

Luke 11:1-4
When You Pray

Main idea: Prayer isn't about the particular words we use, but about trusting our holy Father for all our needs, and for the greatest of all our needs.

I want to find out who in this room prays the best. Because if I really need something, I need to know who prays the best, so that I can ask them to pray for me and then get what I want, right? So to figure out who among us prays the best, we need to take an interactive poll. So I need everyone to stand up, and then stay standing if you can honestly say you always pray according to how the Bible instructs you to pray, according to the following rules.

In secret, not to impress. "When you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you." (Matthew 6:6)

Sincerely, without babbling. "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. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him." (Matthew 6:7-8)

In subordination to God's will. Jesus prayed, "Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done." (Luke 22:42)

With thanksgiving. "In everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God." (Philippians 4:6)

Without ceasing. "Pray without ceasing." (1 Thessalonians 5:17)

In faith, without doubting. "But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways." (James 1:6-8)

With right motives, not selfishly. "You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions." (James 4:3)

In good times and bad. "Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praise." (James 5:13)

Along with obedient lives. "Whatever we ask we receive from him, because we keep his commandments and do what pleases him." (1 John 3:22)

With humility. "Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.' But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner!' I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted." (Luke 18:10-14)

And with that one, we should all sit down, because if you don't sit down, then you're not very humble about prayer, are you?

So apparently none of us pray the right way, and we all need help in this area. We need to learn how to pray! We need God to teach us how to pray! So let's pray that right now.

Lord, teach us to pray. In Jesus's name, Amen.

Before I became a pastor, I always wondered if pastors peeked during prayer to see who was and who wasn't praying. Have you ever wondered that? Well, to my knowledge, I've never peeked during prayer before, until just a moment ago. And actually, you all passed the test, as far as I saw. Nobody was peeking during prayer.

But if I had caught somebody not praying, whether just looking at me or just looking around, I want you to know, I wouldn't have been disappointed at all. Because if that person was truly praying at that time, then maybe they would have been praying more than me. Because even while I was praying out loud, I was also busy trying to catch people not praying, so it kind of makes you wonder how much I was actually praying.

Because prayer isn't about saying certain words, it's about trusting God. Prayer is simply about trusting God enough to talk to Him, and ask Him for what you need.

The sermon this morning is on Luke's version of the Lord's Prayer. But the more popular version of that prayer is found in Matthew, and particularly, most people know the King James Version of the prayer. So I thought it would be appropriate if we said the Lord's Prayer together right now, using that version. Let's pray.

Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name.
Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.

I have no doubt that some of us were praying just now, and some of us were not. I wonder instead if some of us were reciting words that we'd memorized, and you weren't really talking to God, but simply following along. Or maybe you were struggling to remember the words, and you didn't know if you should say "debts" or "sins," and you couldn't remember in which order to say "kingdom, power, and glory." That's okay! That always trips me up, too.

In fact, I'm going to give you a little quiz. I want you to tell me which way is the correct way to pray the Lord's Prayer according to the Gospel of Matthew. No peeking, ok?

Number 1, is Matthew 6:9:

- A) Our Father which art in heaven,
- B) Our Father who art in heaven,
- C) Our Father in heaven, or
- D) O our Father – the One within and in union with the heavens

Which one is correct?

Well, according to how most of us learned it, it's A) Our Father which art in heaven. This is the version that's in the King James Version of the Bible. But I would also have accepted B) Our Father who art in heaven, because this sounds more natural, and it's the version we find in the American Standard Version. And I would have accepted C) Our Father in heaven, because it's the version we find in most translations today, including the New International Version, and the English Standard Version, the Bible in Basic English, the Contemporary English Version, and many more. And I would even accept D) O our Father - the One within and in union with the heavens, because it's the version we find in an obscure, amplified version of the New Testament translated by Jonathan Mitchell, which can often be helpful in understanding the range of meaning of a particular text.

So that was an easy one. Unless you didn't chose an answer, you got it right.

Number 2, is it:

- A) Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven,
- B) Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven,
- C) Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven, or
- D) We pray that your kingdom will come-- that what you want will be done here on earth, the same as in heaven.

Which one is it?

Well, the King James Version has it as B) Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven, but, once again, all of these are correct in that they're all found in various translations

of Matthew 6:10, and we can certainly pray any of these to God. So as long as you chose one of them, you got it right.

One more. Number 3, is it:

- A) And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil,
- B) And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one,
- C) And do not bring us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one, or
- D) And save us from almost certain temptation, and deliver us from great peril, terrible peril, even that which is too perilous, even when we want to have just a little bit of peril.

Which way is the correct way to pray?

Well it's definitely not D, right, because that's actually adapted from a few quotes from the movie Monty Python and the Holy Grail. And yet, if you did pray that, sincerely, not as a joke, but with humility, then I think God would be honored by your desire to be delivered from evil.

So, actually, these are also all correct, in that they can all be good things to say in prayer. And they can all be incorrect if you're praying them without actually talking to God, if you're just reciting a bunch of words you learned a long time ago.

In other words, the correct way to pray is to pray! It's not about the specific words, but about trusting God, who answers prayer.

But even while we know that, sometimes we still make it about the words. Sometimes while we're praying, whether we're praying with others or even if we're praying alone, we fish for the right words, as if God's going to be impressed with our eloquence. So even though we know prayer is as simple as talking to God, sometimes we wish we knew the formula, so that our prayer life would magically be better, more effective, more pleasing to God.

Or maybe you just wish you knew how to simply talk to God, because every time you try, God just seems so far away, and you don't know if your prayers are going any further up than the ceiling.

So with all these doubts and insecurities, let's learn to pray. Luke chapter 11, verses 1 through 4.

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 says first that Jesus was praying in a certain place, signifying that He was in that place specifically for prayer. He went to this place to pray, so that there would be no distractions. As much as Jesus loved people, and as much as He knew people needed Him, and needed Him to teach them, and Him to heal them, even in the midst of His great and busy ministry, Jesus constantly took time to get away and pray.

It's great to pray as you go, while driving, while cutting the grass, it's great to redeem the time by praying at those times, but don't cut out all time reserved exclusively for prayer. Because when we set aside time for prayer, and nothing else, we're demonstrating with our lives that God is so important that He deserves our full attention.

That's what we see Jesus modeling here. And in this instance, we don't know what Jesus was praying, only that He was praying. But something about His prayer caused His disciples at this time to say to Him, "Lord, teach us to pray."

I think it's interesting that the disciples didn't say to Jesus, "Lord, teach us how to pray." That's probably how I would have asked Jesus for prayer advice. "Teach me how to pray." Rather, they said, "Lord, teach us to pray." It's like they were admitting that they didn't know the first thing about prayer! And it's not because they had never prayed before this. They were all Jews! They prayed! They had prayers of blessing and mourning. They recited certain prayers at all of their festivals and holy days. They had certain prayers for the Sabbath, and they saw it as their duty to pray specifically at three times of the day: morning, noon, and night, and at each of these times, they'd pray what they called the Amidah, which is about 5 pages long! The Jews were a people devoted to prayer! Prayer was not a new concept for them!

And yet, when they heard Jesus pray, they couldn't help but say, "Lord, teach us to pray!"

"Lord, we've been praying all our lives, and yet, when we hear You pray, it's like we don't know the first thing about prayer!"

In other words, they were asking for the secret to prayer. They wanted to know the formula. They heard Jesus praying with authority, just like He taught with authority. They heard Jesus praying, knowing that His Father in heaven not only heard His prayers, but would answer His prayers. So they wanted to know the words they had to say so that God would hear them, and so that God would answer them, and they would get everything they wanted.

But instead of giving them another 5 page long prayer to replace the Amidah, or to say in addition to the Amidah, Jesus gave them just a very short example of how to pray.

What we find here in Luke is a shortened form of the prayer we find in Matthew, yet all the same elements are there. And I think it's good that we have both the longer version in Matthew and this shorter version in Luke, because it reminds us once again that it's not a magic prayer! It's not about the exact words we use. I wouldn't discourage you from praying the Lord's Prayer,

because it is a very good prayer, straight out of the mouth of Jesus! But I also wouldn't say that it's a prayer you must pray every day or even every year. In fact, I'd much rather you never pray these specific words if instead you pray to God with a sincere heart. With a heart that cries out to God, "God, thank You for saving me! Thank You for allowing me to know You! You are greater than all! Your name is holy!"

And I think that's what God desires for us. Not that we pray the words "Hallowed be Thy name," but that we believe those those words. That our hearts recognize and trust in God, who is holy.

And the same is true of the next phrase: "Your kingdom come." We've probably said it hundreds of times, but do you really long for it? Do you really long for God's kingdom to come? I mean, have you thought about the implications of God's kingdom coming, not just some day in the future, not just going to heaven some day, but what it would mean if God's kingdom came today? It would mean that you'd have to let go of every earthly pleasure. You'd have to let go of your dreams, your career, everything you've worked so hard to accumulate in this life, it's all going to be gone. If your kids are young, it would mean never getting to see them get married. If you're a virgin, it would mean never experiencing sexual union in marriage. If you're on the verge of paying off your mortgage, it would mean never getting that satisfaction of finally paying it off and being debt free. I mean, wouldn't it be great to be debt free?!?

And yet, in God's kingdom, we are debt free. Our debt has been paid, by Jesus Himself. And in God's kingdom, we're the Bride of Christ, and will have perfect union with Jesus. And in God's kingdom, pleasure isn't tiny and temporary like on earth, but is full and eternal. But so often, we long more for the miniscule temporary blessings of this life rather than God's kingdom coming, which brings to us the greatest blessings forever.

So don't just say, "Your kingdom come," mean it. Long for it. Realize that God's kingdom is better than anything we experience in this life.

And yet, we still live in this life. So we also pray, "Give us each day our daily bread." You know, we don't deserve a single blessing from God. God deserves our full obedience, because He made us, and we're His. But we all sin, and when we sin, we're cursing God. By our sin, we're telling God, "I don't need You, and I don't want You!" So God has every right to withdraw from us and leave us to starve.

But God is love. God loves to show His grace and mercy! Even though we don't deserve it, God gives us good gifts! He makes the rain fall on the just and the unjust. He gives to all men life and breath and everything! Verse 4.

"...and forgive us our sins..." (Luke 11:4)

When you're praying for God to give you your daily bread, your needs, don't forget that He's already given you your greatest need. Once again, we're to pray "forgive us our sins" not out of

repetition, or because we think we have to, but out of a sincere heart that cries out to God, "God, I'm a sinner! I've broken your commands! I don't measure up! Forgive me!"

And He does. And it's as simple as that. You see, God's not impressed with long-winded prayers, as if you could earn righteousness through your prayer life, and God's not disappointed with you when you feel like your prayer life is in a rut, as if your relationship with God depended on your efforts, but God loves it when you simply pray to Him in faith, trusting that He hears you and will answer you. That's what prayer is all about: trusting your holy Father for all your needs, and for the greatest of all your needs, which is Jesus.

Do you trust Him? Because Jesus, talking to His disciples, said, "When you pray." The assumption is that they prayed, and would pray. But when Christians today are asked how much and how often they pray, the numbers are very low. So do you love and trust Him?

Well, I've come to believe any time we ask "how much" and "how often" we pray, we're treating prayer the wrong way. We're treating it more like a magic formula. But Jesus didn't say, "If you pray," but rather "When you pray." I think Jesus was saying that we all pray. Whether you devote time for it or not, whether you believe in God or not, we all pray.

Every time you hope for better circumstances. Every time you're thankful for blessings. Every time a child is about to get in trouble, they pray! We can't help but pray.

In fact, I have a friend who tells people that she's an atheist, and yet when I ask her how I can pray for her, she always has a list, and she always thanks me for praying for her.

We can't help but pray, but here's the crucial question: will you trust God in prayer? Jesus said, "When you pray, say, 'Father...'" When you pray, pray to the Father. Not to yourself, not to Mother Nature, not to some impersonal force in the universe, but to your Father in heaven, because He loves you.

And you will only recognize Him as your Father if you trust in His Son, Jesus Christ, having received forgiveness through His sacrifice for you on the cross. You see, the call to pray is really about the call to know and have a relationship with God through Jesus. You can know that your prayers are going further up than the ceiling because by grace through faith in Jesus, God isn't distant from you! He's not impersonal! God is our personal God, who invites us to know Him and have a relationship with Him.

You see, God hearing and answering our prayers has nothing to do with how good we pray, how righteous we make ourselves, but rather everything to do with how righteous Jesus is, and therefore how righteous we are in Him.

So if you ever struggle to pray, because you don't feel like you're doing it right, just pray this: "Thank You, God, for Jesus."

Grace Baptist Church

965 E. Union Street, Nokomis, IL 62075

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Father, You are holy. And we do pray for Your kingdom to come, because we long to see the fulfillment of all of Your promises. And we do ask that You provide for us, because we know that everything we have comes from You. So we ask also for salvation, the forgiveness of our sins. And thank You that in Jesus, we have it. So we praise You. In Jesus's name, Amen.

[after closing prayer]

Now be honest, how many of you peeked during prayer just now to see if I was peeking during prayer? Uh huh. Well, you know, God isn't looking for a certain posture while you pray, hands folded or heads bowed, or even eyes closed, just that you look to Him, because He is the Father, the King, and He longs for you to know Him and His love for you. So rest in His love.

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