

The Ancient Paths For A Brand New Year ***Why And How To Pray***

I was talking with some people a while back who were bringing up different self-help gurus and their ideas and advice for handling life. At one point I said, "Jesus is my guru." I wanted to make the point that when it comes to how to live life well, his voice is the voice I want to listen to and follow. The philosopher and author Dallas Willard was the long-term professor of Professor of Philosophy at the University of Southern California in LA. In his book, *The Divine Conspiracy* he makes the same point. He says *Jesus has the best information possible on the most important topics in life*. He points out a truth that should be obvious for believers and intriguing for those examining the life and teachings of Jesus. If Jesus is who the Bible says he is then he is the wisest person to ever live on the earth. He is competent to be trusted for the best information on everything that matters most. He is by far the most reliable guide for all things that matter most to you.

In light of that, we are wise to pay attention to what Jesus taught us about prayer because it is so central to who he was. We're in a series for January on the ancient paths. The ancient paths are the proven practices of spiritual life that enrich deepen our relationship to God. Of these ancient practices, prayer is crucial. Jesus makes that clear in these verses we've just read from **Luke 11**. We're going to look at passage today to ask and answer three questions: 1. *Why should we pray?* 2. *How should we pray?* Then just getting more specific in the application: 3.) *How can we use the Lord's prayer in our lives today?*

I. WHY SHOULD WE PRAY?

In **Luke 11** the importance of prayer comes out in multiple ways: 1.) The example of Jesus (he was praying), 2.) The request of the disciples, 3.) The pattern prayer, 4.) The parable about prayer and 5.) The promise that if we ask the father, He will give good gifts to us *because* we asked. If I wanted to sum up the principle at that heart of all of those factors, it would be this: ***Prayer, is the irreplaceable human instrument by which God's people advance the causes of God and his kingdom in this world.***

There is a truth about prayer that comes through especially clearly in the gospel of Luke. Luke shows us that prayer is crucial and central for

followers of Jesus. He does this by showing us that prayer is central to how Jesus lived his life. At every major milestone, with every significant interaction with people and every critical moment in his life prayer is present as his heartbeat. It is present at his baptism, his temptation, in his healing ministry, before choosing the twelve apostles, at the heart of his most significant teachings, in the upper room, in the garden of Gethsemane, on the cross and after the resurrection. Jesus prays.

That same truth comes through in the book of Acts for the followers of Jesus. Acts 1 begins with the first Christians devoting themselves to prayer. Then throughout the story of the birth of the church, lives are changed, guidance is given, problems are solved, and people from every ethnicity come to Christ, churches are established, and the message of Jesus advances. Prayer is how followers of Jesus receive help and guidance from God to get things done. That's why we pray.

Prayer is the irreplaceable human instrument by which God's people advance the cause of God's kingdom in their lives, in their homes, in the church, on this earth.

That's why we should pray. So then...

II. HOW SHOULD WE PRAY?

Jesus tells us when he gives us what is often called The Lord's Prayer. There are two slightly different versions of what we call The Lord's Prayer in the Bible. One is in **Matthew 7**, and the other is in **Luke 11** which we read tonight. The best explanation for this is that what Jesus is teaching us about prayer is so important that he taught basically the same thing on different occasions and with only minor changes. It also shows us that what he wants us to learn is not a magical formula to simply recite. He is giving us a pattern for prayer that communicates the priorities of prayer. If the Lord gave us a prayer to teach us how to pray, doesn't it make sense to pray His way?

Jesus gives us five clear priorities for prayer.

1. The prayer begins with Praise for God's Person. Verse 2 says: *"Our father in heaven, hallowed be your name."* When you pray, begin by praising and thanking God for being your Heavenly Father. Pray that his name would be honored in your life and in the church.

2. After praise, comes Prayer for God's Purpose. Verse 2 says: *"Your kingdom come,"* (**Matthew 7** adds the words, *your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven*) . When you pray for God's kingdom to

come, you are praying for God's good and gracious rule to break into people's lives, including your own. Ask God for wisdom and insight, and pray specifically for those things that God reveals to you that will advance the cause of Christ and the kingdom of God in your life. Pray for others in the same way: family, friends, and others known to you.

3. The third element in the Lord's Prayer is Prayer for God's

Provision: *"Give us today our daily bread"* (**verse 3**). "Daily bread" is symbolic of all of the physical needs of today. Lay out all your concerns, whether big or small. Ask God to supply your needs. The prayer is not "give me... my daily bread", but "give *us*... our daily bread", so pray for God's provision for others as well as for yourself. Pray for God's provision.

4. After prayer for God's provision comes Prayer for God's Pardon:

"...forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors." (**Verse 4**). When you use the Lord's Prayer as a guide, and you come to these words, stop and ask for humility and clarity to confess your sins to God. **1 John 1:9** reassures us that *"if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."* Having confessed your own sins, ask God if there is anyone you need to forgive. Think about relationships, potential resentments and forgive.

Jesus teaches us to pray this prayer daily because every day we need to both receive and give forgiveness so that God can wash the toxins of unforgiveness out of our hearts.

5. The prayer Jesus taught us concludes with a Prayer for God's

Protection: *"And lead us not into temptation"*, (**Matthew 7** adds the words, *"but deliver us from evil"* . are facing, or you sense a direct attack from the evil one in some area of your life or on those you love. Bring those areas to God in prayer and ask for his protection.

Illustration: This prayer that begins with God and his kingdom and ends with protection puts prayer in a different light. John Piper helped me think differently about prayer when he made the point that the prayer Jesus gave us teaches us that prayer is not a domestic intercom for ordering up room service. It is a wartime field radio. The significance of that came back to me when I watched a documentary about a helicopter full of Army Rangers shot down in Afghanistan. The Rangers poured out of the wrecked helicopter suffering multiple casualties and taking heavy fire from the enemy. They began fighting back. The exception was the commanding officer and his radio

operator. They had rifles, but they weren't using them. They were kneeling over their radio trying to establish communications with their headquarters to get air support. They seemed to ignore all the chaos they were so focused on that one priority. It was obvious that they understood that was the single most important contribution they could make to saving their friends and achieving their mission. Prayer is not primarily something we use to call up room service, to satisfy our wants and desires. It is a wartime field radio. It is the single most powerful asset, weapon, source of help, you have both for protecting yourself from the enemy and for achieving the mission on which you are sent. That's why prayer begins with God's and his kingdom and then ends with protection from the evil one. Prayer calls in strategic guidance and powerful air support. So pray the way Jesus teaches you to pray.

III. HOW CAN YOU USE THE LORD'S PRAYER IN YOUR LIFE?

1. Learn the Lord's Prayer and use it daily. *We've placed a prayer card in your bulletin.* It highlights the five key statements and the five priorities in the Lord's Prayer. Learn it and use it daily.

2. As you pray, let the Lord's Prayer lead you into a richer prayer life. Most people have areas they neglect in their prayer life. Do you only or mostly pray for God's provision for your needs? Start praying prayers of praise for who God is and for his kingdom purposes then pray for God's provision. Let the Lord's prayer get you centered on and aligned with God before you start asking for his help with your needs. Some people pray only for high spiritual purposes and for God's will to be done. They neglect daily prayers for God's provision because they think that might be petty or selfish, but the result is that the reality of God seems disconnected from the ordinary challenges of everyday life. Some people pray daily for many things but never to pause, to ask for clarity so they can confess their sins and receive forgiveness, and then reflect on who it is they have been hurt by and are angry with and need to forgive before God in prayer. They miss the cleansing healing power of the Lord's Prayer. Let the Lord's prayer lead you into a richer prayer life.

As you do...

3. Let the Lord's Prayer refine your prayers. Think about the things that weigh on your heart right now. Look at your emotions and anxieties and concerns. Then take those pressing, sometimes anxious and messy thoughts, form them into specific petitions and

then rethink and if necessary restate them to fit them in the priorities of the Lord's Prayer and then lift them up to God.

4. Let the Lord's Prayer gently lead you back when your mind wanders. When I pray my mind often loses focus on drifts of that's where the Lord's Prayer becomes, not a so much a limitation on how to pray but, a path to walk down in prayer that keeps me from getting too lost. Even with the Lord's Prayer to guide me, I find I still wander off the path, but at least the Lord's Prayer gives me a path to come back to so that I am never completely lost. I just circle back and pick up where I left off.

5. Let the Lord's Prayer fill your prayers with confidence. When I pray the Lord's Prayer I pray with confidence because I'm praying the way Jesus, the gave me to teach me to pray. Isn't it interesting that Jesus speaks to the issue of confidence immediately after giving us the Lord's Prayer. He tells the story of a man who pounds on his neighbor's door at midnight because he needs bread. He keeps asking with shameless boldness and in the end receives the bread he asks for. In **verses 9-13** Jesus turns the picture in the parable into a precept and a promise he say *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!*" God is good - he a perfect Father - He gives the Holy Spirit, This same teaching is given almost word for word in **Matthew 7:11** but Matthew quoting Jesus, most likely on a different occasion, says, *The Father gives good gifts to those who ask him.*

Conclusion

If you think there really isn't a God then there really isn't any good or rational way to find peace in this life. If you believe in God but you think of God not as a heavenly father but primarily as a demanding law-giver who doles our blessings in response to performance than when you turn to him in prayer. You'll just be anxious about whether you've been good enough to deserve his help. But if you see and believe the truth of the Scriptures about the reality of God revealed in Jesus Christ then everything is different. It makes perfect sense to

pray with confidence if you believe in Jesus because he offers a reconciled relationship with a heavenly father who gives good gifts.

I can imagine what some of you are thinking. *Why is it that sometimes I have prayed, and it seemed to me that what I was asking for was a good thing and something God ought to want to do but he didn't do it?*

If you went to Jesus with that question I think he might say, “*You need to know and believe the heavenly Father hears your prayers even when he does not do what you wished he would do.*” He might also say, in Gethsemane, I prayed with tears that I would not have to drink the cup of judgment for the sins of the world but I also said, “*Father, not my will but yours be done*”, and it was his will that I drink that cup and that he raise me up on the third day. The cup of suffering the Father gave me to drink on the cross proved to be the cause of my greatest glory and your eternal salvation. It was a good gift. God gives good gifts - even if sometimes he gives good gifts in ways we will not fully understand until later when it all is made clear. Here's what you need to do, pray with this pattern, and pray with confidence. You have a wise and gracious father. You have to trust in Him - he will give good gifts - so pray, ask, seek and knock.

Don't think that God is reluctant to give or stingy with his giving. He is not. Jesus is the greatest proof of that. God gave his son to die on the cross for our sins so that we can be redeemed and reconciled to him. God came into our world in Jesus to rescue us. On the cross, Jesus took our place and paid for our sins. He was forsaken so you could be embraced. He was abandoned so you could be adopted. God raised him from the dead so that he can be our living Lord and Savior. We don't earn the grace and the relationship he offers us. We just receive by faith – by faith alone. When you just turn to him and trust in him he forgives your sins, reconciles you to God and gives you new life through his Spirit. At the heart of that new reconciled life is a relationship with God in which we become his beloved children and he becomes our heavenly Father. Prayer is a big part of that relationship.

You start with the most basic prayer of all: “*Jesus I turn to you and trust in you as my Savior and Lord.*” From that prayer you take prayer and make prayer the breath of your life. Trust in Jesus. Follow him. Pray about everything.

Amen.