

When do you pray? How do you pray? Is prayer easy or difficult? Comfortable or stiff? Do you pray the same prayer all the time or is prayer more spontaneous and relaxed? *How does prayer “work” for you?*

The “Lord’s Prayer” was used by Jesus to teach. His disciples asked for instructions – this prayer was the answer. Contrary to what many have often been taught, this is not WHAT to pray but HOW to pray.

In Matthew Jesus decided his disciples needed a lesson in prayer. Luke relates a moment when disciples asked how to pray. Matthew is the longer version and used most often in worship.

In Luke, the words are quite simple and to the point:

“Father” This is one of the first words a child learns. Jesus teaches us to approach God as you would a loving parent. This engages in a loving, personal relationship that is safe.

“your name is holy” To utter God’s name is to stand on holy ground, sacred ground .. it is to enter God’s dwelling and calls us to remember what the purpose of prayer really is.

“your kingdom come” We aren’t presuming to give God permission or state what is obvious, but to declare that we believe God’s kingdom is alive and embraces you and me. We are making a statement of faith that we believe God is already in our midst and we in his.

“give us daily bread” This is not the arrogant demand of a beggar, but another statement of faith. We acknowledge all we have is a gift from God. It is why we stand before God in the first place; he is our life!

“forgive our sins for we ourselves forgive all indebted to us” We humbly ask for release from our brokenness and help in doing for others what God has done for us. We worship God by serving those around us!

“do not bring us to the time of trial” This is our plea for protection so we do not lose faith. We trust in God to keep us safe and are reminded He is the first and not the last place to turn for help.

So, this is a primer on prayer. An answer to “how.” This gift of Jesus to his disciples is a reminder that prayer is a connection with God we open by being open. It is not "a collection of pious words but a way of being before God and of being with those for whom we pray.¹ These are not words just to memorize without even being aware of what we are saying, but opening the door and embracing our relationship with God.

The Lord's Prayer is not the perfect prayer, nor should it be the only prayer. It is not holy in itself but reminds what it means to be in the presence of the holy One, and how our conversation (which involves listening as much as talking) is all about.”

¹ “Celebration of Discipline.” Richard Foster. page 15

It is a tool Jesus used to teach HOW to pray and what the relationship of prayer is all about. It is like learning to diagram a sentence, ride a bike, program a thermostat. It assists in helping us with what might seem to trivial or complicated to even know where to begin.

Prayer brings us to God (who has been standing next to us all the time but is often forgotten in the din of battle. This is his arena. His house. In prayer God wraps himself around us and we sit as if with a loved parent knowing and feeling the power of that loving relationship

I remember a Saturday when I had to run back to the sound board in the rear of the sanctuary as the microphone was not working. I pushed all the right buttons but no matter what I did, the microphone didn't work! I did what I had always done but something else was needed and I didn't know what that was.

Too often prayer is like that for us. We think if we use the right words or if someone else says the right words for us, it is like pushing the right buttons and God will immediately give whatever we have decided we need. Too often prayer becomes like setting cruise control and we simply set the switch (or say the magic words) and then think we are "in prayer."

The disciples had grown up that way. Prayer was all about ritual, right words, and right posture -- anything to get the attention of a far-off God who can't be seen! They must have seen or heard something in the way Jesus prayed so unique and remarkable they wanted to find a way it would become their way as well.

Jesus began with the most important word of all; Father. In the original language the word is Abba. In the Middle East it is one of the first words a child learns. Daddy, like Mommy, is the joy of a special relationship.

Prayer is all about a relationship, and once in a relationship, the exact words and format no longer matter. Or do they? Think about this carefully!) Because we have so many questions ... Jesus told a parable about an unbelievable and unthinkable request in the middle of a night!

To understand the context, no bread was kept overnight as food was prepared and eaten on the same day. No one would look for food at night. And the only people out at night would be up to no good. There were no lights, a day's work was exhausting, and when it got dark people went to sleep. Days were long and work was hard and at night no one except thieves and robbers would be outside of their homes. For that reason, doors stayed locked until the dawn.

The first thing to understand in this parable is that Jesus has created an unbelievable situation that never would have occurred. His audience "got it" and understood this was an exaggeration to make a point. And the point Jesus made is that prayer is about **persistence**. Nothing is too impossible to ask, and we should believe that someone is always listening.

Contrary to common sense, this parable is NOT about wearing God down with requests, so he finally gives what we want. Instead, it teaches we might continue to ask knowing God will continue to listen! And the more we ask makes it more likely we will watch and listen for how God might respond or what he is maybe already doing!

Here is another thought about this parable. Maybe we have it all backward assuming God is the homeowner being asked to provide bread for an unexpected guest. What if Jesus wants us to realize we are like the one inside the house who so easily tells God and others, "go away!" I am asleep. I have nothing more to give. I am afraid. Possibly persistence in prayer is knowing God is always at our door and when we finally get up and go to the door, we find God has never been far away!!!

If we need help with what persistence means, simply remember the cross and tomb! That was Jesus' focus from day one, and nothing could dissuade him from making that journey and winning that victory. If we need help with persistence, remember healings of lepers or meals with sinful people. God's persistent love never lets us go and never is far away!

In prayer we are connected to that love and filled with the power that has rolled Easter's stone away from the tomb. Jesus' instructions are to "ask ... seek ... knock! It is so simple:

ASK means "go to the right place." SEEK reminds us "God has the right answers." KNOCK affirms "God will open doors!"

Prayer isn't a magic wand but reminds us God has already given us everything we need! As forgiveness, faith, and eternal life are already in our pocket, it changes every question, concern, and need!

Jesus' disciples were beginners. He gave them some simple words that they would not forget, so they would have a way to remember what and why and how to be in God's presence in the time we call prayer.

Here then is what we know by faith:

1. Prayer is our acceptance of a relationship GIFTED by God!
2. Prayer establishes an attitude (our desire to be in relationship with God.)
3. There are many "shapes" (like words, posture, and location) which bring us into and keep us in that relationship!
4. Prayer gifts us with the power of God Himself! (It is not what we do that empowers prayer, but God himself whose presence is the power!)

When it comes to prayer, rather than worrying about our questions, it would seem to make more sense to simply be in God's presence and trust in his love! In other words, don't talk or worry about prayer; just pray. That is the beginning to the answer and the key that unlocks our hearts to God's power.

In prayer we are simply breaking loose from the world so we can feel the warmth of God's embrace and let the silence speak to my heart of faith. And it all begins with one word, "Abba!"