayer? Not in a way that checks it off the box and it is done. But slowly, meditatively, and meaningfully. Pastor and author Timothy Jones said, “To cultivate a deeper prayer life all you have to do is say the Lord’s Prayer, but take an hour to do it.”

I’ll close with a few quotes on prayer.

J. Edwin Orr writes, “Whenever God is ready to do something new with His people, He always sets them to praying.”<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> The story of Corrie ten Boom as retold in Greig, *How to Pray*, 91-92.

<sup>8</sup> 1 Corinthians 10:12-13

<sup>9</sup> Staton, *Praying Like Monks, Living Like Fools*, 159.

Anne Lamont says prayer is simply, “Help, Thanks, Wow!”<sup>10</sup>

The late Pope Francis prayed, “Jesus make my heart more like yours.”

Pete Greig encourages us to, “Keep it simple. Keep it real. Keep it up.”

So may we see that The Lord’s Prayer is not just a set of words, but a pattern for all our prayers that touches every area of need and every element of praise. It is a personal invitation to pray as Jesus prayed. To align our hearts with God’s will, to trust Him for our needs, to seek His forgiveness, to extend grace to others, and to rely on His protection.

May we not recite these words out of habit, but let them shape our hearts, our minds, and lives. And may the Lord’s Prayer become the heartbeat of our relationship with God the Father, drawing us closer to Jesus the Son, and to one another through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Amen

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<sup>10</sup> Anne Lamont quoted in Greig, *How to Pray*, 19.