

Aspects of prayer

[Hosea 1.2-10](#)

[Colossians 2.6-15](#)

[Luke 11.1-13](#)

What is your experience of prayer? I was talking with someone a few weeks ago who said she wasn't very good at prayer. As we talked it became apparent that she had a fairly narrow view of prayer. I said to her, it seems like you pray a lot more than you think. Every time you mull over something, worrying about what might happen, or how people will respond do you think God is aware of this? Of course, she replied that yes, God knows all about us. I suggested she became a little more intentional about inviting God into the thinking – God already knows about what occupies us so by opening ourselves to the fact that this thought process- even worrying- is a type of internal conversation with God, we deepen our understanding of prayer.

Jesus' disciples came to him and asked: "Lord, teach us to pray." They had been with him for some time now, watching how he made time to pray. Possibly they woke up some days, only to find that Jesus had been up hours before and was off somewhere quiet, praying. They noticed that the way they prayed and the way Jesus prayed seemed quite different, and so they ask for some pointers so that they too could have a much more fulfilling prayer life.



Prayer is not only at the heart of the Christian life, it can also be at the heart of a lot of Christian frustration, misunderstanding, and even disappointment. As well as 'How do we pray?' there is another: 'Why does God sometimes seem to ignore my prayers?' These questions may be bubbling along just beneath the surface for many of us, so today we will look at what Jesus taught about prayer. This is a huge topic and there are many aspects of prayer, so we will just be looking at a few today.

Firstly: Prayer is grounded in our relationship with God- the more we know and understand God's will, the better we pray. Jesus tells his disciples to call God 'Father'. The Greek word is actually 'Daddy' which indicates a level of love and intimacy and possibly even playfulness that is very different from addressing a distant deity. We are to understand God as our dad! We know that a human dad shows love and care in how they relate to their children, providing for what they need and creating the conditions in which their kids can thrive. This is the love and relationship that Jesus encourages us to have with our heavenly Father. When we understand what pleases God; what behaviours and attributes God wants to grow in believers, we are able to pray with confidence that some things are 'according to God's will' while others may not be. So we come to realise that praying to become more like Jesus is likely to be answered positively, while praying for our own increased wealth or status may not be.

The Lord's Prayer

We call this the Lord's Prayer but maybe it might be better named the Disciples' Prayer because it is the model Jesus gave to us as his disciples. Luke's version is briefer and simpler than the version found in Matthew.

This prayer follows a traditional Jewish model- naming an attribute of God (here Father) and offering praise- hallowed be your name, your kingdom come. This is a model that our prayers of the day/collects also follow. It's grounding to remind ourselves who we are praying to – this is our heavenly Father who loves us and wants us to shine! Similarly, we want others to acknowledge who God is to us- may your name be holy! When we pray that God's will be done, it is not just praying for others to fall in line with God's justice and concerns, but we are also recognising that we ourselves and any requests we make are subject to God's will.

Many books have been written on intercessory prayer, but here we only have one short sentence, 'Give us **each day** our daily bread.' It's about our immediate needs- not our fears of what will or may happen in the future. It's about what we need – bread- not about the pleasant trappings that we may desire.

Praying for forgiveness is a significant part of the Lord's Prayer. It is relatively easy to acknowledge that we are human and hence we may choose hurtful ways sometimes. It may be more difficult to recognise the specific ways in which we have hurt others and to ask their forgiveness. That's why we need to regularly pray this! We are called into a faith community that is formed by shared forgiveness, where people are set free from the burden of hurt and are freed to love others as we love our selves.

A Parable on Prayer

Jesus uses a parable to illustrate the confidence we can have praying. But as we live in a different time and culture, it can be open to misinterpretation. The temptation is to interpret Jesus' parable as indication that God needs cajoling, or at least that the hallmark of Christian prayer is persistence. The Greek *anaideia*, however, is better translated "shamelessness" than "persistence," and so implies a boldness that comes from familiarity. Note that the parable's breadless host asks only once, making bold to count on his neighbour's expected conformity to the duties of hospitality in that culture. He is in this sense "shameless," counting on his friend's desire not to fail communal expectations. So also, Jesus intimates, should we be bold to offer our petitions to God, shamelessly calling on God to keep God's promises.

Sayings About Prayer

Next comes one of the more familiar commands of Jesus: ask, search, knock. Popular piety has again interpreted this as a call to persistence. It might be more helpful, though, to read Jesus' instruction as inviting trust - ask, search, knock...confident that you will receive what you ask. Of course, there is no one among those listening who would give a snake or a scorpion to a beseeching child, so how then, Jesus implies, can we not trust that God as divine parent will give us all that we need, including and especially the Holy Spirit?

Jesus invites us into relationship with God through prayer, offering us the opportunity to approach the God whose name is too holy to speak, to come with the familiarity, boldness, and trust of a young child running to their parent for both provision and protection.

Prayer is not primarily about getting things from God but rather about the relationship we have with God. We are invited to make all of our needs, wants, hurts, hopes, and desires known to God. While at other places in Scripture we are told that God knows our needs without being asked (Mt. 6:8), here we are invited to make them known, to speak them into existence in the confidence that whatever may happen, this relationship can bear hearing these things and may actually even depend upon hearing them.

Anne Lamott writes in *Travelling Mercies* that our two best prayers are, "help me, help me, help me" and "thank you, thank you, thank you" (p. 82). I think Jesus might agree, as there rests in Jesus' words to his disciples then and now an invitation into a deeper, more honest, and more trusting relationship with the God who desires to be known chiefly as loving parent, provider of all that is good and protector of all in need.

The practical aspects of prayer will vary from person to person but let's be aware of the many different ways we pray, because God is listening to all of them! Some of us are verbal, others express ourselves in words and images. Similarly, some people find their prayer times are more profitable in meditation, or conversation, in silence, in songs of praise or in the language of angels (often called tongues). Jesus encourages us to have confidence in our loving Father God who has our best interests at heart. We can ask, seek and knock expecting that God will answer us.

