

When You Pray, Do Not Pray Like This

SERIES: TEACH US TO PRAY
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DISCIPLESHIP, PRAYER, PRACTICES
MATTHEW 6:9-13

So as followers of Jesus we need to be with Jesus. You start to become like who you spend your time with. If you want to know what you worship, check your schedule and your budget.

And one of the primary ways to be with Jesus is through prayer. Prayer as I have said the last two weeks is not an end to itself but a means to an end and the end is to be with the father.

But it is so easy to make prayer what it is not. For those who have grown up in praying cultures, it is easy to be lost in the familiarity and routine and not really know what prayer is about. In our increasingly secular culture, prayer easily becomes just a routine that means nothing. Or get very frustrated wondering whether it really works or makes any difference.

So maybe for similar reasons, the disciples of Jesus asked him to teach them to pray. And we are asking the same question. To learn from Jesus how to pray. Through his own teaching and the stories that must have shaped him.

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.

He said to them: When you pray, say:

Father,

*hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come.
Give us each day our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins,
for we also forgive everyone who sins against us.
And lead us not into temptation.*

Luke 11

That is the prayer that Jesus taught. And I wanted us to draw out some important things from it.

Importantly that God is a father, meaning he loves, cares and thinks about you. He is full of compassion and mercy towards you and enjoys your company, and would like you to enjoy his.

That God's name is set apart. Above everything else, he is the true source of all life, joy and peace.

That things happen when we pray. The Kingdom of God has come in Jesus but not yet fully here. We see more and more in-breaking of the Kingdom of God as we pray. God is delighted to partner with us to bring His Kingdom on earth as it is in heaven. In Nakuru as it is in heaven. In your family as it is in heaven. In your life as it is in heaven.

Then we get to the part that we often make wrongly make prayer all about. The: give us this day our daily bread part. Where we get to ask God for things. What the New Testament calls intercession. We will talk about intercessory prayer. Intercession simply means to petition an authority for something.

Should we ask God for things, being that he already knows what we need even before we need them? How should we ask if we should? And does it even make a difference that we do?

Let's pray

So to answer that, I want us to first go to some of the stories that Jesus grew up hearing and must have impacted his life and worldview.

Of course, Jesus grew up with the story of creation and Adam and Eve in Genesis. How lack of trusting God and sin made things go wrong. But God, being a loving father, starts a rescue plan. A father who is; compassionate and merciful chooses a man called Abraham and his descendants to be part of the story of the redemption of all of creation. But they also rebel against God over and over again.

Yet this is the background through which we get glimpses of how God, a merciful father, interacts with his children. And even what prayer is about.

Here is one of those moments we find Moses praying, interceding for Israel after they had messed up.

Then the Lord said to Moses: Go down, because your people, whom you brought up out of Egypt, have become corrupt. They have been quick to turn away from what I commanded them and have made themselves an idol cast in the shape of a calf. They have bowed down to it and sacrificed to it and have said, 'These are your gods, Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt.'

I have seen these people, the Lord said to Moses: and they are a stiff-necked people. Now leave me alone so that my anger may burn against them and that I may destroy them. Then I will make you into a great nation.

But Moses sought the favour of the Lord his God. Lord, he said: why should your anger burn against your people, whom you brought out of Egypt with great power and a mighty hand? Why should the Egyptians say, 'It was with evil intent that he brought them out, to kill them in the mountains and to wipe them off the face of the earth'?

Turn from your fierce anger; relent and do not bring disaster on your people. Remember your servants Abraham, Isaac and Israel, to whom you swore by your own self: I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky, and I will give your descendants all this land I promised them, and it will be their inheritance forever.

Then the Lord relented and did not bring on his people the disaster he had threatened.

Exodus 32:7-14

Here is a scenario where God has one thing in mind. God is upset by the rebellion of the Israelites not too long after he had rescued them and he is thinking of just forgetting about them and starting all over. And so he says as much to Moses.

There is a theologian who says that this is God processing his emotions with a human friend. He is saying that this is how I feel, and I will do this to them. Leave me alone.

What does Moses do? He intercedes, he starts petitioning God for the Israelites. He contends with God: I hear what you are saying, but don't do that.

And guess what happens? God relents. Other translations use the word say, God, repented. Because what happened is that God changed his mind. God wanted to do one thing, Moses interceded then God changed his mind.

This is one of the stories that shaped Jesus' worldview even as he teaches prayer. It is the image of a merciful and loving father who can be moved by our prayers and petitions. And some people struggle with that and try to explain it. He is not any less God if he can listen to us and even take our ideas. In fact, God invites us to: Come, let us reason together. He is a good father, and our prayers move him. Your prayers make a difference.

Jesus grew up knowing this. Even at the garden of Gethsamane, you see him demonstrate this in his prayer. He asks the Father to take away the cup of suffering from him while submitting to his will. While he is fully submitted to God's will, He is not afraid of praying for what he wants. He trusts that the Father knows what's best and still prays: I really would like this to be taken away.

He knows our prayers make a difference. Your prayer can turn the trajectory of your life and the world around us. You really need to ask the Father for what you need and want. You really need to, as Peter says: Cast your cares and burdens unto the Lord because he cares for you. James, the brother, of Jesus says: We have not because we ask not.

How many people just don't ask God for what they need? How many of you never pray for healing? What if you don't have what you need because you have not asked. And yes, there is a question about unanswered prayers and we will talk about that next week. But what if an even bigger tragedy is prayers that have not been made?

So when Jesus comes to teaching about prayer this is what he teaches. Let's go back to his teaching in scripture.

Then Jesus said to them, "Suppose you have a friend, and you go to him at midnight and say, 'Friend, lend me three loaves of bread; a friend of mine on a journey has come to me, and I have no food to offer him.' And suppose the one inside answers, 'Don't bother me. The door is already locked, and my children and I are in bed. I can't get up and give you anything.' I tell you, even though he will not get up and give you the bread because of friendship, yet because of your shameless audacity, he will surely get up and give you as much as you need.

"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. For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.

"Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If 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!"

Imagine a neighbour to whom you are a bother answering your prayer just to get rid of you. How much more will a father who loves and cares about you? One to whom you will never be a bother?

Imagine our fathers and you fathers who are not always so good. There is always a lot competing in our hearts. We have limitations in resources and ability. Still, earthly fathers know how to give good gifts to their children in response to their requests.

Jesus is saying, ask from your father. Make your requests and petitions known to Him. So keep asking. Ask, ask, ask and ask again. Actually, ask God for your needs shamelessly, just like a child with their father.

Some of us are too decent and modest. Some too spiritual and think all we need to do is please God. While that is very true, the other piece is the father would like to please you too. Of course, as a father, God knows the limits and what is best but he would like to hear what your heart desires. Your prayers move him they can even make him change the trajectory of things.

Some of us have doubted while others have just grown tired. Jesus is encouraging us to keep asking, keep knocking, keep seeking. The father delights in you. This is what intercession is about. Partnering with God to bend reality to His will. Partnering with God through prayer to create the future and petitioning God even.

Here is a quote from a guy who describes it so well

“Intercession is spiritual defiance of what is, in the name of what God has promised. Intercession visualizes an alternative future to the one apparently fated by the momentum of current contradictory forces.”

“The message is clear: history belongs to the intercessors, who believe the future into being...”

Walter Wink

Prayer is not always about saying yes to God. Sometimes it is like what Moses did. He contended with God. Praying can be saying: No that cannot be it, or Please let that not be it. Petitioning the father even while we fully submit to His will.

So this week, would you try and pray bolder and confidently, even in humility? Ask, ask, ask and ask again. Ask shamelessly. Trust the Father truly cares for you. Repent for the doubt and dare go before your Father.

Intercession is not part of many people's lives. And it won't just happen. So I want to give you an idea that could help. The thing about these techniques that I keep introducing, it is not about religion. The point of prayer is to spend time with the Father. And it is more important that you pray, now even how. So try out the suggestions I have given and if they work for you, make them part of your rhythm if they do not try out something else. What you must certainly do is make prayer part of your lifestyle.

Has someone ever asked you to pray for them? Many of us say we will and never really do. Because intercession is not really part of our lives. Here is something that can help.

Have prayer cards in your pocket or wallet. When someone asks you to pray for them or when you think of someone to pray for, add a prayer card for them. Then once a week or once a day, whatever works for you, schedule some time to pick one or two or all of the prayer cards and pray over them. Talk to God about that person or issue or thing.

And make the prayer specific. For example, some of the prayer cards you could have are one for the family, one for you, one for a friend, one for the church and one for the nation. On each, have specific things you are praying about.

For example, on the church one, we are praying about purchasing this property and having a home from where to serve this city. That will free up resources, that will give a bit of security and that will mean that Nakuru will keep having this place that is open to all kinds of people.

1. God's presence
2. Property for
Home
3. A light for our
city

When you pray, ask, ask, ask and ask again.

The other thing you could do during your prayer time is let the Holy Spirit bring someone or something to your mind. If you are sat down, imagine someone sitting with you. Whoever comes to mind, pray for them. If you have no idea what to pray, let the Holy Spirit bring scripture to your mind and just pray that over them. If there are any words or pictures that come, you can share that with them later.

Let's Pray