

TEACH ME HOW TO
Luke 11:1-4
(modified outline by Haddon Robinson)

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Amarillo, Texas
May 22, 2022

My favorite story regarding prayer involves Tony Campolo, a well-known Christian communicator. **One day he was invited to speak at a Pentecostal college near his home. When he arrived for the chapel service he was escorted to a back room where eight men laid their hands on him and began to pray. Campolo said he was very appreciative of their heart-felt prayers, but one guy spent a long time praying about something that had nothing to do with the chapel service.**

And the longer he prayed the more the other guys grew weary and leaned more heavily on Campolo. He prayed on and on about a friend of his named Charlie. He said, “God, you know Charlie. He lives in that silver trailer down the road about a mile. You know the trailer, Lord, just down the road on the right hand side.” Campolo was thinking, “Knock it off, fella. What do you think God’s doing, saying, ‘What’s that address again?’”

He went on, “Lord, Charlie told me this morning he’s decided to leave his wife and three kids. He’s going to walk out on his family. Lord, step in, do something, bring that family together again.” Campolo said the guy just kept praying earnestly for his friend Charlie and kept reiterating the fact that he was leaving his wife and three kids and that he lived in a silver trailer just down the road, on the right hand side. Meanwhile the other guys kept leaning more and more as they laid their hands on Campolo’s head. Campolo was just waiting for the lengthy prayer about Charlie to end.

Finally it was over and he went to preach for the chapel service. Afterwards, he got into his car and started heading for home. Soon thereafter he saw a hitchhiker and pulled over to give him a ride. As they pulled back onto the road, Campolo introduced himself to the hitchhiker, and the hitchhiker said his name was Charlie. Campolo’s heart began to race and he took the next exit off the turnpike. The passenger asked him why he was exiting and Campolo said, “Because you just left your wife and three children, right?” Charlie’s eyes got real big and he said, “R-r-r-ight.” He leaned closer to the door and never took his eyes off Campolo.

Then things got real strange when Campolo drove him right to his silver trailer. In complete amazement Charlie asked, “How’d you know where I live?” Campolo replied, “God told me.” He then ordered Charlie to get in that trailer and Charlie hurried to the door. His wife greeted him at the doorway and shouted, “You’re back, you’re back!” Charlie then began whispering in her ear and her eyes got bigger and bigger. Campolo then came up to the

porch and said, “Sit down. I’m going to talk and the two of you are going to listen.” It was the most captive audience he had ever addressed. That afternoon those two people were led to a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, and today Charlie is a preacher of the gospel. (“Christianity Illustrated: What Makes Prayer Powerful,” John Ortberg, Seeds Tape Ministry #C9820, as quoted in *In Other Words*, Fall Quarter 1998)

Prayers, you see, can be – even in their awkwardness – very powerful in the workings of the kingdom of God.

We always ask of someone else the best that person can give us. We ask the friend who is a professional golfer, “Teach me to putt.” We ask the friend who is a financial analyst, “Teach me to invest.” We ask the librarian, “Teach me to do research.” We ask our friend who can bowl well, “Teach me to make a strike.”

What characterized Jesus at His best? What is it that His disciples asked Him to teach them?

“Lord,” they said, “teach us to pray.”

Because prayer was so crucial in His ministry, Jesus wanted it to be vital in theirs. He responded to their request by giving them what we have called “The Lord’s Prayer.”

Haddon Robinson rightly observes, “As I read the New Testament, I discover that in the ministry of our Lord, prayer was absolutely crucial.” In us, prayer is the preparation for the battle. For Jesus, it seemed to be the battle itself. For Jesus, prayer was like running a marathon, and ministry was like going to receive the gold medal. Prayer was like taking the final examination, and ministry was like going to receive a diploma.

In what part of His ministry did Jesus shed the great drops of blood? It was not at Pilate’s hall. It was not as He staggered under the load of the cross up Golgotha’s hill. It was in the Garden of Gethsemane. The writer of Hebrews tells us that with strong cryings and tears Jesus made His petitions to God.

If we had been there during His hour of agony, His hour of prayer in the Garden, and watched the way He suffered, we might have despaired of the future. We might have said something like this: “If He’s behaving this way when all He’s doing is praying, what in the world is He going to do when He faces a real crisis? It’s too bad He can’t be like his three sleeping friends who find comfort in distress. They found a spiritual peace in the midst of the storm.” But when the crisis came, Jesus went to the cross in triumph. It was His three friends who fell back and fell away.

Prayer, earnest prayer, was the difference.

I’m very cautious when it comes to teaching people about prayer. I think sometimes the more complicated we make things in the spiritual realm, the more off-target we really become.

I'm reminded of the mother who came in from a three-day prayer seminar. She went to pick up her four-year-old daughter. When the child got in the car, after the child care, she had to climb over her mother's large seminar prayer notebook with its accompanying textbook and her Bible.

"What is all this, Mom? Have you been to school?" the child asked.

"I've been to my prayer seminar, honey; I've been learning how to pray," the mom replied, thinking to herself that this just might be one of those elusive teachable moments with her child.

"I already know how to pray," the little girl responded. "I just talk to God all day long, and he talks to me." The child turned her gaze toward her mother's face. "I thought you knew how to pray, too."

In reality, prayer ought to be one of the simplest things of the spiritual life. I didn't say an easy thing, but I said a simple thing. We ought to come to God as a creature would approach a creator. We are to honor that He is so different than we are, that He is holy and righteous, and that we, ourselves, do not even belong in His shadow, much less at the foot of His throne.

He knows our hearts. He knows our desires. We need, as we come to God, to speak to Him as we might speak to someone that we admire so much, someone who loves us so very dearly and has our very best in mind.

The little girl is right. We already do know how to pray. So this morning I approach this topic realizing that those of you who have a personal relationship with Christ Jesus – you already know how to talk to Him because He's your heavenly Father. And even your friend.

Look at verse 1.

A disciple has been eavesdropping on the prayer of his teacher, Jesus. He was impressed by the fact that Jesus had intimate communication with God. So when Jesus finished His prayer, the servant said to his master, "Lord, teach us to pray like that!" He realized that Jesus' prayer was so much more effective than his own. "Lord, give us a pattern to follow. Tell us how we ought to pray."

And Jesus responds, "When you pray, pray like this...."

And He begins His prayer.

Let's look at this model prayer of our Lord, this prayer of His disciples.

I. Jesus teaches us that we pray to a particular person.

"Our Father."

The Jewish worshipers would never address God as Daddy or Abba. It would have been unthinkable, irreverent, and even blasphemous. They would not have used Abba, the word that a Jewish child would have used to address his parent. Rather, *Abinu*, or a formal "father" would

have been the Jewish word by which to call upon God with reverence. But Jesus taught His disciples otherwise. In revolutionary fashion, He taught His disciples to call upon God with a term of intimacy, a term with a familial flair.

We learn that we're praying to someone with whom we have a personal relationship. **Our prayer life is a real concern, for we are speaking to the sovereign Lord of all the universe, the cosmos, who is willing to move heaven and earth in answer to sincere and reasonable prayer. Prayer is not a mechanical duty, but a wonderful opportunity to develop a loving and caring relationship with the most important person in our lives. (John Bunyan, *Pilgrim's Prayer Book*)**

Lest for a moment we lose our reverence for the one to whom we pray, Jesus says despite the intimacy of that relationship the reverence is to stay intact. "Hallowed be Thy name." When we pray "Hallowed be Thy name," we are speaking about God's character, and we're acknowledging that in our lives God will be God to us. We will not try to whittle Him down to size. We will not try to manipulate Him. We won't try to put God into our hip pocket. It is to proclaim that in your life God will be honored. In your life God will be revered. In your life God will be respected.

Lord, in my prayers and in my life, may you be God to me.

As the people of God and as the children of God, we are not praying to some unknown greater or higher power, as others refer to the one to whom they pray. Rather, we are praying to the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. We are praying to the God of the patriarchs. The God who created. The God who sustains. The God who intervened with the crucifixion and the resurrection of Christ. The God who is coming again for the complete fulfillment of His kingdom. We know to whom we pray – the one who has made us and knows us better than we ourselves.

II. Jesus teaches us to seek the program of God.

That's a hard thing to say – "Thy kingdom come." Or as Matthew's version of the prayer – "Thy will be done."

The Bible teaches us very clearly that God acts in history and He is directing history towards the great, future coming of the Kingdom of God – that great Messianic Kingdom that has been promised throughout the Old Testament. It is that kingdom where Christ will come back and rule. It is that kingdom that shall move on to eternity. At that time, men and angels will join to sing His praises, and every knee on earth shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father. That's where history is going.

So before you pray for anything else, Jesus said, talk to the Father, a person, about His program.

"Let Your divine rule come." It is a hope, a prayer, that God would have His way in the hearts of men and women. That those who were under the sway and rule of the power of darkness will now be under the power of God.

Thy kingdom come.

We ask God for so many things. But in reality, congregation, I have realized that I'm not sure I want God to give me what I want. I dare not pray the prayer to God that He gives me whatever I want, no matter the consequences. For you see, God knows best, and God sees all. It would be so detrimental to my life if God had given me everything I wanted at every turn. I would be miserable. Be careful. Ask not for your will. Ask not for what you want. But ask for what God wants.

Have you ever been to the grocery store with a child? Just experience it sometime. Take your child to the grocery store and say, "We're going to let you pick the groceries out today. Just put whatever you want in the shopping cart." There won't be any broccoli, but there will be brownies. There won't be any milk, but there will be Milk Duds. There won't be any carrots, but there will be carrot cake.

Can you imagine what life would be like if every child was indulged by his parent?

Sometimes God tells us no. Sometimes we tell our children no.

God's destiny for each of us is salvation through Jesus Christ our Lord. God's overarching desire is that each of us reach that destiny. His itinerary on this trip includes stops that encourage us on the journey. He frowns on stops that deter us. When His sovereign plan and our earthly plan collide, a decision must be made who is in charge of this journey. God must choose between your earthly passion and His heavenly plan, your salvation. Which do you hope He chooses?

Me, too.

(modified from Max Lucado, *In the Eye of the Storm*, p. 116)

Thy kingdom come.

III. Jesus teaches us to recognize that God is our provider.

"Give us each day our daily bread."

When Jesus talks about bread, He is talking about the basic necessities of life. If Jesus had been speaking to a group of people in the Orient, He probably would have said, "Give us this day our daily bowl of rice." Or to Italians it would have been "our pasta."

Several years ago a piece of papyri (sheet of old paper) was found which contained a woman's grocery list from the ancient world. On that list there were several items that were perishable. Next to each of those items was the same Greek word used in our text this morning – *epiousios*, enough for the day. She wanted enough provision for the day.

In our culture, where we have freezers full of food, we hardly take this seriously. But in most of the world, it's a basic request. If we pray this prayer, we are asking God to provide our needs as we serve His kingdom. We are acknowledging that for our bread, our threads, the things we need, we will turn to God and He will supply.

Isn't that what a blessing before a meal is all about? It's stopping and saying, "Hey, I realize were it not for God's good grace I would have nothing to eat."

It's saying the blessing.

Fredrick Buechner wrote:

There is a restaurant in a city somewhere, a sort of quick-lunch place with no tablecloths on the tables, just the ketchup and mustard jars on the bare wood. It seems to be raining outside. An elderly man with a raincoat and umbrella has turned at the door. Another man glances up as he sits there smoking a cigar over a newspaper and the remains of his coffee. Two teenagers sit at a table, one of them with a cigarette in his mouth.

They are all looking at the same thing, which is an old woman and a small boy who are sharing a table with the teenagers. Their heads are bowed. They are saying grace. The people watching them watch with dazed fascination. The small boy's ears stick out from his head like the handles of a jug. The old woman's eyes are closed, her hair untidy under a hat that has seen better days. The people are watching something that you feel they may have been part of once but are part of no longer. Through the plate-glass window and the rain, the city looks dim, monotonous, industrial. The old woman and the boy are saying grace there, and for a moment the silence in the place is fathomless.

The watchers are watching something that they've all but forgotten and will probably forget again as soon as the moment passes. They could be watching creatures from another planet. The old woman and the boy in their old-fashioned clothes, praying their old-fashioned prayer, are leftovers from a day that has long since ceased to be. (Frederick Buechner, *A Room Called Remember*, p. 119)

Thank God for daily provision.

IV. Jesus teaches us to ask not only for provision, but for pardon as well.

"Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sinned against us."

These two requests seem linked. God, give us our daily bread and forgive us our sins. Most of us don't have any problems remembering to pray for daily bread. Our stomach rumbles, we know when we're hungry. It is easily forgotten that we need a daily pardon, a daily portion of God's forgiveness.

Augustine called this the terrible petition. For it's not just forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us. There is a link between the way I am willing to forgive others and the forgiveness I ask the Father in heaven.

And when we ask for pardon, we're admitting that there is pollution in our lives. When we admit that about ourselves, we're better able to understand the foibles of others.

You see how close to blasphemy it is to come to God and say, “You who are holiness, forgive me my sins. But this person has offended me, and I am so holy, and I am so righteous that it is unthinkable that I will extend forgiveness to that person.” People who do that are self-righteous. You can no more get forgiveness from a self-righteous person than you can get apple juice from a stone slab.

Instead, we might pray, “Lord, deal with me as I have dealt with others. She has offended me, has hurt me badly. And, Lord, I just don’t want to put up with it. Lord, deal with me as I dealt with her.”

V. Jesus teaches us to pray for protection.

“Lead us not into temptation.”

We certainly don’t need the Lord to lead us into temptation. We are fully able to get there all by ourselves – at least I am.

Notice the request Jesus asks us to make in our prayer. “Lord, don’t even let me get close to sin today.” To pray that to God is to ask for a transformation of your attitude. The truth of the matter, if we are honest with ourselves, is that we like temptation. We hope we’re not going to fall into the well of enslaving sin, but we enjoy dancing around the rim, tiptoeing around the edges. We fantasize about temptation.

What would it be like to dance and not have to pay the orchestra? We want the excitement of temptation, but we don’t want the consequences of sin. We want to live in that in-between land of not jumping into the ocean, yet we want to feel the mist of the sea on our face.

Jesus says if you pray to God correctly, you will ask Him to help you stay away not only from sin, but from temptation as well.

It is recognizing that the enemy of our soul would destroy us if he could. And what he wants is to separate us from God, to convince us that God is not a Father but an enemy, that our little kingdoms matter, that our names have to be established, that we have to go out and hustle to get our daily bread – and forget about temptation. In doing that, the enemy separates us from God.

When we pray to the Father that we will be delivered from temptation, what we’re really praying is, “Lord, when I’ve got the inclination to sin, keep me from the opportunity. When I have the opportunity to sin, keep me from the inclination.” Behind the temptation is the tempter, a grim and evil force, a personality whose aim is to destroy us.

Lead us not into temptation.

Lord, teach us to pray. Teach us to realize with whom it is that we speak – a person – that He is our heavenly Father, yet to address Him with reverence.

Lord, teach us to have His program, His will done in our lives.

To realize that it is He who provides for our needs.

To seek His pardon, even as we forgive others.

To ask for His protection from the evil one's temptations.

Samuel Chadwick said **“The one concern of the devil is to keep Christians from praying. He fears nothing from prayerless studies, prayerless work, and prayerless religion. He laughs at our toil, mocks at our wisdom, but he trembles – he trembles – when we pray.”**

Lord, teach us to pray.