

Jesus Teaches Us To Pray

Jesus is the one who teaches us how to pray. As you read the accounts of the life and work of Jesus in the gospels, and the book of Acts, and the Epistles that follow, you develop a sense of the significance of prayer and of its companions—faith, obedience, submission, steadfastness, and all the virtues that make us more like Jesus, conformed to his image, His life being lived out in us—His Church, His earthly body.

In the Old Testament we are given many examples of prayer—many great and effective prayers, certainly—but not specific instructions or guidelines for prayer. Jesus, in His Sermon on the Mount, began teaching His disciples how to pray. He did it in a sequential way, giving them the step-by-step pattern for building a solid foundation for a life of prayer. You find this beginning in Matthew 6.

How to pray (a pattern for prayer) (Matthew 6:9-13) In what we in the evangelical and Reformed traditions have historically known as “The Lord’s Prayer,” Jesus gives us real help. What He gives is not so much a listing of proper and appropriate words to say but a guideline for the whole of our prayer life. He shines His brilliant light upon the things that should occupy our thoughts and intentions as we come to the place of prayer and approach the awesome the caring Creator God:

Our Father...Jesus begins with the recognition of a relationship (Father is a relationship word), This shows that we are aware of the One to whom we speak, and for whose voice we listen. He is Father of all who believe (not all human beings, but of all who come to Him through faith in Jesus Christ: see John 1:12).

Your Name be honored as holy....This is worship. First we acknowledge the relationship with our Father, then we worship Him, knowing who He is and who we are before Him.

Your Kingdom come... Your will be done... This is submission or surrender. It is our plea that He become and remain King and Lord of our life; and that His will, not ours, be done in our lives and in His world.

Give us today our daily bread... This is our first petition (notice that we are not to begin our praying by giving God our “laundry list; of request). He we recognize that God is our provider, and that He has taught us to ask for what we need (not merely for what we want, or for what will bring us beauty, wealth, comfort, pleasure or happiness).

Forgive us our debts... Jesus says we are to ask forgiveness of our sins, the things we do that are disobedient to His Word and, therefore, offensive to God. This assumes and includes confession—the recognition that we are sinners and need to be forgiven of the specific sins we commit day by day.

As we also have forgiven our debtors...We are to ask to be forgiven in the same measure that we have forgiven others for wrongs done to us. The seriousness of the command to forgive is emphasized later (in Matthew 6:14-15) as Jesus declares that we must first forgive others if we are to be forgiven and restored to fellowship with God—which our sinfulness can so easily disrupt (see Isaiah 59:2).

Do not bring us into temptation... A prayer for guidance in life’s decisions. The word used for temptation means “testing.” God does allow us to be tested. (The equivalent word occurs in Genesis

22:1, where we are told that “God tested Abraham.” It had become essential that Abraham understand what it would mean to obey God at all costs). Sometimes the test is confusing-not clearly a matter of right and wrong. The Christian is most often tempted to pursue the good in place of the best. While it is true that we should ask not be tempted by the fleshly and worldly attractions surrounding us, it is more often Satan’s strategy to simply get us slightly off track- just enough to keep us from find God’s best in our lives. We must pray to be delivered from that kind of testing.

Deliver us from the evil one...Jesus says we are to ask God for protection from the power and trickery of Satan. (The word used here for evil one is masculine, not neuter; it refers to Satan, not to the “cosmic power of evil,” or any such concept.) Satan is alive and “prowling around like a roaring lion, looking for anyone he can devour” (1 Peter 5:8). Only the power of God will give adequate protection from the enemy.

This is the first, basic, elementary teaching of Jesus on prayer recorded in the New Testament. He taught it to His disciples as a part of His Sermon on the Mount – the manifesto of life in the kingdom of God. It is an essential part of the teaching, to be taken as the very command of God in the same way and to the same degree that all other teaching of our Lord is to be understood.

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