

Text: Luke 11:1-13¹

Title: "When you pray, say, 'Father....'"

Series: Talking With Our Father, Part 1

Date: March 1, 2009

Place: First Baptist Church, Olds, AB

"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.'" Luke 11:1

Jesus' response to this question has become one of the most frequently quoted portions of the Word of God. For almost two thousand years it has been spoken in churches, in hospitals, in schools and in private times of devotion and prayer all around the world. It's come to be called "The Lord's Prayer" or in many places, the "Our Father."

Last summer, Ruth and I had the opportunity to worship at St George's Chapel in Windsor Castle and also in Westminster Abbey in London. The format of both of those services was radically different from what we're used to here but in both services there as a moment when we found common ground with those worshippers. Together, with those worshippers, Ruth and I were able to pray, "Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name...."

According to *Wikipedia*, the online encyclopedia...

On Easter Sunday 2007 it was estimated that 2 billion Catholic, Protestant and Eastern Orthodox Christians read, recited, or sang [this] prayer in hundreds of languages in houses of worship of all shapes and sizes. Kang, K. Connie. "Across the globe, Christians are united by Lord's Prayer." *Los Angeles Times*, in *Houston Chronicle*, p. A13, April 8, 2007

The current population of the earth is estimated to be approximately six and a half billion people. So on Easter Sunday two years ago, almost a third of the world's population was united in this prayer. There's no doubt that it has had and continues to have a powerful impact on the lives of believers in Jesus around the world.

Over the next weeks as we move towards Easter 2009, we're going to spend our time together learning about prayer from Jesus and we're going to use this prayer as our foundation. I believe that Jesus' prayer was intended to serve as a model for prayer rather than as a memorized form of prayer. Please hear me when I say that I don't believe that it is wrong to memorize it or quote it from memory or even to pray it word for word as your own prayer. But the fact that the

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rest of the New Testament is full of prayer, but never of this prayer, leads me to believe that Jesus' primary purpose here was to teach his disciples how to pray rather than to teach them what to pray.

This morning, I want to lead you in reading together and possibly, as the Spirit empower and fills these words, in praying together this prayer that Jesus taught to his disciples. Let me give you a few words of introduction to what we're about to do. I want us to avoid sliding into the ritual repetition of a form. I want us to be alive to the words that Jesus taught his disciples.

We're going to take the wording as it's found in Matthew's Gospel rather than the shorter form we find here in Luke's Gospel. We're going to be reading it from the English Standard Version, the translation I've been using for some time now, so we won't be using the King James wording that many of us memorized as children. The ending that we memorized in the King James Version, "For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen" is not included in modern translations of the Bible because it probably wasn't in the original manuscript of the Bible. The earliest copies of Matthew's Gospel don't have this additional ending. It was added later as the prayer became a formula prayer used in church liturgies. However, the addition does reflect a Biblical foundation so it isn't theologically wrong. If you read 1 Chronicles 29, verses 11 to 13, you will read a prayer which voices the themes of God's majesty and power that have been added to the Lord's Prayer in Matthew and is clearly the foundation for the addition to Jesus' "Our Father."

I've said all this to slow us down as we come to these words that are so familiar to so many of us. We need to come to Jesus' teaching on prayer with fresh eyes and open hearts to hear what he has to teach us about how we should pray. As we come to Jesus' words, let's come with the same request the disciples made, "Lord, teach us to pray...." Let's read together Jesus' response to their appeal. Jesus said to them, "**Pray then like this:**

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil." Matthew 6:9-13

There is significant interest in prayer around the world. Major newsmagazines carry articles on prayer. The book market has numerous titles on the subject of prayer. *Books in Print* lists over 2000 titles on prayer. There are retreats and seminars on prayer and a variety of other spiritual disciplines.

Why all this interest? There are a variety of reasons, but at bottom, the reason is simply that mankind was created by God to engage in communication with Him. We are hardwired by our Creator to pray. The Book of Genesis tells us that we were created to talk with God and at bottom, that's what prayer is, talking with

God. But Genesis also tells us that one of the first casualties of our sin was our ability to openly communicate with God. Immediately following their sin, the writer of Genesis tells us that Adam and Eve...

“heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden. But the Lord God called to the man and said to him, “Where are you?” And he said, “I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself.”
Genesis 3:8-10

Our ability to communicate with our Father in heaven was broken by sin and ever since then we’ve been forced to relearn the art of conversation with God. Although we were created for communication with God, we’ve lost the “natural” ability to talk with God. We shouldn’t be surprised about our need to learn how to pray. If you’re uncomfortable with prayer, please know that you’re in good company. Jesus’ disciples recognized their need to learn the art of communication with God.

With Jesus, communication with the Father was natural. There was something about the way in which Jesus prayed that made the disciples hunger to communicate with God. Notice the circumstance that gave rise to the disciples’ request. Luke tells us...

“Now Jesus was praying in a certain place, and when he finished, one of his disciples said to him, “Lord, teach us to pray....” Luke 11:1

Jesus had a freedom in prayer that they had never seen before. As Jews living in a culture that was saturated with the prayers of the Old Testament, the disciples had been exposed to prayer from childhood, but Jesus’ prayer life was something they had never seen before. For Jesus, prayer was natural and the disciples longed to know how to pray the way he prayed.

Over the next few weeks, we’re going to study the best text book on prayer, the Bible, and we’re going to learn from the best teacher there’s ever been on prayer, Jesus.

Turn in your Bible’s with me to Luke chapter 11 and verse 1, the passage that was read earlier. When you get there, let’s just stop for a moment and pray. The prayer is very simple and we’re going to pray it together. It’s just five words and here it is: “Lord, teach us to pray.”

Pray this with me and let’s do it out loud:

“Lord, teach us to pray.”

In response to the disciples' request, Jesus said to them:

“When you pray, say: Father, hallowed be your name.” Luke 11:2

There are some foundation truths we need to notice here that are crucial to learning how to pray Jesus' way.

[First,] we should understand this to be a model prayer

Read Matthew's record of this same teaching a few moments ago. In that passage, we find these words with a slight difference. Matthew records...

**“Pray then like this: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.”
Matthew 6:9**

Jesus' expression recorded in Matthew, “Pray then like this” does not mean, “These are the words you should use, and only these words.” Nor does Luke's wording, “when you pray say” mean that “You must always say or you should only say....” If you take a look at Jesus' own prayers, you'll see that he didn't always and only use this form of words in his prayers to the Father. And if you look at the prayers of the disciples in the rest of the New Testament, you'll never find this form of words repeated in their prayers. But what you will find in both the prayers of Jesus and the prayers of the apostles is the spirit and essence of this model prayer.

For centuries, in churches and schools, this prayer has been recited, word for word, as a regular part of the program of worship and education. I don't think there's anything wrong with that, but ritual repetition of this prayer can lead us to the conclusion that Jesus was encouraging his disciples to memorize these words and repeat them regularly. And if we're not careful, it can turn all our prayer into a ritual of “saying our prayers.”

Several years ago I visited an elderly couple connected with a sister church. The pastor of that church was holidays and so I was asked to look after hospital visitation in his absence. We talked about the various needs they had as a couple and as our visit drew to a close, I asked them if I could pray with them and bring these needs to the Lord. “Yes,” the wife replied, “we'd be happy to say the Lord's Prayer with you.” And so we did, but after praying the Lord's Prayer together I just continued to pray for the needs we had been discussing.

Jesus gave his disciples a model to follow – to build their own prayers upon – not a ritual to recite. Jesus' words contain an outline of effective prayer that can be freely adapted to our needs and to the situation in which we find ourselves. There are at least six major themes contained in the Lord's Prayer. I'm using Matthew's fuller record of Jesus' prayer that gives us the full outline of Jesus' model for prayer. You'll find...

Adoration...

“Our Father in heaven, hallowed by your name.”

Mission...

“Your kingdom come,”

Submission...

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

Petition...

“Give us this day our daily bread,”

Confession...

“and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.”

Protection...

“And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.”

Martin Luther, the founder of the Protestant movement in the 16th century, used this prayer in his daily time with God, but he used it as an outline upon which he hung the needs and situations of his life. With it he wove, what he called, “a wreath of prayer,” that touched his life’s needs and the situations he faced.

This week, I was praying using this outline and I just camped on the first line that emphasizes the adoration and worship of God. I thought of all the ways in which God acts as a Father to me and I spent time praising him for who he is and what he’s done for me as my Father. Here’s my list of the “Father” qualities of God:

God the Father is my...

- Protector
- Teacher
- Provider
- Counsellor
 - Guide
- Comforter
- Care-giver
- Disciplinarian
 - Friend
- Encourager

You can take any of the six themes in the prayer and just spend time exploring what it means to bring it to God in conversation.

In the coming weeks we’re going to expand on these themes, but for today, I just want you to get a picture of prayer as a wreath that we weave from the strands given to us by Jesus. If you were to weave a wreath of prayer, which strand would you begin with today? What do you need to say to God today? What needs are you facing that you need to bring to Him? What situations around you need His intervention?

Keep those things in mind because you'll get an opportunity to bring your personal praise and petitions to God during the communion service in a few minutes.

[Secondly,]

We should recognize that this is a corporate prayer

“When you pray, say, ‘Father...’ Luke 11:2

Jesus often spent time praying alone, but he also prayed near his disciples, perhaps hoping to awaken within them a hunger to share in the obvious intimacy he had with his Father. It seems to have had the desired effect because the disciples came and asked for instruction on how they, too, could speak with God as Jesus did.

In my experience there are men and women of God whose prayer life has given me a hunger to know my Father in the same, intimate way that they do. When I prayed with them I was drawn into their communion with God:

- Dr. Griffiths – his humility and gentleness in prayer came from his deep experience of the majesty and kindness of our heavenly Father.
- Mrs. Bruneau – her wonderful joy and freedom in prayer came from her joy in knowing the goodness of her heavenly Father.
- Al Stebbing – his utter confidence in God came from his experience of seeing God do great things in building His church in Charlie Lake.

I could name many others – some from this church and others from previous churches I've attended, but I won't this morning. Obviously, unless we had prayed together I never would have had the opportunity to hear them and to be inspired to greater commitment in my own prayer life.

The words that Jesus uses in this prayer are plural: when “you pray,” is plural, not singular. And we're to petition God to “Give **us**,” not “me,” “**our** daily bread.” We're to call on God to “forgive **us**,” not just “me,” “**our** sins.” We're to implore God to “lead **us not** into temptation.” Notice that it is “us” and “our,” not “me” and “mine.” And in Matthew's Gospel, this corporate spirit is heightened by the fact that the very first word of the prayer is “our”:

“Our Father in heaven....” Matthew 6:9

In the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew chapter 6, Jesus warns against “showy” public praying. (Matt 6:5-6) The brothers and sisters whose names I mentioned this morning as past prayer partners of mine would be horrified to hear their names mentioned by me this morning as models of prayer – they are people of deep humility. That's why I won't mention the names of any prayer warriors present here in this church – I don't want to embarrass you.

But although Jesus warns against “showy” public prayer, please understand that Jesus isn’t against public prayer. Jesus warns against “show” prayers, but he also invited the disciples to pray with him, out loud. What is needed is a balance between public and private prayer – the one feeding and supporting the other.

Praying in the stillness of our hearts is not forbidden in Scripture, but in this central teaching of Jesus about prayer, he portrays prayer as a spoken act, not a thought, and as an action done together.

In the Psalms, a great text book on prayer, we read of “shouting” and “crying” and “calling” out to God. We read of prayers as declarations of God’s goodness in the public assembly of God’s people. Prayer is a very public act in which we openly declare our love for God, our allegiance to God and our worship of God. Prayer is a very public act in which we declare our need for Him and in which we call for his intervention in our lives, in the lives of others and in our world.

In our church body I am confident that many of you are engaged in regular, heart-felt, spiritually alive prayer in your personal lives and in your families. I’m also sure that there is corporate prayer going on in our small groups and ministry teams. But I’m challenging us today to consider the need to allow our corporate, church-wide prayer expression to grow.

Brothers and sisters listen to me carefully this morning. One of the things that motivated me to focus on prayer in this sermon series was my experience of our prayer time at our last congregational meeting. For the past ten years, ever since I’ve been here and probably even before I arrived, we begin every congregational meeting with a half hour of worship singing and prayer. As the membership of the church gathers to discuss the direction of the body of Christ I don’t believe there is anything more important than prayer. When I first arrived ten or so years ago, I committed myself to growing this area of our church’s life. What I realized at our last meeting was that I have failed. I haven’t moved our corporate prayer life forward one inch.

Now if you’re squirming in your seats, please be encouraged by what I’m about to say. Here it is: **it’s my fault, not your’s**. There is a piece of common pastoral wisdom that says that after you’ve been in a church for seven years, some say five years, the character of the church is a reflection of your pastoral priorities. If corporate prayer needs to grow in this church it’s because corporate prayer needs to grow in my life. It needs to become a priority for me. I need to encourage prayer. I need to plan for prayer. I need to give leadership in prayer. I need to make corporate prayer a priority for my life and ministry.

I’m working on a plan for a corporate prayer event for Holy Week, the week between Palm Sunday to Easter Sunday. I’m working on some ideas to encourage corporate prayer in our small groups and ministry teams. And I’m

working on some other corporate prayer ideas that I hope will stimulate and encourage us to pray together with an increased confidence and joy. If you've got some thoughts on encouraging corporate prayer, throw them my way in the next few weeks.

But let me ask you this: Thinking about the themes that Jesus identifies for us in his model prayer, what do WE, as a church, need to say to our Father today? Keep those things in mind because I'm going to give you an opportunity to bring those petitions to the Father during the communion service.

There's a very important [**third**] principle to identify and this is it:

We should understand that this is a family prayer

“When you pray, say, ‘Father...’” Luke 11:2

Being president of the United States is one of the world's most highly pressurized jobs. Time is precious; appointments to see the president are short and set well in advance. I love the story I read once of an incident during John F. Kennedy's presidency. He was in the middle of an important meeting with a foreign ambassador when one of his kids broke into the Oval office, ran to Kennedy and jumped into their dad's arms to tell him some important kid's stuff – no appointment necessary!

Our Father is the King of kings and ruler of the universe, but there isn't a moment when He isn't willing and ready to listen to us. There isn't anything on his agenda ahead of our need to speak with him – we have immediate access!

Ray Stedman had some great insights on the meaning of this word, “Father.” He wrote:

“The word father answers all the philosophical questions about the nature of God. A father is a person; therefore, God is not a blind force behind the inscrutable machinery of the universe. A father is able to hear; therefore, God is not some impersonal being, aloof from all our troubles and problems. And above all, a father is predisposed by love and relationship to give a careful, attentive ear to what his child says. God is like that. From a father a child can surely expect a reply. And when we pray, we are talking to our Father.” Ray Stedman, Talking With My Father, Discovery House Publishers, © 1997 Elaine Stedman, p. 55

If you are a child of God then you have access to the Father, right now. You need to settle that relationship once and for all. Are you a member of the Father's family? Jesus' teaching on prayer was given to his disciples who had a relationship of faith with him and unless we have that same faith relationship with Jesus, we don't have a relationship with the Father.

How do you become a child of the Father? This is what the Bible says...

“But to all who did receive him [that is, Jesus], who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.” John 1:12-13

The moment you become a child of the Father through faith in Jesus the Son, you gain immediate access into the Father’s presence. As a child of the Father, he longs for us to come to him more than we desire to pray to him. He wants to meet our needs in prayer. To illustrate how ready the Father was to answer the requests of his children, Jesus told his disciples a story.

Jesus said,

“Which of you who has a friend will go to him at midnight and say to him, ‘Friend, lend me three loaves, for a friend of mine has arrived on a journey, and I have nothing to set before him’; and he will answer from within, ‘Do not bother me; the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed. I cannot get up and give you anything’? I tell you, though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, yet because of his impudence he will rise and give him whatever he needs.” Luke 11:5-8

The reluctant friend, Jesus suggested, would get up and answer the request because the man persisted in asking, even though friendship should have been enough. Jesus wasn’t suggesting that God was like the reluctant friend. He was simply saying that if human friends help each other in hard and inconvenient situations, ***how much more*** will our Father in heaven help us in our time of need.

◆ **The Father longs to be our greatest “friend in need”**

Our needs often arise when it’s inconvenient for others to help us. Year’s ago, when we were living in Ontario, Ruth was stuck some miles away with the car keys locked in our car. It was night-time. She was stuck at a gas station after working late. She phoned home for help but we didn’t have a second car so I phoned a friend. He was glad to help. He drove me there with my set of keys. Why? Because he was a friend.

Some years ago, my niece Lisa was returning to Ontario from college in the United States. Her car broke down late in the evening. She called home and her dad got in his vehicle and without even a moments hesitation, drove from Ontario to Pennsylvania in the middle of the night to rescue his daughter at a service station. Why? Because he was her father!

I hesitated a bit when I thought of phoning my friend to help get Ruth out of her predicament with our car. I wondered whether it might be too much to ask, whether it might be too inconvenient; whether it was right to expect him to help me on such short notice. But I can guarantee that my niece didn’t hesitate for a

moment to call her father to drive through the night to come and rescue her. God is more than our Friend – he’s our Father, and we shouldn’t hesitate for a moment to call on him.

What do you need from the Father today? Please know this: the Father is your greatest “Friend in need”!

Jesus also made an analogy between human fathers and the perfection of our Father in heaven. He said...

**“What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will instead of a fish give him a serpent; or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!”
Luke 11:11-13**

Human fathers know enough about fathering to give what is appropriate for meeting needs. To meet the hunger of our children, I hope we have enough sense, dads, to provide our families with the food they need. If we human fathers know enough to meet those obvious needs, how much more then can we look to our “heavenly Father” to meet the needs we bring to him? He wants to meet our needs for “daily bread,” but he also wants to do so much more!

◆ **The Father longs to meet our greatest needs**

Notice that Jesus says that our “heavenly Father” is ready and willing to give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him. Why would Jesus mention the Spirit when he’s talking about meeting our needs?

Let me ask you:

- Do you need more of **the Father’s love**?

“God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.” Romans 5:5

- Do you need more of **the Father’s strength**?

**“I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being”
Ephesians 3:14-16**

- Do you need more of **the Father’s direction**?

“When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth” John 16:13

- Do you need **the Father’s victory** over sin?

“For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.” Romans 8:13-14

- Do you need **the Father’s peace and joy**?

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control” Galatians 5:22-23

- Do you long for a greater **assurance of your relationship** with the Father?

“you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, ‘Abba! Father!’ The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God” Romans 8:15-16

What do you need from the Father today? Let’s pray together:

“Father, you want us to simply talk with you because we are your children and because you have so much to give us if we simply ask you for it. As your children, Father, we come, with open arms, to receive what you have to give to us. We receive with thanks in Jesus’ name, Amen.”

Adoration...

“Our Father in heaven, hallowed by your name.”

Mission...

“Your kingdom come,”

Submission...

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

Petition...

“Give us this day our daily bread,”

Confession...

“and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.”

Protection...

“And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.”

[Please leave this slide on the screen during the communion service – thanks]

- **The Lord’s Table**
 - **The Bread:** silent prayer for personal praise & petitions to God
 - **The Cup:** silent prayer for corporate praise & petitions to God.

- **Song of Commissioning:** Great Is Thy Faithfulness (#139 – verse 1 & 3)
- **Benediction**

“Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God our Father, who loved us and gave us eternal comfort and good hope through grace, comfort your hearts and establish them in every good work and word.” 2 Thessalonians 2:16-17