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INTRODUCTION



Have you ever wondered if your prayers were being heard by God? Sometimes I will call an office or business and instead of getting a real person, I get a voicemail recording asking me to leave a message. Occasionally, I will leave a message anticipating a call back that never comes. Was my message ever received? Perhaps the office isn't very professional in dealing with their clients and is slow at returning phone calls. After a few days, I come to the conclusion that the office I called either didn't receive the message, is slow in returning calls, or is incompetent.

When we pray, it sometimes feels like my office call. We pray for months and sometimes years with what seems like no response at all. I remember praying for my mother to become a Christian for years with what appeared to be no response. Was God hearing my prayer? Maybe I am doing something wrong in the way I am praying. Is God even getting my message? How do I know that when I pray, God is hearing me? When we pray, what is it supposed to look like? If you have asked these questions, you are not alone. Even the disciples of Jesus would ask Him how to pray and would not be ridiculed for asking the question. Luke 11:1 says, "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."¹ Instead, Jesus answers the question clearly, not only for them, but for us.

In the next few chapters, we will learn how to pray from the words of God Himself. We will learn to pray by looking at the example given to the disciples by Jesus.

¹ Luke 11:1 (NIV)

THE HERE OR THERE PRINCIPLE



The Lord teaches us how to pray in both the gospel of Luke and the gospel of Matthew. The Matthew passage is in chapter 6 and is as follows:

⁵"And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. ⁶But when you pray, go

into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.²

When Jesus teaches on prayer, he starts by pointing to the heart of the person praying. Why are you praying? When it comes to communicating with God in prayer, your motivation matters.

There is a principle that I call the “Here or There Principle”, which is taught by Jesus in various parts of the New Testament. Jesus says,

“And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full.”³

Just a few verses later, Jesus teaches about fasting and says,

¹⁶“When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show men they are fasting. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. ¹⁷But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, ¹⁸so that it will not be obvious to men that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

Jesus tells us that we can receive rewards in one of two ways. First, you can receive your reward on earth in the form of other religious people thinking you have done something holy. They will look at you on your knees and say, “Wow, what a super holy dude, he is!” “I wish I was as holy as him!” Pride makes this a reward that is actually somewhat desirable to us while we are living on earth. It is a tangible reward that we get right here and now.

² Matthew 6:5-6 (NIV)

³ Matthew 6:5 (NIV)

But Jesus suggests that the reward we receive, “Here” is not as good as the reward we can receive, “There”. “There” is in heaven. It is the heavenly reward we will receive for our good deeds when we get to heaven. The catch is you can only get one reward. You can either receive your reward “Here” or “There”; on earth or in heaven.

This is a universal principle central to the gospel. Our punishment for our sin can come either “Here” or “There”. The book of Romans teaches, “For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”⁴ As a human being, you have a choice as to where the punishment for your sins will be meted out. You can receive your punishment in hell, (THERE), or you can receive your punishment on earth (HERE). Should your sins be paid for here on earth, they are paid for by Jesus in his substitutionary sacrifice on the cross of Calvary.

We also see this principle in the story of Lazarus. Jesus tells the story in Luke 16 this way,

¹⁹“There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day. ²⁰At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores ²¹and longing to eat what fell from the rich man's table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores. ²²“The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried. ²³In hell, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. ²⁴So he called to him, 'Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue,

⁴ Romans 6:23 (NIV)

because I am in agony in this fire.' ²⁵"But Abraham replied, 'Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony. ⁵

Though the story continues from here, we see the principle of here or there again quite clearly in the lives of both Lazarus and the beggar. The beggar who didn't receive his reward on earth receives it in heaven and the rich man who lived it up on earth is tormented in the life to come. Do not presume that this is a story about who gets to go to heaven. Salvation is found in Christ alone, however, this story does support the principle of here or there.

Like fasting and giving, the results of our prayers are conditioned by our heart. Jesus tells us,

"But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you."⁶

When we pray, we should not seek any public recognition or ego stroking praise. Our hearts should be seeking approval of God, not the praise of people.

⁵ Luke 16:19-25 (NIV)

⁶ Matthew 6:6 (NIV)

THE LORD'S PRAYER IN MATTHEW



In Matthew, Jesus continues His lesson about praying.

⁷And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. ⁸Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.⁷

Apparently, there were people thinking that if they talked to God long enough, God would be more likely to hear and answer their prayers. Jesus puts the

⁷ Matthew 6:7-8 (NIV)

kibosh on this myth, by comparing people who pray this way to pagans. We are to be reminded that God doesn't find out about our problems and needs when we pray. Prayer is not a means of communicating to God information that He is unaware of. God knows everything! In fact, He knew your needs and problems before you did! Explaining things to God in a number of different ways using a breath full of words and descriptions of your problems won't help God understand your problem. That tactic might work with your five year old. It might even be recommended when explaining something to your teenager, however, it doesn't work with a God who already knows more about your situation and needs than you do.

Instead, we are given an example of how to pray, commonly referred to as the Lord's Prayer. We find this prayer in both Matthew and Luke, with minor variations. The prayer in Matthew is as follows:

⁹"This, then, is how you should pray:

" 'Our Father in heaven,

hallowed be your name,

¹⁰your kingdom come,

your will be done

on earth as it is in heaven.

¹¹Give us today our daily bread.

¹²Forgive us our debts,

as we also have forgiven our debtors.

¹³And lead us not into temptation,

but deliver us from the evil one.' ¹⁴For if you forgive men when they sin

against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. ¹⁵But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.⁸

The prayer starts by addressing God as “Our Father in heaven”.⁹ If we are going to pray, we should know who our prayer is addressed to and where He is. God is our Father. He is the one from whom we came. He loves us like a good father loves his child. He wants what is best for us.

God is also in heaven. Where is heaven? Is heaven really a place on earth like Belinda Carlisle sang so confidently in the 80s? The Bible refers to heavenly places as the realm in which God and spiritual beings exist.

Ephesians 6 says,

For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.¹⁰

This passages seems to indicate that heaven is not a place far, far away that resembles the earth in its physicality, but rather a realm that is spiritual in nature. It is a realm that is not far, far away, but perhaps, right here beyond our 5 senses. We might start our prayer by acknowledging that God is our father present in a realm outside our 5 senses, yet among us none the less.

Jesus continues his lesson on prayer with, “*hallowed be your name*”.¹¹

According to Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, the word “hallowed” means

⁸ Matthew 6:9-15 (NIV)

⁹ Matthew 6:9 (NIV)

¹⁰ Ephesians 6:12 (NIV)

¹¹ Matthew 6:9 (NIV)

“Holy, consecrated”, “sacred, revered”¹² In other words, Jesus is telling us that we are to show reverence to God the Father. We are acknowledging the holiness of God. We recognize that he is set apart from us in his perfection. Jesus puts this in the Lord’s Prayer because we are to verbalize this back to God. We are to tell him that He is holy. Revere God with your mouth and with your heart for a while.

Verse 10 reads, *“your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”*¹³ God wants our desires to match His. This passage shows us that what God desires to happen in heaven happens. His will is done in heaven. God has his way there. He has his way because He is the King. The King gets His way in His Kingdom. Our desire should be that His kingdom is alive here on earth as we serve Him as King. God’s Kingdom doesn’t have any real estate. It exists, where people serve the King. So God’s kingdom comes to earth when God’s people serve Him as King. In this way, God gets His way on earth “as it is in heaven.”¹⁴

We continue our prayer now by asking God to meet our needs, *“Give us today our daily bread.”*¹⁵ I love the way Jesus teaches us to ask for our needs for now. When it comes to praying for our needs, the example given by Jesus is to pray for the needs of today. Notice that he doesn’t teach us to pray for

¹² “hallowed.” Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary. 2008 Merriam-Webster. 30 December 2008
<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/hallowed>

¹³ Matthew 6:10 (NIV)

¹⁴ Matthew 6:10 (NIV)

¹⁵ Matthew 6:11 (NIV)

tomorrow's needs. In the passage that follows this one, Jesus teaches us not to worry about the future saying, *"Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own."*¹⁶

Notice that Jesus also teaches us to pray for OUR needs. Some people feel as though they are doing something wrong by praying for themselves. They feel as if they are doing something holy by praying for others instead of themselves. But that is not the way Jesus taught us to pray. Jesus says that we should pray for our own needs for today. That's not to say that we shouldn't pray for others as well, however, in the Lord's prayer, we are taught to pray for the needs that we, ourselves have.

In verse 12, Jesus continues, *"Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors."*¹⁷ We usually think of debt in financial terms, but we can be in debt to someone as a result of sinning against them. For instance, if you cheat on your wife, you are indebted to her until she forgives you. Jesus tells us that when we pray, we should ask God to forgive us because we are indebted to God because of our sin.

Notice, that Jesus doesn't just tell us to ask for forgiveness, but to proclaim to God that we have forgiven our debtors as well. Forgiving and being forgiven are connected with God. If we skip to verse 14 we see that Jesus doesn't mince words. He says, *"For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. ¹⁵But if you do not*

¹⁶ Matthew 6:24 (NIV)

¹⁷ Matthew 6:12 (NIV)

forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins."¹⁸ A person who is forgiven must forgive and it is those who forgive that God is willing to forgive.

*"And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one."*¹⁹ With these words, we recognize that we are weak people who have a tendency to fall under temptation. The prayer is that as God leads us, He would not lead us where we will be tempted to disobey Him. But where does the temptation come from? According to the book of James, God doesn't tempt us. In James 1 it says,

"¹³When tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; ¹⁴but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. ¹⁵Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death."²⁰

James tells us God doesn't tempt us. Obviously, God isn't going to entice us to disobey Him. The idea of a father trying to get his son to disobey him is ridiculous. We disobey when we are tempted by our own evil desires. But if that's the case, then why are we taught to pray, *"but deliver us from the evil one"*?²¹ It's because the evil one, aka the Devil, tries to lead us into situations where we will be tempted. Scripture seems to indicate that the evil one likes to lead us to places and point out things that we might be tempted by. The

¹⁸ Matthew 6:14-15 (NIV)

¹⁹ Matthew 6:13 (NIV)

²⁰ James 1:13-15 (NIV)

²¹ Matthew 6:13 (NIV)

devil tempts us by leading us to where our own sinful desires are most likely to fall under enticement. Yes, the Devil is a tempter and he uses your own sinful desires against you. Our prayer should be for God to deliver us from the evil one and his schemes.

With this we have the basic model of prayer taught by Jesus to His disciples. I am to:

- 1) Acknowledge who and where God is. (Or Father in Heaven)²²
- 2) Revere God's Name²¹
- 3) Pray for God to have His way in my life in the same way that He has His way in heaven.²³
- 4) Ask God to meet my needs for today.²⁴
- 5) Pray for God to forgive me and forgive those who need forgiveness from me.²⁵
- 6) Ask God to lead me where I will not be tempted and to protect me from the schemes of the Devil.²⁶

²² Matthew 6:9 (NIV)

²³ Matthew 6:10 (NIV)

²⁴ Matthew 6:11 (NIV)

²⁵ Matthew 6:12 (NIV)

²⁶ Matthew 6:13 (NIV)

THE LORD'S PRAYER IN LUKE



In the book of Luke, we find Jesus teaching on prayer again, however, with some variations from the Matthew passage. The Luke version is found in chapter 11 verses 1 through 13 and is as follows:

¹One 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."

²He said to them, "When you pray, say: " 'Father, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come. ³Give us each day our daily bread. ⁴Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us. And lead us not into temptation.' "

⁵Then he said to them, "Suppose one of you has a friend, and he goes to him at midnight and says, 'Friend, lend me three loaves of bread, ⁶because a friend of mine on a journey has come to me, and I have nothing to set before him.'

⁷"Then the one inside answers, 'Don't bother me. The door is already locked, and my children are with me in bed. I can't get up and give you anything.' ⁸I tell you, though he will not get up and give him the bread because he is his friend, yet because of the man's boldness he will get up and give him as much as he needs.

⁹"So I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. ¹⁰For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened.

¹¹"Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? ¹²Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? ¹³If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"

Verses 1 through 4 are really just an abbreviated version of the Lord's prayer that we just studied from the book of Matthew. Instead of "forgiving our debts"²⁷, the word "sin"²⁸ is used. You will also notice other aspects of the Matthew passage missing in the Lord's Prayer according to Luke.

Having already studied Matthew's version of the Lord's prayer, we move on to the rest of Jesus' teaching on prayer in Luke. In verse 5 Jesus lays out the scenario of a friend going to another friend's house at midnight to borrow some bread. The friend says that he needs the bread because a friend has come in from out of town and he doesn't have any bread to feed his guest.

²⁷ Matthew 6:12 (NIV)

²⁸ Luke 11:4 (NIV)

Everyone in the house is asleep until the entire household is ripped from its slumber by the neighbor's insistence that he awake and help him. Jesus presents us with a dilemma. What would you do? Would you tell your neighbor to beat it or would you get up and give your neighbor some bread? Some of us might be so angry that we get up kicking and screaming at our neighbor to get off our property, reminding him of how rude it is to wake people up in the middle of the night for something as trivial as a few loaves of bread. Others may hurry and give the neighbor bread to get them to go away so your family could quickly return to their slumber.

Jesus continues the story by showing us what happens,

⁷"Then the one inside answers, 'Don't bother me. The door is already locked, and my children are with me in bed. I can't get up and give you anything.' ⁸I tell you, though he will not get up and give him the bread because he is his friend, yet because of the man's boldness he will get up and give him as much as he needs.

Jesus tells us that the friend would get up out of bed and give him whatever he wants, but not for the reason we may think. The man won't receive the bread at midnight because he is a good friend. Instead, he gets the bread because of his boldness.

The passage continues with,

⁹"So I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. ¹⁰For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened."²⁹

²⁹ Luke 11:9-10 (NIV)

Jesus tells us to ask and seek and knock. These are all actions that require us to take the initiative. In today's society, we are often reluctant to ask anybody for anything. Asking is admitting that we need something. In today's American culture, we are too lazy to seek. If we can't find it by doing a google search, it's just too hard. We don't like to knock. We don't want to bother people like those Jehovah's witnesses do. But prayer requires taking the initiative. Like we saw in the prior passage, prayer requires boldness. It requires being willing to acknowledge our needs and ask. It requires a desire to seek that exceeds typing a few words in our google toolbar. It requires a boldness that lifts our knuckled hands to the door and knocks anticipating someone receptive on the other side. We can come to God with boldness because He told us to ask, seek and knock.

Verses 11 through 13 get to the character of God. This is the core of why we can and should pray. It reads,

¹¹"Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? ¹²Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? ¹³If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"³⁰

The point is that God is not a creep. Every once in a while you hear of some freakshow parent that is mean and nasty to his kids. But those are the exceptions to the rule. Most dads love their kids and would do anything, even to the point of giving up their own lives for the well-being of their children. God reminds us that even though at the core of all humans is evil, even we are giving and loving to our children. You may have met someone who you

³⁰ Luke 11:11-13 (NIV)

consider to be a real schmuck; mean and nasty. But normally, though those people are mean to everyone else, they still are usually pretty good to their own children.

But with God, there is not a hint of sin or guile. God loves his children more than any human could. In addition, he has the capacity to provide good gifts to His children in a way that an earthly parent could only dream of. Prayer, at its root, is not about us, but about God. It is about a good God willing to love on His children. Don't hesitate. God is waiting.

APPLICATION



So I get what you are saying, but how do I put it all together? How do I take what I've learned and apply it to my life? My suggestion is that you take the example of prayer that was given to us by Jesus and use it as a model for your own personal time of prayer. The model given to us by Jesus is the example Jesus used when His disciples asked Him how to pray. If you were to ask Jesus, "Show me how to pray", I suspect this is the answer He would give you.

Luke 15:16 says, *“But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.”*³¹ Here we see that Jesus prayed often. **Lesson number one: We should pray often.** It also says that He “withdrew to lonely places and prayed.”³¹ Lonely places are places where nobody else is around. It’s encouraging to see that even the Creator of the Universe could be distracted by the world around Him if He didn’t get off someplace by Himself. **Lesson number two: Get off by yourself when you pray.**

We should then follow the model of prayer given to us by Jesus. **Lesson number three: Follow Christ’s lead.** Let’s take a look at the Lord’s prayer in Matthew one last time.

⁹“This, then, is how you should pray:

“ ‘Our Father in heaven,

hallowed be your name,

¹⁰your kingdom come,

your will be done

on earth as it is in heaven.

¹¹Give us today our daily bread.

¹²Forgive us our debts,

as we also have forgiven our debtors.

¹³And lead us not into temptation,

but deliver us from the evil one.’ ¹⁴For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. ¹⁵But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.³²

³¹ Luke 15:16 (NIV)

³² Matthew 6:9-15 (NIV)

Use the summary of the prayer at the end of chapter three to help you or, better yet, open your Bible while you are praying and use the models in Matthew and Luke as guides to help you through your time of prayer.

Finally, when you want to know if God is hearing your prayers, remember the character of God. Remember that it is God who told you to ask and seek and knock in the first place.³³ The communication between you and God was initiated by God, when He told you in His word to ask, seek and knock. Jesus also, took the time to show you how to pray. **Lesson Four: Remember who you are praying to.**

So now, get to it. Get praying. I leave you with this exhortation from the book of Hebrews 4:15-16:

"For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin. ¹⁶Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need."³⁴

³³ Luke 11:9-10 (NIV)

³⁴ Hebrews 4:15-16 (NIV)

References

1. Scripture taken from the HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved.
2. "hallowed." Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary. 2008 Merriam-Webster. 30 December 2008 <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/hallowed>



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