

INTRODUCTION

Since the terrorist attack on September 11, I have heard the word "pray" more on national television than at any other period in my memory. Instead of advertising "Whopper deals" Burger King restaurants have "PRAY FOR AMERICA" on their signs. Every time someone says, "God bless America," they are praying. And as we journey through the Gospel according to Luke, we come to the some of Jesus' most profound teaching on *how* to pray. Gallup polls taken before the terrorist attack reveal 90% of Americans claimed to pray regularly and I believe that number must be closer to 99% now. I love the way children pray—we can learn from their simplicity. Here are a few examples:

Dear God,
I bet it is very hard for you to love all the people in the world. There are only four people in our family and I can never do it.
Nan

Dear God,
Did you mean for the giraffe to look like that or was it an accident?
Norma

Dear God,
Thank you for my baby brother, but what I prayed for was a puppy.
Joyce

Dear God,
Please send me a pony. I never asked for anything before. You can look it up.
Bruce

Dear God,
I want to be just like my daddy when I get big, but not with so much hair all over.
Sam

Dear God, If you watch me in church Sunday, I'll show you my new shoes.
Mickey

Dear God, I think about you sometimes, even when I'm not praying.
Elliott

One of the best selling books in America is *The Prayer of Jabez*. In this little book, Bruce Wilkinson examines a short prayer from I Chronicles 4 prayed by a man named Jabez. This 29-word prayer is used as an example and the reader is encouraged to pray it daily. I've read the book. I appreciate any book that makes people pray more. Someone asked me recently if I prayed the prayer of Jabez every day. I told them, "No, I prefer the Prayer of Jesus." This person was puzzled and asked, "Oh, who wrote that book?" I told them, "God did. It's only found in the Bible." These few verses are often called The Lords' Prayer or the Model Prayer. I prefer it to the Prayer of Jabez because I'm convinced Jesus knew a lot more about prayer than Jabez could

ever know! Let's read it, and remember whenever you read from the NIV, you always need to include the footnotes.

One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he finished, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples." He said to them, "When you pray, say: '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. Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us. And lead us not into temptation. [but deliver us from the evil one]'"

I hope your desire today is to say the same thing the disciples said, "Lord, teach us to pray." You *can* improve your prayer life. I've had dozens of people say to me through the years, "Pastor, I just don't feel like my prayers are getting past the ceiling." In frustration, some people just quit praying. If you walked into a room and flipped on the light switch and nothing happened what would you do? Would you say, "Thomas Edison was a liar and Benjamin Franklin was a fraud. I've had it with electric lights!" No, you'd think, "Something's wrong, but it can be fixed. Either the bulb needs replacing, or a fuse is blown, or the electricity is shut down in this area." The same can be said of prayer. If it seems your prayers are ineffective, there are some things you can do to "fix" your prayer problem. Jesus gives us the best advice on how to improve or fix your prayer life.

At churches all across America today, thousands of people will recite The Lord's Prayer, or the Model Prayer, which I prefer. But I wonder if everyone who recites it will be praying sincerely? I confess that when I was playing High School football in South Alabama, our team would get on our knees and pray this prayer before every game. You can probably imagine what it sounded like as we chanted, "Ou' Fa'tha which a' in heav'n ... hallo be thy name. (our voices got louder and faster toward the end) .. for thine is the kingdom and th pow'r and the glor fo' ev' an ev' Amen—Yeah!" I can't speak for the other guys, but I wasn't thinking about praising God and my need for forgiveness, I was thinking about getting out there and knocking a few heads! It was more of a pep cheer to motivate us than a genuine prayer. Jesus warned about using "vain repetitions" when we pray; I was certainly guilty of it!

I'm convinced Jesus never intended this to be prayer to be repeated from memory. Instead, He gave us a great pattern all our prayers should follow. Those of you who work much with word processors know both Microsoft Word and WordPerfect have "templates" for different kinds of documents. The template provides the outline, and you simply fill in the information. This prayer is a template we are to use to fill in as we pray. To pray the Jesus way, you must follow at least six principles:

1. RECOGNIZE GOD'S CHARACTER—"Our Father ... "

How you pray will be determined by what you believe about God. If you think God is some uninterested, unapproachable tyrant on the other side of the universe, you will think praying is a waste of time. Jesus taught that God is like a loving Father. That concept of God is unique to our faith. Other religions don't teach it. People are interested in Islam these days, not to convert to it, but to try to understand the terrorists' motivation. We've had hundreds of orders for the message

I gave on "Understanding Islam." It is critically important for us to note the important distinctions between Christianity and Islam. For instance, the Koran never refers to Allah as a "Father." Islam teaches there are 99 titles for Allah, and I've read all of them. They include titles such as the Avenger, the Powerful, the Subduer, The Merciful, the Compassionate, but would you like to guess how many times God is referred to as a Father in the Koran? Zero. Nada. In fact, the Koran clearly *rejects* the idea of God being the Father of Jesus: "The Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, was only the Messenger of God, and His Word that He committed to Mary, and a Spirit from Him. So believe in God and His Messengers, and say not, 'Three.' Refrain; better is it for you. God is only one God. Glory be to Him—[He is] above having a son." (Quran 4:171)

Jesus' most revolutionary teaching was His claim to come from Heaven and He had a Heavenly Father. "Father" was His favorite designation for God. He referred to God as "Father" 117 times in the Gospel of John. The only time Jesus didn't use the term "Father" was when He was on the cross and called out, "My God, my God why have you forsaken me?"

Sometimes people mention the universal "fatherhood" of God over all people. But that's what it is, Universalism, and Jesus didn't teach that. Jesus made it clear God is *not* the Father of everyone, only those who have been made a part of His family. Jesus said to the Pharisees, "You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desire. He was a murderer from the beginning." (John 8:44) There are two spiritual fathers and two spiritual families on this earth.

If you have trusted Jesus as your personal Savior, you can rejoice that God *is* your Father, and He relates to you the way a loving father relates to his child. There is a formal word for "father," *pater*, Jesus often used when speaking of God, but He also called God, "Abba." That was a tender word of affection a little child would use. It's like our word "papa." And we can use that same term of affection when we address God. Paul writes: For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of Sonship [adoption]. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father." (Romans 8:15)

Jesus is teaching us when you pray, you can talk to God the way a child talks to a loving Father. That's why I don't care for "flowery prayers" that use a lot of artificial words. Some people resist praying in a group because they have heard preachers pray and they think they have to use special words and phrases. I've never understood why a preacher would talk normally out of the pulpit, but when he begins to pray he sounds like he swallowed a communion table or something. "Dear Gaaaaaaaaaad . . ."

Let's imagine this scenario: My family drives up to Dairy Queen and one of my daughters wants some ice cream. How is she going to speak to me? Is she going to say, "Hail, Thou Eminent and wise Pastor of Green Acres. Wouldest thou grant to thy female offspring one crisp, green, dollar bill so that I mightest purchase from yon rapid service food establishment one savory frozen diary concoction to tickle the tastebuds of my tender mouth?" That's the way some people pray. No, she's going to say, "Dad, may I have a dollar for some ice cream?" That doesn't show disrespect. She's not going to say, "Hey, old man, gimme' a dollar!" Simply understanding God is your loving Father will affect the way you approach Him and how you address Him.

2. RESPECT GOD'S NAME—"hallowed be your name ... "

One kid said He knew God's name, "Harold be your name." The word is "hallowed." Unless we talk about the "hallowed halls" of some old building, we don't really use the word "hallow" very often. "Halloween" literally means "hallows eve" or the night before a holy day, All Saints Day, which is November 1. The word basically means "holy" or "special." In the Bible, a person's name was always connected to their character. Our God is not only a Loving Father; He is a Holy God, worthy of praise.

Jesus is teaching a pattern here. It's good to begin your prayer with praise. Praise is bragging on God's character. You can do that in your own words or sing a song of praise. In my personal prayer time, I often read a Psalm of praise to God. Many of the Psalms contain words of pure praise. For instance, let's praise God for a moment by reading from Psalm 93:1-2: "The Lord reigns, he is robed in majesty; the Lord is robed in majesty and is armed with strength. The world is firmly established it cannot be moved. Your throne was established long ago; you are from all eternity."

You praise God for Who He is; you thank Him for what He's done. Every Father loves to be praised and thanked by his children. When our kids ask us for things thank us, it blesses us. But when they simply brag on us, it blesses us in an even great way! You can bless God by bragging on Him!

This past Father's Day Jenni sent me a card that read, "Loving Father, How blessed I am—I am constantly amazed at how fortunate I am to be your daughter. You are an incredible leader—your character is reflected in your firm handshake and your tears at a silly video ... " she said other things, but she ended by writing, "You'll always be the first man I loved! Happy Father's Day, Jen" Whew! Do you think I was blessed? And I'm going to have to walk her down this aisle and give her away in marriage on December 29. In the same way, your Heavenly Father is blessed when you praise Him. Before you ask for anything, spend some time bragging on the greatness of God.

3. REQUEST GOD'S KINGDOM (HIS WILL)—"Your kingdom come ... "

The first request in the model prayer is for us to ask God to establish His kingdom on earth. The phrase "your will be done on earth as it is in heaven" is not an additional request, but a clarification of the first one. God's kingdom is established whenever His will is done. God is king of heaven, of course, because His perfect will is always done there. God's kingdom is established in your life when you are committed to living by His will and not your own. When Jesus told us to "seek first the kingdom of God" (Matthew 6:33), He meant we are to choose to follow God's Will for our lives.

The concept of the "will of God" is greatly misunderstood in our world. For instance, some people have such a fatalistic, fixed idea of the will of God they say *everything* that happens is the will of God. Sometimes insurance companies use the term "acts of God" to describe damage caused by weather or other natural means. May I suggest it is *not* a great idea to let insurance companies determine your theology? What about September 11? Some people say the airliners

flying into the World Trade Towers was the “Will of God.” If you believe that, then you agree with Osama Bin Laden who said that same thing. His official comment was, “insha Allah” which means it was the will of Allah to punish the great Satan.

God is in control and He is sovereign, but He loves us so much He has given us a very dangerous capacity: to choose. He didn’t create us as robots that automatically *do* His will 100% of the time.

As a young pastor fresh out of seminary, there was a terrible accident in our little community that happened on Christmas Eve. The dad had been drinking and was driving at a high rate of speed to get to his parents’ house. He lost control of the car and he and his young wife and two young children were killed.

It’s the only time in my ministry I’ve conducted a funeral with four caskets present, thank God. The family didn’t go to our church, but some family members had asked me to assist in the funeral. Another pastor spoke before me and he basically said, “This was God’s Will.” He said it in such a smug, certain way, I was hurt for the family because his attitude drove them away from God at a time when they needed God’s help and hope. When it was my time to speak, I tried to communicate with the family that God is a God of love and compassion and He grieves when we grieve. I also said that because sin is present in this world, there is evil. There are sinful people who make evil choices. There are always terrible consequences to face when an evil choice is made. I’ve never forgotten that funeral.

In this model prayer, Jesus teaches a

Powerful Principle: God’s Will is always done in Heaven, but not on earth—so we must pray for it to be done—and then do His will!

If everything that automatically and arbitrarily happens on this planet *is* the will of God, *why* would Jesus have instructed us to *pray* for God’s Will to be done on earth? His will is done in heaven, and I assure you there are no drunk drivers or terrorist pilots in heaven. God will not force His will on anyone. None of you got out of bed this morning and marched to church like zombies who had no control over your decisions. No, you *chose* to get up and to follow God’s Will by assembling with others to worship as His Word directs. We’re living in a world where God’s Will is not done much of the time. That’s why we pray for His Kingdom to come, because when it does come in your life and into this world *then* His will is done, on earth as it is in heaven.

God’s Will is connected to His Word. If someone wants to know what my will (desire) is I can tell them or write it out, but I don’t want them presuming to know what my will is. God clearly stated His Will in His Word, the Bible. That’s why we must study the Word of God to determine what *is* His Will. It’s dangerous to presume the will of God. Study God’s Word, and then pray that His Will be done, and be willing to *do* it yourself.

4. RELY ON GOD’S PROVISION—“give us each day ... ”

This part of the Model prayer teaches us several important things. First, it is God who supplies all your needs, even the most basic need—food. Every day we are to trust Him and to ask Him to provide whatever we need. Paul writes, “My God shall supply all your needs according to His riches in glory through Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 4:19) Notice he said “all your needs” not “all your wants.”

Every time you pause to pray before a meal you acknowledge God supplied the food and money to buy the food. Dr. H. A. Ironsides once ate in restaurant that was so crowded, he had to sit at a table with a stranger. Before he ate, Dr. Ironsides asked the stranger if he might pray. The stranger said, “Go ahead. But I don’t ever pray before I eat. I just jump right in and eat.” With a smile, Dr. Ironsides said, “You know, that’s exactly what my dog does. He just jumps right in and eats, too.” Then He proceeded to pray and was able to talk to the man about Christ as they ate.

There is also significance in the phrase “each day.” Jesus was teaching we must depend upon God’s provision every single day. We stockpile our pantries and freezers with food to last us for many days, but prayer doesn’t work that way. You can’t stockpile your prayers. In the Old Testament, God fed the wandering Israelites with manna from heaven. But each day, except the Sabbath, they had to go out and collect a fresh supply. Yesterday’s manna was always rotten. Yesterday’s prayers are no good for you today. The key to effective praying is setting aside a time every single day to spend time with God.

We often call that a quiet time. Sure you ought to pray as you drive, and before you eat, and whenever you lie down in your bed, but it’s *best* to set aside a special time to focus on God in prayer. That was the habit of Jesus. Mark 1:35 tells us Jesus got up before daylight and went out to a solitary place to pray. Our world is so crazy and there are so many demands that create stress a quiet time is not just a good idea, it is a necessity.

C.S. Lewis wrote: “The moment you wake up each morning, all your wishes and hopes for the day rush at you like wild animals. And the first job each morning consists in shoving it all back; in listening to that other voice, taking that other point of view, letting that other, larger, stronger, quieter life come flowing in.”

If you want more practical tips on how to develop a consistent quiet time, I suggest you get a copy of *The Spiritual Powerbook* available in our Discover Life Bookstore. This is a prayer journal that allows you to keep track of your prayer requests and answers and it has a lot of very practical information on *how* to have a consistent personal prayer time.

5. REFLECT GOD’S FORGIVENESS—“forgive us our sins”

One reason I seldom call this the “Lord’s Prayer” is because I believe Jesus didn’t actually *pray* this prayer. The Bible teaches He was totally sinless so He had no need to ask for forgiveness. Instead it is a “Model Prayer” because each of us *desperately* needs God’s forgiveness.

We have all sinned, and we continue to make mistakes and experience failure. Jesus recognized the greatest need a person has is forgiveness.

Do you remember our passage from Luke 5 where four friends tore up the roof to lower their paralyzed friend in front of Jesus? All of us would have looked at the man and claimed his greatest need was for physical healing. Jesus looked at the man and said, “Friend, your sins are forgiven.” Look around this crowd. You may see people you think have certain needs, or you may see people who you think they don’t need anything. But Jesus looks at each of us and says, “You need forgiveness.”

When you are born again, the *penalty* of sin (hell and separation from God) is once-for-all removed. But the *presence* of sin is still a reality. Even though we have a new nature, our flesh is constantly dragging us back into a sin. A Christian may sin, but a *true* Christian cannot sin and enjoy it.

There is a key point to this prayer many people miss. Jesus was actually teaching us to pray, “Forgive us our sins *in the same way* that we forgive those who sin against us.” He makes it perfectly clear in Matthew 6: “For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.” (Matthew 6:14-15)

That doesn’t mean you can earn God’s forgiveness by forgiving others. It means when you have truly experienced God’s forgiveness you will reflect that forgiveness to others. You must understand your sin against a holy God was so horrific, no man will ever sin against you as badly as you sinned against God—and He forgives you. Once you understand the *cost* of God’s forgiveness, the death of His precious son, you can’t hold on to unforgiveness. Your willingness to forgive others is *proof* of your salvation not a *prerequisite*.

Years ago, a church member complained to me about how another man had treated him unjustly in a business deal. I can still recall his words, “I know what the Bible says, but I just *can’t* forgive him.”

“You used the wrong word. It’s not that you *can’t*; it’s that you *won’t*.” I said.

He agreed, “Okay, I guess it’s that I *won’t* forgive him.”

“Well then you better hope that when you stand before God you have never committed a single thought or deed of sin, because God *won’t* forgive you.” He didn’t like it but he later told me he had forgiven the man.

Unconfessed sin short-circuits your prayer life. If you flip the “prayer switch” and nothing is happening, the first place to look is to see if there is sin in your life you are hanging onto. David wrote: “If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened.” (Psalm 66:18). I have found whenever I ask God, “Father is there some sin or attitude in my life that is not pleasing to you and I’m not even aware of it?” He *always* points something out.

6. REMAIN ON GOD’S PATHWAY—“lead us not into temptation ... ”

The wording of this statement has been misunderstood. It literally means, “lead us, lest we fall into temptation and deliver us from the Evil One.” God *cannot* lead you into temptation. James wrote: When tempted, no one should say, “God is tempting me.” For God cannot be tempted by

evil, nor does he tempt anyone; but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. (James 1:13-14)

God's pathway never leads to sin. It's our own evil desires that make us want to leave God's pathway of purity and go off into some roadway of ruin. Prayer helps you remain on God's pathway. The devil is the evil one, and he hates it when a Christian prays. Samuel Chadwick wrote: "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 when we pray." And Charles Spurgeon wrote: "I would rather teach one man to pray than to teach ten men to preach."

As you journey through life, you will be lured off God's pathway to take some enticing-looking detour. Every day, you and I are confronted with a decision about different pathways to follow. The vast majority of Americans are on pathways of their own design or the popular pathway trying to "be like everyone else." Robert Frost wrote a poem, "The Road Not Taken," in which the final lines read: "Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—I took the one less traveled by, And that has made all the difference." God's leadership is a road that seems to be less traveled these days. Will you pray this prayer and tell God you will follow His leadership?

Some look at this model prayer and think they found a flaw. They point out this is a selfish prayer and there is no intercession for others. They are wrong because Jesus used the plural pronouns, "give us, forgive us, lead us ..." If you want to pray for me, I'd ask you to pray that I would remain on God's pathway. I can pray that for you, too.

Some of you have gotten off of God's pathway for your life; you made some poor choices. God is calling you to follow Him again. Will you get back on track today? Confess your sins and start following His will as you discover it in his Word.

Where is God's pathway leading? Let's let the Bible answer that: He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he restores my soul. He guides me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake. (Psalm 23:2-3)

Some of you need some green pastures today. We've got plenty of Green Acres of love and friendship here in our church. Will you join us and let us love you? Some of you are going through such troubled waters you feel you are drowning. Jesus can be your bridge over troubled waters and He can lead you beside still, quiet waters. Is it righteousness you need? None of us has enough of our own. The Bible says our self-righteousness is as filthy rags. If you will get on God's pathway you'll find Jesus. He'll take your sins, and He will give you His righteousness in exchange. The Bible says, "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." (II Corinthians 5:21)

This is more than just a prayer to pray—it is a guide that will put you on God's pathway to eternal life. Will you follow Him today?

OUTLINE

1. RECOGNIZE GOD'S CHARACTER "*Our Father ...*"

For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of Sonship (adoption). And by him we cry, "Abba, Father." *Romans 8:15*

2. RESPECT GOD'S NAME "*hallowed be your name ...*"

3. REQUEST GOD'S KINGDOM (HIS WILL) "*Your kingdom come ...*"

Powerful principle: God's will is always done in heaven, but not on earth. So we must pray for it to be done—and then do His will!

4. RELY ON GOD'S PROVISION "*give us each day ...*"

5. REFLECT GOD'S FORGIVENESS "*forgive us our sins*"

For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins. *Matthew 6:14-15*

6. REMAIN ON GOD'S PATHWAY "*lead us not into temptation*"

When tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. *James 1:13-14*

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To put it in Texas terms, “You’re mighty welcome to use any and all of my ingredients; just make your own chili!”

For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes