

A Fresh Look at the Model Prayer

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By Dave Butts

“Lord, teach us to pray” was a request of the disciples to Jesus 2000 years ago. It still seems to be a popular request of His disciples today. In spite of years of sermons and lessons on prayer, Christians are still saying, “I don’t know how to pray.”

Often what is taught is more motivational and theoretical than practical teaching on how to pray. It is assumed that prayer is a spiritual discipline that all Christians will automatically do. I am finding, as I travel the country, that this is simply not the case.

When a church first asked me to teach a seminar on “How to Pray,” I started looking at all sorts of techniques and methods. But as I prayed about it, I kept going back to Jesus’ response to the question posed by the disciples in Luke 11:1, “Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples.” I’m convinced the key in knowing how to pray is in that model prayer that Jesus gave us in Matthew 6:9-13. It is commonly known as the Lord’s Prayer; however, I prefer to refer to it as the Model Prayer, or the Disciples Prayer, because it is for our instruction and benefit.

Many authors have written about it, and many of us have studied all the various parts of this wonderful prayer,

carefully analyzing each section. There is real value in that; however, I would like to take a fresh look at this text, trying to shed some new light upon God's intent for our prayer lives.

What can we learn about how to pray by studying this prayer outline of Jesus from God's perspective? Perhaps it is time to discover what it is that God wants us to pray about. I suggest you keep your Bible open to Matthew 6:9-13 as we walk through the prayer.

The Model Prayer instructs us to:

1. Address the Father ("Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name"). Verse 9 shows us how to offer our praise and worship to the One who desires it. This allows us to enter into the presence of God by being focused on Him rather than upon ourselves. If we are in His presence, we are more likely to be in tune with what He desires. Praying through the Psalms is a good way to do this because they help us to better understand the heart of God through knowing more about the character of God. It is vital for the Father's children to know that the purpose of prayer is to bring glory to God! Worship that is focused on God is prayer! Psalm 145 is one that reveals much about who God is and gives us a robust vocabulary to utilize in addressing our Father. Pay attention to the One who is on the other end of our prayers – the One who sits on the throne!

2. Pray about Kingdom issues ("Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven"). Verse 10 reveals the place where God's heart is! Jesus' message was about the Kingdom—His Kingdom. In Matthew 6:33, He instructed His disciples to seek first the Kingdom, and then the things needed for this life would be provided.

Growing Deeper in Kingdom Prayer

Praying about the kingdom is often the most neglected area of prayer, and yet the nearest to the heart of God. Kingdom prayer is birthed in the heart of God, and the Holy Spirit reveals the desires of God to us! It's amazing that God has chosen to work through human flesh to accomplish His purposes. To illustrate, look at the way Jesus phrased this subject in Matthew 6:10: "Your Kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven." The Kingdom of God, the reign of God, happens when God's will is done. This occurs in its perfect form in heaven where everything is done in exact accordance with the will of God.

Jesus instructs us to pray that God's Kingdom would advance on planet earth—that God's will would be done here as it is in heaven, with all creatures and institutions perfectly submitted to the will of God.

I'd like to suggest to you that this reign of God begins to take place on earth when two things happen:

- People submit their lives to the Lordship of Jesus Christ as a result of hearing the Gospel.
- The People of God (the Church) live out the life of Jesus on earth.

Basically, then, we're praying about two things:

- That every person on this planet will have the opportunity to hear about Jesus and respond to Him as Savior and Lord—the finishing of the task of world evangelization!
- That the Church of Jesus Christ will wake up and begin to take seriously what it means to follow Jesus—revival!

It is particularly interesting that God's Spirit is prompting believers all over the world to pray for these very things.

Let's look at some practical ways we can pray about these two topics:

Finishing the Task

- **Become a Prayer Missionary.** The Great Commission was given to all of us; and, although we are all called to the mission field, we aren't all called to missions in other nations – except in prayer! In order to be obedient, we must answer the call to prayer wherever God calls us, whether locally or globally. And, just like a missionary, we can make a commitment of a year, two years, or long term service. It means saying, "I will pray for the nation or nations that God has called me to pray about." It is hard work and it takes preparation, but the results are glorious. We can become prayer missionaries to one or more cities, countries, and/or people groups during our lifetimes.

How do you decide what country or people group to pray for? Let the Holy Spirit guide you, just as He guides missionaries to their particular place of ministry. Begin praying for the needs of the world . . . watch the news and read newspapers. Pray about the nations or people groups mentioned. Read a book like "Operation World" and begin praying for the nations. God will begin to attract you to one particular group or city or region which you can **"adopt"** for prayer. Spend time researching the nation, tribe or city that you have chosen. Make a file or scrapbook about your people group. Learn to pray intelligently for these people for whom you have committed to pray.

- **Learn to pray effectively for the world.** Bennie Mostert's book, "Change Your World Through Prayer" is a wonderful help in learning to pray for the world. He suggests that there are four things which must be prayed for daily for your people group:

1. For the workers already in the harvest field as well as for more workers in the harvest field (Matthew 9:38).

2. For open doors so that the gospel may take its rapid course (Col. 4:2-3).
3. For lasting fruit as a result of spiritual labor (2 Thess. 3:1).
4. For the necessary funds to spread the gospel (Romans 10:14-15; Phil. 4:19).

- **Take a prayer journey.** You may even be able to gather several others with you to take a prayer journey to your nation. This involves going and praying physically in that nation. It will give you a far better understanding of how to pray. Harvest Prayer Ministries takes a prayer journey to Israel regularly!

Revival

How do we pray for revival? There are so many good ways. Mostert's book suggests 10 ways we can pray every day for revival, both for ourselves and for our own congregation of believers. Would you commit to praying daily for revival in your life and in your church?

- **Lord, change us (Ps. 85:7).** Pray for renewal and change. Revival results in change and spiritual awakening.
- **Lord, we humble ourselves before you (Is. 57:15).** Humbling ourselves before God is essential to a right relationship and to revival. Humility is an act of obedience before God. Fasting is an example of such an act.
- **Lord, cleanse me (1 John 1:9).** Pray for deeper cleansing of sin that goes hand in hand with deeper confession of sin. Keep short accounts with God. Become spiritually sensitive to sin.
- **Lord, heal us (James 5:13-16).** This certainly includes prayer for physical healing, but also for the spiritual recovery from emotionally hurtful events from the past. This is true for a whole congregation as well as an

individual. 2 Chron. 7 relates revival to a healing of the land.

- **Lord, make us holy (1 Pet. 1:16).** Pray for holy conduct in our lives that we might be different from the world around us. The way we speak, spend our time, and respond to people is what really makes us different.
- **Lord, guide us (John 4:34).** Pray for the Lord's daily guidance. How we need that as a congregation! Jesus is head of the Body. He ought to be making the decisions as to where we go and what we do as a Church.
- **Lord, fill us (Eph. 5:18).** Pray for the daily filling of the Holy Spirit. Dwight L. Moody often preached on the need to be filled daily with the Holy Spirit. He was stopped one evening after a message by an irate woman who asked him why he needed to be filled with the Spirit more than once. Moody answered. "Because, Madam, I leak."
- **Lord, anoint us (Luke 4:18-19).** Pray to be equipped to serve the Lord not by might, but by His Spirit.
- **Lord, use us (1 Cor. 12:12-30).** Pray for willingness to be involved in the congregation. It is time to lay the 80/20 rule to rest, where 20% of the members of a congregation do 80% of the work. Mentoring and discipleship is so needed in the church.
- **Lord, send us (Matt. 28:18-20).** Pray for involvement in the expansion of Christ's Kingdom.

3. Pray about personal needs ("Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one."). Notice that the rest of the model prayer (Matthew 6:11-13) deals with one's own life. God wants us to pray about our needs. He just doesn't want them to be the only thing we pray about.

Most Christians have little difficulty praying about personal needs. There's nothing wrong with that, but how often do we wonder whether or not our priorities in prayer are God's priorities? Often, our default mode of prayer is to go immediately to ourselves, or to those close to us. Here are some suggestions to help you with the three issues listed in verses 11-13:

- **Daily bread/necessities of life.** Perhaps the most important thing here is the expression of gratitude; recognizing what God has done and always being grateful. I remember a number of years ago going to a church camp where there was no hot water. After several days of cold showers, I returned home to my nice hot shower. The prayer came almost involuntarily, "Lord, thank you for hot, clean water." How often we take the blessings of God in our lives for granted. We need to thank Him for taking care of our daily necessities. "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God" (Phil. 4:6).
- **Forgiveness.** In 1 John 1:9, the Word of God says, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." One of the biggest hurdles in this area seems to be trusting God to do what He says He will do. We ask for forgiveness over and over again because we don't feel forgiven. Trust God and His Word, not your feelings.
- **Temptation and deliverance:** As Christians, we often forget that we are in a daily spiritual battle. We have an enemy who would like nothing better than to cause us to fall and to fail. "Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour" (1 Peter 5:8). Fortunately, we have the power of God's Word to stand upon and strengthen ourselves. For example, 1 Peter 5:9

says, “Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings.” Another example is found in James 4:7: “Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.”

Closing Thoughts

Knowing “how to pray” will happen when we operate as Jesus taught us. First, we remember to “hallow His name” when we recognize that prayer is designed by God for the glory of God.

Next, we quit focusing first and only on our own needs and wants, and begin to pray about the things God wants to have happen “on earth as it is in heaven.” When we pray for the advance of the Kingdom, and the reign of God coming upon this earth, we demonstrate to Him that we are seeking His Kingdom first. And finally, these other things, the necessities of life, may properly be brought before our Father who delights in providing for us.

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