

“Lord, Teach Us to Pray” – (Luke 11:1)

Introduction – “...after we have learned by faith to know that whatever is necessary for us or defective in us is supplied in God and in our Lord Jesus Christ, in whom it hath pleased the Father that all fulness should dwell, that we may thence draw as from an inexhaustible fountain, it remains for us to seek and in prayer implore of him what we have learned to be in him.” – John Calvin.

We speak of God’s control over everything. We hear of God’s goodness and kindness towards every man and woman in Christ. And yet, how little we pray. We continue to struggle with prayer as a heavy obligation rather than a heavenly opportunity. Let us join with the disciples and ask, “Lord, teach us to pray.”

They Saw Him Pray – Jesus was in ‘a certain place’ and His disciples were with Him as He prayed. The indication is that Jesus prayed often, most likely, ‘without ceasing’, as Paul will instruct us later. Luke records that Jesus prayed many times before this encounter (3:21, 5:16, 6:12, 9:18, 28-29). Jesus, the Son of God, the One with the ability to speak to diseases or demons, to storms or to the sick, and have them all obey Him, would appear to be a Man who did not need to pray. But He was known as one who often withdrew and prayed.

They Asked Him to Teach Them to Pray – Indications are that Jesus had already taught them ‘the Lord’s Prayer’ (Matt 6:9-13). Seeing Jesus praying, and knowing how the disciples of John prayed (Luke 5:33), they seek more instruction. But Christ leads them again to His short prayer He taught them. This is, apparently, central to learning how to pray.

Persistence (vv5-8) – But I have prayed this prayer, you say (as did the disciples). And so Jesus teaches us another important part of prayer. It is to be done persistently, constantly, with an eye to the heart of the One you are petitioning. He is your friend. He is your heavenly Father.

Assurance (vv9-13) – We learn that we are not to despair when the answer doesn’t come in some kind of ‘instant’ fashion. We are to learn what it means to persist, to ask and keep asking, to seek and keep seeking, etc. We are to learn to trust what we have learned of God our Father, that is, that He is more generous than any earthly father ever could be (Rom 8:31). Driving us to deeper dependence upon God, we are to learn that prayer requires that we ‘strive’ (Rom 15:30), that we ‘labor fervently’ (Col 4:12), and that we ‘wrestle’ (Eph 6:12, 18). So, when we struggle, when we get off track, and when we find that we have stopped praying, the Lord directs us to begin again – and to do so with the Lord’s Prayer.

Praying with Submission and Assurance – Throughout the scriptures we see the same thing being taught. Prayer is to be done in submission to the will of God and with the assurance of God’s sovereign hand.

John 14:12-14 – The ability for faithful and successful discipleship is promised to the church who prays and ministers in the name of Jesus. We pray “in Jesus’ name” because we can only come before the Father in Christ’s perfect righteousness. We can only know our requests are heard because He mediates for us. We pray with His name upon us, as His disciple, His servant, with His agenda. And why is the Father pleased to answer? Verse 13 – “...that the Father may be glorified in the Son.”

John 15:7 – Hope for answered prayer is not to be thought of as hope in a well-oiled machine. It is to be thought of in terms of organic connection. My life in Christ is directly connected to the effectiveness of my prayer. But in faithful organic discipleship, I can expect much fruit from prayer.

John 16:23-24 – Pile these verses on top of the others. Another reason to pray is so that “your joy may be full.” It is God’s pleasure to make your joy full. He desires to give us His Spirit, to hear our prayers, to conform us to the image of His Son, and to make us most satisfied in Him. Prayer is not an obligation, like paying dues to be in a club. Prayer is more like the benefit of being in the club. Prayer is the sanctifying means of power and joy for the Father’s children in Christ.

1 John 5:13-15 – The assurance of the Word grants faith to rest upon God’s promised salvation, and in that context, we are invited to pray with the same confidence. “according to His will” is not an escape clause in our prayers, but rather an indication of our glad submission. And when we are unsure of the will of God, we may rest that the Spirit intercedes for us according to the will of God (Rom 8:27).

A Place to Start – Our discipline of prayer is elusive. We see Jesus pray. Christ knows the Father, and He knows the work of prayer, and He knows these things perfectly. What do we learn about prayer and the Father from Jesus?

Prayer is a Gift – The Father loves to give. He delights in mercy (Mic 7:18). He is not stingy (Psalm 81:10, Rom 8:31). Prayer is one of God’s appointed means to administer His generosity to His children.

Prayer is Work – In His wisdom, God has made prayer hard, like work. We are struck with how dependent we are upon Him for everything. We are tested in our faith. We are warned to test our motives (James 4:1-6) and the sincerity of our obedience (1 Pet 3:7), and all of this is done to drive us to more prayer.

Prayer is Efficacious – Prayer is one of God’s appointed means to administer His generosity to His children. God has ordained the ends and the means to His ends. Lives full of prayer and growing more and more in prayer reveal that we believe in God’s exhaustive sovereignty and inexhaustible goodness.

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