

Teach Us To Pray Part 2

Introduction and Recap

Hey, very good evening to all of you. Thank you for joining us in our second session of Christian Education Program, about prayer. This is a series called Teach us to pray. We are really learning the principles of prayer, as taught by our Lord Jesus Christ. And I'm so grateful you can join us for session number two. Last week we looked at why pray? I think this is the most important question to answer. Because if we don't believe in the benefits, and indeed the command to pray then we will never pray effectively. But when we realize that God gives us prayer for many wonderful reasons that encourages us to pray even more.

We saw that prayer was for the purpose of building up a relationship with Him, that we might be a people who recognize our dependence and we may call upon our God. Then, we realize that God doesn't want us to be an anxious people. And he has promised that the peace of God guides our hearts, as we bring all our prayers, and requests, and supplications to him. Then, we learn that prayer really makes a difference. Results of prayer, ask and it shall be given, seek and you shall find, knock and it shall be opened unto you. Prayer is not just informing myself of my own needs, prayer makes a difference. There are results to prayer, not always, of course, let me just qualify it again, the way we want. But prayer will make a difference the way God wants. And then finally, we realize that God is a prayer hearing and rewarding God. He sees our prayers made in secret and one day, he will reward openly your ministry, your labor, in a place of prayer.

Opening prayer

So today, we're going to look a little bit more at who do we pray to. And let's come to God in a word of prayer and ask Him for guidance again, shall we? Father, thank you again, for this session we can have together I pray that this will be helpful useful for your people, that they will understand the theology of prayer that they will really know who to pray to, and how then they should pray thereafter. So bless this time, may your spirit be our teacher, we ask this in Jesus' name, Amen.

Who do we pray to?

Who do we pray to? Well, Jesus taught us be careful that you do not misunderstand the person you pray to. He says in Matthew chapter six, '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' (Matthew 6:7-8). So, this is very interesting. It allows us to think something deeper than just saying, oh, don't repeat empty phrases. This is the issue. The Gentiles, the people who are not the Jews, the people who do not know God, they have this habit of praying, repetitive, empty phrases. They believe that by the sheer repetition, somehow their words will be heard, and their prayers will be answered.

Elijah versus the prophets of Baal

This classic story of Elijah versus the prophets of Baal, which illustrate this very well. You know that Elijah, in First Kings, challenge the false prophets of Baal to a battle, a royal battle at Mount Carmel. He challenges them whoever can call upon their God to bring down fire on the bulls sacrifice on the altar will be the true God. And he gave first opportunity or first chance to the prophets of Baal. So of course, the prophets of Baal in this picture began to pray, they pray, and they pray and nothing happened. So, they began to shout, they began to dance, they do all kinds of things. And the Bible says, 'they call upon the name of Baal from morning until noon, saying 'O Baal, answer us!'" (1 Kings 18:26a) O Baal, sheer repetition. They think that by the sheer repeat of these words, they will be heard. 'But there was no voice, and no one answered.' (1 Kings 18:26b) So what did they do? Well, 'they limped around the altar that they had made'. (1 Kings 18:26c) So they kind of acted like they were very pitiful, very sad, they limped around the altar.

How ridiculous is this you say? Well, Elijah felt the same way as you do. But he 'mocked them saying, 'Cry aloud, cry louder, because he's a god, either he is musing, is thinking, or he's in a toilet, or he's somewhere far away on a journey or maybe he's asleep, and you need to wake him up' (1 Kings 18:27). What is Elijah saying? Elijah is saying your god is a useless one because He can't hear you when you want him to. He's either too preoccupied or his far away, and he's not able to respond to you. So, 'they cried aloud, and cut themselves after their custom with swords and lances until the blood gushed out upon them' (1 Kings 18:28).

Why do they do these things? Shout loud, limp around, cut themselves, because the false prophets, the Gentiles, they don't have the right understanding of God, or rather, their understanding of their god is that their god is uncaring, unfeeling, and you need to show how pitiful you are before he will respond to you. And therefore, this story, I think, perfectly illustrates why Jesus says this is not the way you should pray. Don't pray in a nagging way. Don't pray in a way that reflects a wrong understanding of God. Don't pray, thinking that your God needs to be nagged at, your God needs to see how pitiful you are before he will be moved in his heart. You have a wrong theology if you think so. The word theology just means the knowledge of God, *theos* (Greek for the word 'god'). Don't have a wrong theology when it comes to pray.

Repeating prayers

Now, let me just sidetrack a little to ask this question. Is it wrong to repeat prayers? No, not really, not at all. You will see that Jesus prayed the same prayer three times in the Garden of Gethsemane. You will also recall that Paul prayed three times the same prayer for God to remove the thorn in the flesh. You will realize that the Bible tells us to pray ceaselessly Pray without ceasing. So, it is not wrong to pray the same things repeatedly. But it is wrong to pray empty phrases, to pray, in a sense, not because you're earnest and sincere but you just think by that by the sheer mathematics, or the numerous attempts you have, that uncaring, unfeeling, ignorant God will respond to you. So, the issue is not about the number of times you say something, the issue is your understanding, and your knowledge of God that makes you repeat your prayers. I repeat my prayers, because I believe God is

caring. And I want to express my dependence and my desperation before God. But if I think God is uncaring, and I have to nag him, then that is not good prayer. I hope you see that distinction.

Jesus then contrasts this in verse eight by saying, 'Do not be like them, for your Father knows' (Matthew 6:8). You see, empty phrases is because you think that your deity or your God does not care and does not know. Don't pray like that. Don't be like the prophets of Baal. But understand this. You pray to someone who knows exactly what you need, even before you ask him. And you pray for someone who absolutely loves you because He is your Father.

Our Father in Heaven

So, Jesus therefore says, 'Pray then like this, our Father in heaven' (Matthew 6:9). The very first thing we need to understand is who we pray to, and it is here, 'our Father in heaven'. Oh, I can't overemphasize this statement enough. It says, 'Our Father'. Now this is the thing that may not be registering with us most of the time. When we pray, we often say, 'My Father', but I think it's good to remember it's 'Our Father', so that we don't just pray for my needs, my selfish needs, but I pray for the church, I pray for the family, I pray for the community of faith that God has called me to. And so, it's important, I think, that prayer is not just for oneself, but for the community that God has called you to. And later on, you will see more of that in the subsequent requests. Then, of course, we come to the keyword, 'our Father'. That means when I pray, I need to understand I'm not praying to a monster, or to an ogre, or to a tyrant who is so harsh and unfeeling and uncaring. No, he's my tender loving father.

I have two sons. And I can't tell you how much I am for them, I love them. And that's natural. And when God says He's our father, he's trying to help us understand how much he is for us. And so, we can come to him as a loving father, who receives us by grace. Now this is a revolutionary statement. When Jesus says you pray like this our Father, this is something mind boggling. This is shocking, because as far as we read in the Old Testament, no one, no individual calls God 'Father', of course, Jesus is saying, and hinting that because of what he will do, we can now call God 'Father'. So, we have great intimacy, even though we are sinful, even though we are sinners, but because of Jesus, and what He has done, and because of the price for sin that He has paid on the cross, we are forgiven, we are accepted, we are adopted into the family. And now we call God, 'Father'. Amazing, that the great God is our Father.

Now, this is the regular pattern for prayer. People ask, Can I pray to Jesus? Can I pray to the Holy Spirit? My answer? Sure, you can. I think it is not inappropriate, because in the Bible, there are people who speak to the Lord Jesus Christ and beg him and ask of him to do mighty things, nothing wrong to speak to Jesus. But I think it is the regular pattern for the Christian to pray to the Father. So again, I'm not saying it is wrong, to say, 'Oh, thank you, Jesus for dying for me on the cross'. Nothing wrong to say, 'Blessed Spirit, help me fight this sin'. But I don't think that should be the regular pattern for prayer. It should be praying, 'our Father in heaven', I can pray, Lord, thank you for sending your son to die for me. I can pray Lord, allow Your Holy Spirit to enable me. I think those would be appropriate prayers. They are not separate in the sense that they don't communicate with one another. You see the Trinity.

And I want to address this because I fear that there are some people who do not dare to pray to the Father, because somehow, they think that Jesus is more loving. That's problematic. That's bad theology. Because I don't think God is in a sense, compartmentalizing his attributes is that the Father is holy, and the Son is merciful. No, God is holy and merciful and righteous all together. So, when I hear or when you realize that you're praying to Jesus, only exclusively, or you're praying to the spirit exclusively, I don't think that fits the regular pattern for prayer. We pray to the Father, in the name of the Son, by the help of the Holy Spirit. Or, in other words, we depend on the Holy Spirit and we pray on behalf of Jesus, what He Himself would want to pray to the Father, I think that would be the right thing to do. Because we pray to a loving Father, you do not need intermediaries of prayer in this sense. And then we must therefore be, be aware of faulty theology alright.

So, I just want to caution, perhaps, some of us we pray only to Jesus, because we have a flawed idea about the Father, I think that should be corrected. So, our Father and then don't miss this part in heaven. In heaven speaks about his grandeur, about his power, about his greatness. And I think there should be reverence and honor when we pray. So, there's beautiful balance there, right? 'Father' speaks of his proximity to us; how intimate he is with us. We call that the imminence of God, His nearness to us. And then in heaven reminds us of His greatness. We call that the transcendence of God, how great He is. So, this is imminence versus transcendence. And I think, prayer to God is a balance of knowing how close we can get with him. And yet at the same time, realize that he is the Father in heaven, the pure, holy, righteous, sovereign, powerful one.

Conclusion and closing prayer

So let me conclude. If you want to learn how to pray, then it begins with knowing who we pray to. Don't be like, the Gentiles, don't be like the prophets of Baal, who have a very low view of their God. God is far greater than that. Prayer begins with knowing who we pray to. So instead of rushing into the 'what' of prayer, what should we pray for? Maybe this session allows you to pause and think of the 'who' of prayer. And when you know that he's our Father in heaven, well, maybe it inspires you to pray. Right theology, the right knowledge of God will inspire the right kinds of prayer. Our Father in heaven, what a statement.

I close with this. The only reason why we can call our God, our Father in heaven, is because one day, Jesus said, 'My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me?' Every time Jesus prayed in the New Testament, He prays my Father, except this once, on the cross, because there he was our sin bearer, because for our sake He was separated from his God. And because Jesus was made sin for us, we today might be drawn nearer to God and call him, Father. This is the gospel. May this encourage you to know Him and to be faithful to him.

Let's bow for word of prayer. Father, thank You for this time, seal these lessons in our hearts. May right theology, lead us to right prayer lives for your own namesake, we ask in Jesus' name. Amen. Thank you for joining me here. I love to hear your questions at our Q&A session right after this. So, join me on Zoom. And if you can't then join us next week for session number three in 'Teach us to pray'. God bless, see you soon.