

Lord, Teach Us to Pray

What Jesus taught His disciples about how to pray, what to pray for, and why we pray

Now it came to pass, as He was praying in a certain place, when He ceased, that one of His disciples said to Him, "Lord, teach us to pray."

LUKE 11:1

AT A GLANCE

BIG IDEA	Jesus gave His followers a pattern for prayer and taught them the attitudes that make prayer real: boldness, expectation, persistence, humility, forgiveness, trust, and obedience. Prayer doesn't change God's mind; it changes us to be more like Jesus.
SCRIPTURE	Luke 11:1-13 · Matthew 6:9-13 · Luke 18:1-14 · Matthew 18:21-35 · Mark 11:22-25 · John 15:7
LENGTH	About 25 minutes, or a three-week series
BEST FOR	Middle school and high school
YOU WILL NEED	Bibles and a whiteboard

Start here: the one thing they asked to learn

The disciples watched Jesus heal the sick, calm storms, and teach crowds. But the Bible records only one time they asked Him to teach them how to do something: "Lord, teach us to pray" (Luke 11:1). They had grown up with formal prayers recited at set times. Jesus prayed differently, like a Son talking to His Father, and they wanted that.

1 A pattern for prayer

Jesus answered with what we call the Lord's Prayer (Luke 11:2-4; Matthew 6:9-13). It isn't meant to be repeated mindlessly (Jesus warned against "vain repetitions," Matthew 6:7). It's a pattern that shows us what to pray about. It contains six requests:

1. "Hallowed be Your name"

That God's name would be honored by everyone.

2. "Your kingdom come"

That God's rule would spread in hearts and in the world.

3. "Your will be done"

That God's plans would happen on earth as in heaven.

4. "Give us this day our daily bread"

That God would provide what we need today.

5. "Forgive us our debts"

That God would forgive our sins, as we forgive others.

6. "Do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one"

That God would protect us in testing and rescue us from evil.

Notice the order: God's name, kingdom, and will come first. Then our needs. Prayer starts by putting God in the center.

2 Ten marks of real prayer

Throughout the Gospels, Jesus taught what kind of prayer pleases God. Read these passages together and write the key words on the board.

MARK	PASSAGE	WHAT JESUS TAUGHT
Boldness	Luke 11:5-10	A friend knocks at midnight until he gets bread. Lay hold of God's willingness to give to His children: "ask... seek... knock."
Expectation	Luke 11:11-13	No good father gives a snake instead of a fish. "How much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!"
Persistence	Luke 18:1-8	A widow keeps coming to an unjust judge. "Men always ought to pray and not lose heart."
Humility	Luke 18:10-14	The proud Pharisee bragged; the tax collector prayed, "God, be merciful to me a sinner," and went home justified.
Forgiveness	Matt. 18:21-35	A servant forgiven a huge debt refused to forgive a small one. Forgiven people forgive, from the heart.
Restraint	Matt. 12:38-40	Jesus refused to perform a sign on demand. Don't treat God like a performer; trust what He has already shown.
Watchfulness	Mark 13:33	"Take heed, watch and pray; for you do not know when the time is." Pray with eyes open to what God is doing.
Purity	Mark 14:38	"Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation." Prayer prepares us for temptation before it comes.
Trust	Mark 11:22-24	"Have faith in God." Pray believing that God hears and answers.
Obedience	John 15:7-10	"If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire." Answered prayer flows from staying close to Jesus.

BACKGROUND FOR THE LEADER

In Jesus' day, devout Jews prayed at set times, often reciting fixed prayers. Jesus didn't reject set times; He often prayed early in the morning and through the night (Mark 1:35; Luke 6:12). What amazed the disciples was the intimacy: He called God "Abba," "Father" (Mark 14:36), and taught them to do the same.

3 What to pray for others

Jesus also showed us how to pray for people who don't yet know God:

- **Freedom for those in darkness.** When the disciples couldn't help the boy with an evil spirit, Jesus said, "This kind can come out by nothing but prayer and fasting" (Mark 9:29). Pray for people trapped in darkness and despair.
- **More workers and open hearts.** Seeing the crowds, Jesus said, "The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers" (Matthew 9:37-38; Luke 10:2). Pray that people would welcome Jesus, and that God would send someone (maybe you) to tell them.
- **Good for your enemies.** "Love your enemies, bless those who curse you... and pray for those who spitefully use you" (Matthew 5:44; Luke 6:28). Ask God to do real good in the lives of people who hurt you.

Why do we pray?

If God already knows everything, why pray? The purpose of prayer is not to change God's will. It's to change us. As we pray, the Holy Spirit transforms our minds and attitudes until we look more like Jesus. We start wanting what God wants. And along the way, God delights to answer His children, in ways that are often bigger than we asked.

TALK IT OVER

1. Why do you think the disciples asked Jesus to teach them to pray, and not to do miracles?
2. Why does the Lord's Prayer put God's name, kingdom, and will before our own needs?
3. Which of the ten marks of prayer is strongest in your life? Which needs the most work?
4. Why does Jesus connect forgiving others so closely with prayer?
5. If prayer changes us more than it changes God, how should that affect the way we pray?

TAKE IT HOME

This week, pray through the six requests of the Lord's Prayer each morning, putting each one in your own words. Then pick one person who doesn't know Jesus and one person who has hurt you, and pray for both of them every day.

Lord, teach us to pray.

From fifty years of youth ministry by **Ron Whittam**. Share freely with your students and leaders. · The Youth Ministry Living Room · qrprogramming.com/livingroom

Scripture quotations are from the New King James Version®. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson. Used by permission. All rights reserved.