

## **The Rev. Charlie Holt:**

One of the things that I love reflecting on are all the incredible teachers that I've had in my life over the years, and really started with my grandparents and my parents teaching me things like how to tie knots, and how to use a pocket knife, and how to shoot guns, and things like that. Just basic survival skills of life. But as I've grown older, it's been amazing to think back on the teachers that I had in school, learning how to read, how to do math problems, how to do business. And one of the things that I started thinking about, especially in light of this man asking Jesus to teach me how to pray, was who were the people that taught me how to pray? And I started to think back when I was a young priest, my prayer life was actually not particularly good. And I felt very convicted about that, particularly being in my line of work. You know, here I am a minister and I'm not a very good prayer. And so I looked up this, it's not a profession, but it's really a calling that certain people have to be what's called a spiritual director. Has anybody ever heard of that, a spiritual director?

Anybody gone to a spiritual director?

Billy has one back in the back, Catherine. Well, that's what I needed. I needed somebody to be a teacher in my life to basically direct me on how to have a spiritual life. I knew a lot about the Bible. I had gone to seminary. I studied theology. But what I really lacked was really practical skills on basic

basic prayer life with God, and how does that happen? And that's what this guy who's asking Jesus is doing. He sees Jesus praying, and he says, Lord, would you teach me how to do that? Can you teach me how to pray? So I discovered this priest, it was about 30 minutes away by car, his name was Father Henry, and I made an appointment with Father Henry, and I said, hey Father Henry, would you teach me how to pray? Because I'm not good at it, I don't know how to do it. And so Henry and I met for, I don't know, months and months, and it wasn't going well. I was the worst student of prayer ever, and I would go and meet with him, and he'd give me all this stuff that I should be doing and thinking about, and I'd go back the next week, and he'd go, how did he go? And I'd say it didn't go very well, I was not good at it, I didn't do it right. And so one time he said, well, let's just start with something very basic and go to the beginning.

And what he encouraged me to do, and I've really used this ever since then, and I don't pray the same thing every morning or every day, but a lot of times I've gone back to this, particularly when I've had times of spiritual dryness where I've gotten out of the habit of praying or not really feeling the energy and needing to really get back to basics, which we have to do sometimes in our life. And what Father Henry said to do was, he said, okay, when you wake up in the morning,

I want you to memorize one line that is from the morning prayer service, it's actually a psalm, psalm 51, and it's this very basic line, oh Lord, open my lips and my mouth shall proclaim your praise.

You wanna try that with me, oh Lord, open my lips and my mouth shall proclaim your praise. Very easy to remember, oh Lord, open my lips and my mouth shall proclaim your praise.

And this is what Henry said: he said, Charlie, if that's the only prayer that you pray at the beginning of the day, that's enough. And it really took the pressure off me, actually, because part of what was impacting me was I just really felt guilty. And my guilt over not doing it right and not doing it in a super spiritual way as a priest of all people made me feel even worse, and that made me not do it. It's kinda like when you know you're not good at something, you don't even try, well, that's kinda the way I felt. But I could do that, so I started doing that in the morning, oh Lord, open my lips

and my mouth shall proclaim your praise. And what I discovered is just by doing that one little thing, it set the trajectory of my day on a pattern of more prayerful day. Father Henry was a good spiritual director and gave me a tool. Now Jesus is, in a sense, doing exactly the same thing with this young disciple. He's saying let me just give you some very basic prayers.

Our Father who art in heaven,

hallowed be thy name. You know this one?

You ever heard it before?

It's called the Lord's Prayer.

And I think sometimes when we hear it over and over again, and we say it every single Sunday, actually,

we just go right through it. But what Jesus was doing was giving us a pattern of prayer.

Something that would be like what Father Henry had done with me with Psalm 51, but to just give us a few little hooks

that we could use to understand the right kind of posture and pattern of prayer. Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.

I used to go and visit when I was in seminary, a young, he wasn't a young, but he was kind of young, actually. He was a man who had had a stroke. He was probably in his 50s. And his name was Chuck. And Chuck could not say anything. His language, part of his brain, had been damaged by the stroke. And all he could say was yes and no.

And so I'd go and read Chuck a book, or I'd just talk to him about what was going on in my life, or I would read him the newspaper. He loved Sports Illustrated. So he read Sports Illustrated sometimes. But one time I said to Chuck, I said, "Chuck, would you mind if we prayed the Lord's Prayer?" And Chuck said, "Yeah." So that was what he said, yes or no.

And so I started to pray the Lord's Prayer with him.

And one of the things that it was just like a miracle to me, he said every single word of the Lord's Prayer.

And that taught me something really important about things like the Lord's Prayer. That when we have been patterned with a prayer like that,

and we've memorized it from childhood, and it's in there, that it actually is not a rote thing, but it's a very deep spiritual thing. It's something that you can access

just anywhere you are at any time.

And it's actually probably written in a place in your brain and in your heart that even like Chuck, if your language was destroyed by a stroke,

you could still say the whole thing because it's in such a deep place in your brain where other memories and other ways of formulating things don't exist. It's really wonderful, actually, to have things like that inside of you. And so this is something that any of us can do any time when we get up in the morning. Like I have it on good authority that this is a good way to pray.

The Lord said this. But he says, just meditate on each thing every morning. Say our Father.

Now think about this. Right up to this point of Jesus coming,

nobody referred to God as their Father.

They would have called him Adonai, Lord. In fact, God was so distant and holy to the Jewish people that they would never say his proper name, which is Yahweh. They would always do what's called a circumlocution. They would work their way around the name of God and only call him Lord. And so they're relating to God as not a father, but as a king.

You are the, you are my Lord. I am your subject. I am your servant.

But what Jesus would teach his disciples

is that, I want you to learn how to relate to God, not as a distant king and you as his slaves or servants, but learn how to relate to God as a child would relate to their parent, as a daughter would relate to a father, or a son would relate to a father. Call him Abba. Call him daddy. Call him father.

Paul would say in another place in Romans chapter eight that when we pray to God as our Father and we cry out to him, Abba, Father, that there's something actually that should be very reassuring in our hearts that says, you know what?

I am a child of God.

And that assurance that is deep within us when our spirit testifies with the holy spirit of the living God, and it's actually the relational aspect of us praying to God as Father that confirms that indeed we are his children. That all comes from Jesus teaching his disciples. That's the way you should pray. That pray to God as your Father. Now that's not to say you don't pray to him as your father that you take advantage of or your father that you don't respect. He says, Father, hallowed be your name. I mean, I have two boys, and they're constantly stealing my stuff. And I'm

constantly feeling disrespected by these guys. So one of the incidents happened the other day, actually. I was getting ready to get into my truck to go to church, actually to work. And it was a big day. There was a funeral and other things. And my son shows up, and he just says, I'm taking the truck. I'm like, you're doing what? You're taking the truck, and he's like, yeah, I'm going to take all the surfboards and I'm going to put them in the back of the truck and I'm taking the truck. I'm leaving you with the Tesla. And I'm like, I've never driven a Tesla. I don't even know how they work. And he just filled up his truck and drove off with my vehicle.

And he leaves me with a key card

and that's the key to get into a Tesla. Did you know that? It's like a credit card. And I'm like, what am I supposed to do with this? And he says, well, it's got instructions on the back. Well, it doesn't. It has a picture on the back.

And he drives off.

And I get to that Tesla with this black card, and I'm like holding it at the car. I'm waving it at it. There's no place. There's no keyhole. There's nothing. I look at it and I'm like, I call him up on the phone. He goes, well, you just got to hold it by the door. And I'm like, and he's like, you're not holding it close enough. So I'm holding it closer. Stand back farther. And I said, son, this is ridiculous.

And he goes, just YouTube it and figure out how to do it.

He was not hallowing his father's name in that moment.

But anyway, when we come to prayer, the Lord would have us be in a intimate posture of reverent intimacy with him.

And you can do this with all of the different petitions and the Lord's prayer.

Thy kingdom come, thy will be done. It's not in this particular gospel passage, but in another place it says, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

And just think about what that would do for you in the morning as you center your life around the coming of the kingdom of God.

You say, Lord, whatever agendas that this day may hold, whether it be what agenda you see in the political parties on the news, or what the governor wants to do, or the mayor, or your boss at work, or even your own self-centered agendas for the day,

taking a moment and engaging with the Lord's prayer right at the beginning of the day and saying,

not my will, but your kingdom come,

your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Or just think for a moment about how that might change the trajectory of your day.

If you were to center your life every day around the kingdom of God.

Give us each day our daily bread. It's one that we just probably rolls right off of us. But scholars often debate the way that that's phrased is a little challenging in the Greek.

And if you were to literally translate it, and it's not the way that we talk, so the way they've put it in our Bibles in English, give us this day our daily bread. But literally, if you were to translate it, it's give us today tomorrow's bread.

And the idea is that what we're praying is give us enough provision that I can go to bed tonight and not have to worry about what I need for tomorrow.

It's a prayer to help set our hearts at peace

with the anxieties and needs of our lives in the world.

Every single one of them deliver us from evil. You could actually spend hours in prayer meditating just on the Lord's prayer.

Now, when I was thinking about this sermon on prayer, I was thinking, okay, three Ps. We got the pattern of prayer, and then you have the persistence of prayer because you have this story about the guy that shows up in the middle of the night, and then you have the power of prayer with the Holy Spirit being a gift. So the persistence of prayer. The Lord tells us, it's kind of a funny story, actually, about this guy that shows up. Billy actually lives like two doors down to me, so let's just pretend it's Billy. So Billy shows up at my house at midnight, and he says, hey, Charlie's banging on the door. Charlie, Charlie, I had some friends that came over just now, and I need three loaves of bread. That's of course what he would be asking for at midnight, right, three loaves of bread.

Bread party, we're having a bread party at my house, dude. So cool, can I get some bread? And what would I say? And the story, Jesus is exactly right. The guy's like, you're not my friend.

What are you thinking? Go away.

But because Billy keeps knocking on the door, come on, man, I need some bread, I need some bread,

that I would open up the door, and I'd give him the bread.

Not because I want to, but because he's being persistent.

One thing came to me this week. I was driving down Ortega Boulevard, and there was this husky that was wandering the streets of Ortega, and I pulled up my truck to it, and there's no collar on the dog, and I'm thinking, oh, somebody's lost their dog. And so I opened up the door of my truck, and the dog jumps right in. And now I have a husky, and I put notices out everywhere.

Somebody find this dog. Is there anybody that wants this dog that is missing a husky, but nobody has responded? And so we've named the dog Roxy, and now she's sleeping in our bedroom at night.

And so Roxy, at four in the morning, and she has done this pretty consistently

with some real persistence. She gets up at four in the morning, and she starts scratching the rug, and then she walks around the room and bangs her toenails all over the room, and then she does heavy breathing dog pants.

(Panting) And then she comes and sticks her nose in my face, and I'm like, okay, okay, I'll get up. I'll take you out.

This is what the Lord is trying to say that we should be like with our prayers.

That so many of us are way too passive when it comes to our approach with God.

That what the Lord really wants for us, what the Father wants for us as His children, is for us to ask, to seek, to knock. And what does He promise? He says, "If you ask, it will be given to you. "If you seek, you will find it. "If you knock, the door will be open to you." But your prayers are not persistent.

You're not knocking, you're not seeking, you're not asking.

And what's another say? You do not have because you do not ask.

The door's not being opened because you're never knocking on the door.

And what the Lord is trying to get across to us is that God wants to be in a personal relationship with us and to wrestle with us and to engage with us and to interact with us.

And so be like Billy coming over to my house at midnight asking for bread, or be like Roxy, who wants what she wants.

And I think one of the things that prevents us from being as aggressive in our prayers is maybe we should.

And well, there's a couple of things. I mean, one, we have been taught over and over again in Protestant churches to be more passive when it comes to God. You know, let go and let God.

And so we just kind of take a more passive approach with the Lord, but that's not the teaching of Scripture.

Teaching of Scripture has Job wrestling with God.

And the Lord, Jesus himself,

arguing with the Lord in the Garden of Gethsemane, if this cup can be taken from me, but not my will but yours.

And this is what Jesus is trying to get across to his disciples when they're coming to him for instruction and asking them about prayer. That when you pray, pray like that persistent friend

who wants what they want and asks the Lord aggressively. So one is that we have been taught to be passive, but the other thing is that there's something inside of us that maybe says, well, if I ask so aggressively, I might be doing it wrong.

And I'll ask him for something, and then I'm gonna get what I asked for, and that would have been the wrong thing. And then I've really messed up because I asked God for this and he gave me that and that really messed up all of thy kingdom come and the universe is all gonna fall apart because I prayed incorrectly.

And Jesus says you can't mess it up.

Why?

Because God is a good father.

Goes back to the our father thing. I mean, you who are fathers, you know this, that if whatever your children ask you for,

they can't mess it up.

And now you may not give them what they ask for,

but you're not gonna give them what's not good for them. If you're a good father, you know how to parent your children; well, that's the way God is as the father.

And if you come to him and you ask him for something that's good, like you want a fish, he isn't going to be mean to you and give you a snake. Or you come to him and you want something that's good for you, that it's a good thing,

like an egg, he isn't going to give you a scorpion.

So if you fathers who know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more, Jesus says, will God the father give good gifts to his children who come to ask? And particularly the thing that he wants to give you more than anything else, if you will come and wrestle with him in prayer, is the gift of his Holy Spirit.

And so what Jesus encourages you and I to do in our prayers is to follow his pattern, to take the Lord's Prayer and make it not just something that we know by heart, but something that we pray with our hearts,

and that we persistently ask and seek and knock

for the things that we need in our life.

And do it with passion.

You know, Lord, deliver me from evil.

That's part of the Lord's Prayer.

Lord, I'm having trouble forgiving this person.

But help me to forgive this person as you have forgiven me.

There's so many things there. I need this, Lord. Give me today tomorrow's bread.

But pray with wazeal and passion and perseverance, and the Lord will pour out his abundance upon you. Let us pray, and one of the things that I want to invite you to do is to simply pray this, and we're gonna have the prayers of the people, but to pray a simple prayer that is, Lord, fill me with your Holy Spirit. That's the real big gift that God wants to give to his children. How much more will the good Heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him? And it's something that you can pray anytime, any place. You can pray it at the altar rails. You're taking communion, but you can also pray it with me. So let us pray. Heavenly Father, thank you for giving us

a pattern of prayer that can center our hearts and our lives in life with you.

And so we do ask that you would help us not just know the Lord's prayer, but to make it part of our practice.

And Heavenly Father, give us more zeal

to ask and to seek and to knock, as you've challenged us to do through your son.

And Heavenly Father, we ask you to give us the good gift that you would give us, the gift of the Holy Spirit. And so maybe just a simple prayer,

Lord, fill me with your Holy Spirit.

If you want to pray that tonight, maybe just pray it out loud with me. I'll say it again, Lord, fill me with your Holy Spirit.

In Jesus' name we pray, amen.