Pointers, Part 5

The Way We Pray

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 *“And it came to pass, that, as He was praying in a certain place, when he ceased, one of his disciples said unto Him, Lord, teach us to pray.”* (Luke 11:1) The Lord’s Prayer is not a form or formula, but a model which our Lord Jesus gave to his disciples. It is a prayer of the kingdom; a prayer suited to the disciples at that time, when the Lord was preaching the kingdom is “at hand,” and not the gospel of the grace of God, which tells the story of a crucified Christ and the pardon for sin through Him. Its enduring value lies in the fact that His prayer is a model and not a form. His intent was not for us to recite it, but to teach us something about God. The gospel of Luke tells the story that one of our Lord’s disciples, evidently speaking for all of them, had said, *“Lord, teach us to pray,” (Luke 11:1)* And the Lord’s Prayer is part of his answer.

Notice, first of all, the singularity of this disciple’s petition. These men were Jews, and as Jews had been brought up to pray. They had always prayed. Furthermore, many of them had been disciples of John the Baptist, and one of the things, it appears, was that John taught his disciples to pray. But here before Jesus there is a desire unsatisfied. These disciples, who were brought up to pray and who had been in a kind of preparatory school of prayer, still felt that they did not know how to pray. It is a good sign when a Christian can no longer be satisfied with religious forms. There is a tremendous contrast between praying and saying prayers. We all are guilty of saying prayers from the memorization of our minds, but not an actual need from the heart. We do this all the time with many types of prayers.

As Christian believers, we live in a mysterious in-between place of an opportunity with Jesus, and in confusion of struggling for using words that do not express our meaning, we desire help in listening for God as we grow in the knowledge of learning how to pray that brings delight. In the opening verses of Luke’s version of the Lord’s Prayer, imagine Jesus whispering in your ear, “Here, let me show you how to pray.” Jesus invites us to pray with him to the Father who is always a personal and welcoming, seldom demanding, and never standoffish. At the same time, our Father also sends the Holy Spirit to us so we can pray through, with, and in Jesus.

Recently, I was reading some commentary about the Lord’s Prayer, and it struck me in my study that it was the request of one of the disciples (unknown) who asked Jesus how to pray; “Lord teach us to pray.” Seemingly, there was this Aha moment that just as prayer was essential in the life of John the Baptist, and in the presence of the Lord Jesus, it should be their practice as well. Maybe Jesus was previously ready to teach on prayer, but he wanted the disciples to conclude for themselves how important prayer was and he waited for their eagerness to learn.

Consequently, the prayer life of Jesus prompted the disciple to teach him to do likewise because he knew it was an area of inexperience. The child-like quality of the disciple's petition to learn certainly had to overjoy Jesus. I do not know what it was in Jesus’ praying that suddenly brought to light to those watching disciples or in the consciousness of precisely what that they needed to be taught to pray. Whether it was the expression in the face of our Lord Jesus, the appearance of his face radiant and triumphant trusting in the Father to whom He prayed, or whether it was a ring of certainty that God heard Him and would answer His prayer. Or whether there was an accent of reality in it all so that it seemed to those disciples clear that their Lord was not engaged in a religious exercise, but that He was getting something from God, that moved them to ask this question; I do not know. But something in His praying stirred them.

The Bible tells us of a story related to prayer from the Old Testament book of Daniel when he was facing a judgment against the law of God. *“Now when Daniel learned of the decision, he went home to his upstairs room where the windows opened toward Jerusalem. Three times a day he got down on his knees and prayed, giving thanks to his God, just as he had done before.”* **(Dan. 6:10).** Later in the 9th chapter, Daniel provides another prayer, this time an intercessory prayer for others and asking for the forgiveness of sins for all who had turned away from God’s commandments.

In every prayer, we must *confess* not only of our sins, but our faith and dependence upon Him. As we turn our eyes back to Paul, Paul had been saying prayers all his life, and yet one day he met Jesus on the Damascus road, and he began to pray on his knees for the first time. From that moment, the form of prayer became intolerable to him.

Notice again, that it was the praying of our Lord Jesus, which suggested to His disciples their need for instruction in the art of prayer. Hear these words from **Luke 11.1.** *“One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he finished, one of his disciples said to him, Lord, teach us to pray.”* Have you ever thought about the prayer-life of Jesus? Here was a perfectly sinless man tempted in all ways of life. Tempted like as we are, apart from indwelling sin—the Son of God, incarnate as Mary’s son, walking the pathway of dependence as we must here, never helping Himself by His own almightiness, casting Himself in absolute human dependence upon the sustaining power and guiding wisdom of His Father in heaven. It is an inescapable sequence of taking the place of dependence before God.

Now if we are self-confident, if we have a kind of spiritual arrogance and believe that we are sufficient only to yourself, we will not pray much; that is one thing that severs the nerve of prayer, and another is that weary like doubt as to whether it does any good. If we want to see the life of worship established to its fullest, then we must turn to the earth-life of the Lord Jesus. We read in the Bible that when some crisis of His life was coming, he continued all night in prayer to God. And remember, it was praying; it was genuine praying to the point of agony. Listen to what **Luke says in 22:44**. *“And being in agony, he prayed more earnestly: and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling to the ground."*

Furthermore, Jesus was praying in the experience of his transfiguration high on the mountain, not just in preparation for his departure, but also for strengthening the faith of the disciples for the challenges they would later endure. So why isn’t the transformation into the likeness of Christ more rapidly progressing in us? My answer to this is: We do not pray enough. Listen to what **Luke says in 9:29.** *“And as he prayed the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became as bright as a flash of lightning.”*

My friends, if our faces were turned upward more, we should be persuaded there would be on our faces some of that shining glory that the face of Moses caught when he was on the mountain with God. Jesus prayed constantly! He prayed in Gethsemane; He prayed at Calvary—prayer was His vital breath. Prayer is “the Christian’s vital breath.” We cannot have a sturdy foundation or a vibrant life without prayer, and the more prayer, the stronger the growth in Christ. Again, listen to what Luke writes. *“Lord, teach us to pray,”—Luke 11:1*

You see, there was the sense of need even in that petition. The trouble with us is that we think we could pray if we would**; (1) only have a mind to pray; or (2) if we just were determined to pray.** But no, we need to be taught to pray. Let us free ourselves of our self-satisfaction, and our lack of experience, and our spiritual pride and confess that we do not even know how to pray. So, what do we do? Let us enter the school of Christ, and I am sure He will teach us some valuable lessons. How does He begin to teach us to pray? **“*When you pray, say, Father” (Luke 11:2)*** That is Jesus Christ’s basic philosophy of prayer. If you claim to be Christian, you are not an orphaned child of God.

The historian Goldwin Smith once said that “the worst consequence of atheism was to leave man orphaned in a vast whirlpool of blind force.” How true that is! Every one of us who stops to think, and feels that his or her life is played upon by mysterious forces—or is in the crashing waves of influence that arise outside themselves from who knows where is lost. Or possibly that some evil ancestor lives within themselves, and all the turbulence of a life which lived centuries ago is reproduced in him today. Let us then learn this first lesson in Christ’s school of prayer; it is that prayer is asking the Father for something. He bases prayer on a parent-like relationship and prayer is just going to the Father with a child’s need. That is the true, and whole philosophy of prayer.

But how many inadequate and foolish philosophies there are! One tells us that God is a God of law; another that He has enacted specific laws of nature which govern the condition of human life in His universe, and if we learn those laws and live by those laws, we will then live happy lives. That is true, of course. But Christ answers that God is something more than a judgment maker, something more than the Creator and Ruler of the universe. Over and above all that is the fatherhood of God. He says in effect, “This Father of yours does not make judgments and laws, but He is a Father, and His fatherhood dominates His judgment making.” God is, first of all, a Father.

Secondly, Christ gave His disciples a model of prayer. And what does the model teach us? That true prayer is worshipful and that God is first, demonstrating how different He is from us by His holiness. Jesus prayed, *“Our Father who art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name.” (Luke 11:2)* I am confident that sometimes we think God is not listening to our prayers when there is no answer. He does not always give us what we ask for, but He gives us what we need. And then what we need is presented briefly to Him. Prayer brings us right into that presence. If I am in temptation, I need help. If I am in danger, I need help AND comfort. If I am in weakness, I need help AND strength. If my business is in difficulties and seems to be going wrong, I need my Father’s help AND wisdom in my work. And so, it is with any need-whatever, it may be. That is the teaching of this model prayer.

**First,** worship. God calms our souls in the presence of our Father. **Second,** the coming kingdom. If the coming of that kingdom means that He has got to say “No” to me this day, well, then, still I must pray, *“Thy kingdom come.” (Luke 11:2)* And then my need: “Meet it, Lord!” That is the essential teaching of the Lord’s Prayer.

Lastly, doesn’t our Lord teach us that prayer should be mostly intercessory? Prayer should be intercessory. Pray for others. He shows us this ever so gently! He tells us this parable in Luke 11:5-8 about the man who goes to his friend and tells him of the need of his other friend who is on a journey. “*And he said to them, Suppose one of you has a friend, and he goes to him at midnight, and say unto him, Friend, lend me three loaves of bread; Because a friend of mine on a journey has come to me, and I have nothing to set before him? Then the one inside answers, do not bother me: the door is already locked, and my children are in bed with me; I cannot get up and give you anything. I tell you, though he will not get up and give him the bread, because he is his friend, yet because of the man’s boldness, he will get up and give him as much as he needs.” (Luke 11:5-8)*

Christian teacher and pastor, Andrew Murray has a phrase: “Trust for yourself, Pray for others.” Do you suppose that when Christ prayed all night He was going over His case with His Heavenly Father? I think He may have spent two hours on Peter and half an hour on John, and so on. I think He was praying for Israel. I think He was praying for the whole world. Intercessory prayer! And this is the blessed simplicity of it all! A friend of yours comes to you and needs something that you have not, and you go to your Father and get it for him. Pray. That is what our Lord, in effect, says, “Pray.” Get a need on your heart and then go to your Father about it. That is prayer. Stay with Him until you have an answer. *“Here’s what I am saying: Ask, and you’ll get; seek, and you’ll find; knock, and the door will open. Don’t bargain with God. Be direct ask for what you need. And don’t you think the Father who conceived you in love will give the Holy Spirit when you ask Him?” (Luke 11:9-10,13)* That is prayer.

In conclusion, I’d like to leave you with a story illustrating the faith and boldness of a child. Paul Harvey told a story about a 3-year-old boy who went to the grocery store with his mother. Before they entered the grocery store, she said to him, "Now you’re not going to get any chocolate chip cookies, and so don’t even ask." She put him up in the cart & he sat in the little child’s seat while she wheeled down the aisles. He was doing just fine until they came to the cookie section. He saw the chocolate chip cookies & he stood up in the seat & said, "Mom, can I have some chocolate chip cookies?" She said, "I told you not even to ask. You’re not going to get any at all." So he sat back down. They continued down the aisles, but in their search for certain items they ended up back in the cookie aisle. "Mom, can I please have some chocolate chip cookies?" She said, "I told you that you couldn’t have any. Now sit down & be quiet." Finally, they were approaching the checkout lane. The little boy sensed that this might be his last chance. So just before they got to the line, he stood up on the seat of the cart & shouted in his loudest voice, "In the name of Jesus, may I have some chocolate chip cookies?" And everybody round about just laughed. Some even applauded. And, according to Paul Harvey, due to the generosity of the other shoppers, the little boy & his mother left with 23 boxes of chocolate chip cookies.

John’s gospel reminds us of this one thing. *“Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask, and you will receive, and your joy will be complete.” (****John 16:24****)* Does the Kingdom of God come first in your prayer life? If not, then get on your knees and confess that you need Him now more than ever, praying from your heart and not from the memorization of your mind.