

How To Actually Pray

Luke 11:1-4

Rest #3

Weekend of January 18-19, 2020



Introduction

For the last couple of week's we have been talking about Rest. In the first week, we spent out time discussing the Sabbath and how that Jesus is the culmination of everything the Sabbath embodied-that he is our rest according to the book of Hebrews. Last week, we explored how distractions keep us from abiding well in Christ thus keeping us from the thriving life God intends for us. **This week, we explore the idea that we rest because prayer brings not a less busy life, but a less busy heart.**

We've got issues when it comes to prayer. We say things that don't make sense. We repeat phrases and God's name and the word 'just' over and over: "Father God I just want to thank you, Father God, I just want to ask, Father God, that you just..."

Maybe in your small group you have the prayer-lecturer. They are kind of praying but more lecturing everybody and gossiping about others while they do it. Preach-praying. "Lord, I beseech you to be with Rachel and her new boyfriend as they deal with purity, as Lord you have called us to purity in our inner most parts, and Lord sometimes I just see lust in their eyes." Really???

A person asked the other day, **"Would you pray for my son? He's in the finals of a karate tournament."** I thought, **"What exactly am I supposed to pray?"** "Jesus, when this boy steps out onto that mat, would you just guide his foot right into that other little boy's face? Be the great physician that you are, Lord, and just render his opponent unconscious..."

This one always gets me... **"Lord, bless this food and the hands that prepared it."** Why just the hands? Why not the whole body? But, see, that's a question you are not allowed to ask. Next time you pray over a meal, try asking God to bless the feet or the kidneys of the people that prepared it. See where that gets you.

I'm grateful that we have a story in the New Testament where Jesus specifically explains to the disciples how to pray. This is a prayer outline, or a template, that should shape all the prayers you pray. Look at these words...

Bible Study

"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." And he said to them, "When you pray, say: "Father, hallowed be your name; Your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread, and forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone who is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation." Luke 11:1-4

It's important to note here we have to be taught to pray... Jesus didn't just say: "You don't need to be taught how to pray; just say whatever you want. All prayers are the same/ acceptable." The truth is they are not. There is a specifically Christian way to pray. In fact, in Matthew's recording of this same teaching, he tells us that before Jesus gives his disciples instructions on the way TO pray he warns his disciples now NOT to pray. Look how Matthew renders this teaching...

"And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words." Matthew 6:7

Interestingly, one of the only kinds of prayer that Jesus criticizes are prayer that are too long. To which many of you say, 'Amen.' But just remember, he never said anything against long sermons."

What did Jesus have against long prayers? These "pray-ers" thought they'd be heard for their 'many words.' They think that because they pray a certain amount of time, or say certain phrases, or fast, or get themselves into some spiritual state, that God will hear them.

You, by contrast, Jesus says, pray to a loving Father, a Father you don't have to persuade to care; a Father who knows what you need before you ask it, who only thinks about his children with good. We have been adopted into God's family. Yet many times we still act like orphans. And we shouldn't approach God as if we have to make ourselves worthy.

Prayer begins by embracing the fatherhood of God. J.I. Packer says if you really want to find out how much someone understands Christianity, find out how much they understand and make of the fatherhood of God. Look at how Jesus starts this prayer...

"Our Father..."

Author Paul Miller says how we approach God in prayer is where we demonstrate whether we really understand the gospel. There is this iconic picture of John F. Kennedy... It shows him with some paper in his hand probably deciding the fate of the free world. I'm sure it is in perfect condition—beautifully types and worded. And John Jr. is peeking out from below his desk—with a totally different relationship to the man in the chair than anyone else. **"That's not the ruler of the free world. That's dad. ...And I need some Cheerios."**

"hallowed be your name"

I knew of a guy who grew up in Catholic church who said that until he was 8 years old he thought that God's name was 'Howard.' He said, **"We said it every week: "Our father who art in heaven, Howard be your name."** Here is the real definition of that term...

Hallowed means most beautiful. He is better than anything you are asking him for. Many of us approach God like only a means to an end. "God, get me out this jam. Give me healing. Help me do well on this test. Get me this job."

But seeing God has holy means seeing him as greater than all earthly gifts. It means saying, "God, I would love to have the new job; I'd love to have a healed body, but you are better than any of those things. And if I don't get them I'll be a little disappointed, but it won't affect my joy or my confidence in life because I have you, the greatest of all possessions."

Hallowed means most worthy. This is a recognition that the point of my life is to give glory to you. Life is not about me, or prospering me, but your name and your kingdom.

God's glory is the main character of our lives, and we recognize that the point in all things that happen to us is to put us into a theatre where we can give glory to God. God might hallow his name before others by prospering you so that you can give credit to you for your successes to him and using those successes to further his kingdom; or he might hallow his name that by letting you suffer so that you can show everyone in the midst of suffering that you can have joy in bad circumstances because he is better than health or anything else you are asking him for.

The point of our lives is not living and dying; the point is giving glory to God. And sometimes God is glorified when sick people get well; sometimes he is glorified when they suffer well, and even die well.

3rd phrase: "...let your kingdom come, your will be done." We are surrendering ourselves to pursue God's agendas on earth. Prayer is not supposed to be getting God to help us in all of your agendas, but you seeking to join God where he is working.

One last observation about this phrase, "your kingdom come, your will be done" before we move on. **Eugene Peterson says these two phrases juxtaposed are an example of two important kinds of prayers we should pray: morning prayers and evening prayers.**

Morning prayer is active, petitionary prayer, where you pray boldly against things in the world that are not right. "God, change this! Bring your kingdom into this mess."

Evening prayer is where you submit yourself to the will of God and rest in his choices for your life, trusting he has given you what is best like he promised and that he'll take care of all things. Look at the next phrase...

"Give us this day our daily bread..." Most of us never think to pray this, because we don't wonder where our next meal is coming from, but the point here is that we develop a posture of dependence on God and thanksgiving for everything.

The essence of sin is independence and autonomy from God. The drive of sin is toward independence and autonomy. The phrasing (in Greek) is today's bread. It is intentionally short-lived. It means day by day we are looking to God as the ultimate source of everything—not just bread but anything we need. As a dad, as a husband, as a student—anything I need in any role I have. Nothing is off limits.

Not every request is spiritual. Bread is not spiritual. What should I look to God for? Literally anything I'm worried about. Just for fun, I went through Scripture and made a list of some of the varied things that people prayed about—note how some of these are spiritual and some are not...

- **Zacharias and Elizabeth wanted a family when they couldn't have kids so they prayed for a son.**
- **Solomon prayed for wisdom in his new job.**
- **Eliezer, Gen 24, prayed he could meet a pretty girl he could set his master Isaac up with.**

- **Samson prayed for water when he was thirsty and superhuman strength to accomplish a task.**
- **Joshua prayed for the sun to stand still so he could finish a battle**
- **Daniel had a weird dream and he didn't know what it meant, so he prayed for interpretation.**
- **Gideon thought God was calling him to do something, but he wasn't sure so he prayed for confirmation that he should do it.**
- **David prayed for forgiveness after committing adultery with Bathsheba. He prayed God would give him a clean heart and a renewed, steadfast spirit.**
- **Elijah prayed that it wouldn't rain.**
- **Paul prayed that some thorn in the flesh that bothered him would be taken away.**
- **The disciples prayed for boldness.**
- **Fathers in the NT prayed for their little girls to get better.**
- **Peter asked Jesus for financial help to pay his taxes.**
- **Jesus told his disciples to pray to get out of temptation**
- **He prayed that his disciples would stop acting like idiots and be unified.**
- **Jesus told us to pray for lost people and the workers to get the gospel to them.**
- **All the Apostles prayed for Jesus to come back quickly**

Here's the rule: If it matters to you, it matters to God, and you can pray about. Look at this passage that we've explored a lot in recent weeks...

"...do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."
Philippians 4:6-7

When you read that passage, you just get a sense of the rest of God. When you look at the fact that God is concerned about those things that concern you-that gives you rest.

"Learning to pray doesn't offer us a less busy life-it offers us a less busy heart. In the midst of outer busyness we can develop an inner quiet. By spending time with our Father in prayer, we integrate our lives with his, with what he is doing in us. Our lives become more coherent. They feel calmer, more ordered, even in the midst of confusion and pressure." This leads to the next phrase...

"...and forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone who is indebted to us..."
 This is a part of prayer that I have tended to skip in my personal life. But it's in there for a reason. **Confession is an important part of our lives because it helps us clear out sin so that it isn't growing and spreading in us.**

Sin loses its power when it is exposed. Scripture tells us to confess our sins first to God, and then to others where we need to, because you strip sin of its power that way. Additionally, confession changes our attitude toward others.

The primary thing that produces compassion and generosity in you toward others is realizing how gracious and compassionate God has been toward you. As I approach God as a man deeply loved and deeply forgiven-that fosters the right attitude in me toward others—both those that need my love and those that need my forgiveness. Here's the last idea...

“Lead us not into temptation.” This is one I find myself praying a lot. I know that all of us, left to ourselves, will go astray. Lurking inside of us are corruptions that want to take us over and destroy us. I don’t want to end this on a discouraging note. Yes, only God’s grace can deliver us from the particular temptations of our heart, particularly since we have a literal Enemy who is scheming to attack us with those temptations in the particular places where he knows we are most vulnerable; but, church, God promises to make a way of escape (1 Cor 10:13) if we ask him for it. Amen?

So what are some practical things we can do to help us pray...

Application

“Riff” on the Lord’s prayer: You know, “riff,” like in jazz, when you’ve got a melody in the background, but the musicians are riffing and doing their own thing around the skeleton of that melody. For the last 2 years, I’ve started just about every morning prayer time this way—by going through the phrases of the Lord’s prayer and praying what the Spirit brings to mind as I pray. Here is a second idea...

Take a morning walk with no devices and pray out loud: There is just something sweet about that time alone with God and you are just having an outlaid conversation with Him. The neighbors may think you’re crazy but tell them you’re praying for them as well. Here is a last idea...

Pray in the moment with people: We promise we will pray for folks all the time. Don’t wait. Seize the moment and pray on the spot.

Above all, just start. Prayer is a muscle that grows as you use it.