



# Truth Matters

*A Publication Discussing Matters Related To Truth Because Truth Matters*

Scripture Reading  
Week of  
April 24<sup>th</sup> -30<sup>th</sup>



Monday

- ❖ Judges 13, 14
- ❖ Psalm 81
- ❖ John 13

Tuesday

- ❖ Judges 15, 16
- ❖ Psalm 82
- ❖ John 14

Wednesday

- ❖ Judges 17, 18
- ❖ Psalm 83
- ❖ John 15

Thursday

- ❖ Judges 19, 20
- ❖ Psalm 84
- ❖ John 16

Friday

- ❖ Judges 21
- ❖ Psalm 85
- ❖ John 17

Saturday

- ❖ Ruth 1, 2

Sunday

- ❖ Ruth 3, 4

## Following His Model

By Don Whitney<sup>1</sup>

*This article originally appeared in the November/December 2000 issue of Moody Magazine.*

I have an older friend in the ministry who is much like a spiritual father to me. He is one of the godliest men I know, and the most devoted to prayer. Many consider him the foremost authority on prayer in his large denomination. He has written two books on the subject and is in demand around the world to lead conferences on prayer. I usually see him a couple of times each year, and I always ask him what he's learned about prayer since we last talked. His eyes brighten as he excitedly begins with something like, "Oh! I've learned the most wonderful thing!" Being with him, and especially praying with him, always reminds me of how much I have to learn—and *want* to learn—about prayer.

The people of God want to learn how to pray. Though we may often experience failure and frustration in prayer, the Holy Spirit causes our inadequacies to make us want to learn rather than to quit.

So it's no surprise when we read in the New Testament that "It happened that while Jesus was praying in a

certain place, after He had finished, one of His disciples said to Him, "Lord, teach us to pray just as John also taught his disciples" (Luke 11:1). Even those closest to Jesus wanted to pray but knew they could never pray as He did unless they were taught.

One of the fascinating bits of background about this passage is that this is the only time reported in the Gospels where Jesus was asked to teach on a specific subject. To our knowledge they never asked Him to teach them how to walk on water or to multiply loaves and fishes. But something about the way Jesus prayed—as they were praying with Him, or as they overheard Him praying alone, or simply the way He devoted Himself to private prayer—made them want to learn to pray like Him. In their previous religious experience, the prayers they heard in the synagogue or had offered themselves may have largely been a formality. In Jesus Christ they saw prayer's necessity, as well as their own insufficiency.

I think I know how they felt. I've never heard Jesus pray, of course, but I can hear mere

men talk with God and identify with the disciples' sense of inadequacy in prayer. Others have an easy fluency that soars in the heavenlies, then I hear myself stammering "and, . . . um . . ." As some are praying with great fervency, I often struggle to keep my thoughts on God and not my to-do list. When another is conversing with the Lord out of an obvious sense of intimacy, I sometimes feel like a hypocrite when it's my turn to pray because my heart is so cold.

So I'm grateful for the disciple who asked, "Lord, teach us to pray," for he gave voice to a need experienced by Jesus' disciples of all times and places. From his question and Jesus' answer we can see more clearly that only those Christians who have been taught *how* to pray can pray effectively. But we can learn the content and spirit of true prayer from God's Word and God's Spirit.

### "LORD, TEACH US"

Joining with the disciples in asking Jesus to teach us to pray implies our *dependence*. In other words, we can't pray

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rightly unless the Lord teaches us. The Apostle Paul expressed our problem succinctly: "we do not know how to pray as we should" (Romans 8:26).

No one is a born pray-er. There are natural-born athletes, and singers, but no one comes by prayer (at least the kind God answers) naturally. "A natural man," 1 Corinthians 2:14 declares, "does not accept the things of the Spirit of God [such as prayer], for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, . . ." In fact, until the Holy Spirit lives within a person, that person's prayers are for many reasons an abomination to God (Proverbs 28:9).

But even after being born again through faith in Christ we cannot pray well without being taught. Remember that Paul was referring to himself and others who already had the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit when he wrote, "we do not know how to pray as we should." And we never will know how to pray as we should until we are taught. Only someone from heaven can teach us how to communicate with "Our Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 6:5). Of course, as an infant can cry out and express many things without words, so a child of God can cry out in prayer and be heard by his heavenly Father. But the limits of infantile communication skills soon become unsatisfying and frustrating to those who want to grow. To grow in our ability to communicate, whether with a parent on earth or our Father in heaven, means learning how to do it.

To say "Lord, teach us to pray" also assumes a sincere *desire* to learn. It's one thing to say you want to pray and another to be willing to learn. Within every Spirit-indwelled human is the yearning to converse with his heavenly Father. In fact, the New Testament tells us twice, "Because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!'" (Galatians 4:6; see also Romans 8:15). All who have the Spirit of God have this Spirit-sparked Fatherward orientation. We crave intimacy with our Father in heaven, but often we don't know what to say. And yet

many Christians seldom move beyond this frustration and genuinely try to learn how to pray. Do you really want to learn how to pray?

Third, to ask the Lord, "teach us to pray" implies *growth and process*. The disciples didn't learn all they needed to know about prayer in one lesson, and neither do we. Although Jesus directly answered their request here, this passage does not contain all He taught them about prayer. For instance, in Luke 18:1, ". . . He was telling them a parable to show that at all times they ought to pray and not to lose heart." Later He would teach them more about fervency in prayer by His example in the Garden of Gethsemane (Luke 22:39-46).

The point? Don't be tempted to think, "I just don't have it" when it comes to prayer. If you were to begin the study of a foreign language, it would almost certainly take years of learning and regular practice in conversation before you'd be comfortable and articulate with it. Why then should we think we ought to learn the language of prayer in a short time?

### "WHEN YOU PRAY"

Jesus' answer to the disciples' request is immediate and straightforward in verse 2: "And He said to them, 'When you pray, say: . . .'" What follows is known as "The Lord's Prayer," or sometimes called more accurately, "The Model Prayer." After this He emphasizes the importance of persistence in prayer (verses 5-11), and concludes His response with the promise of verse 13, "If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him?" Put simply, Jesus teaches here a summary of what is necessary about the content and the spirit of prayer. That's why it's been called "The *Model* Prayer."

As to the content of prayer, He begins with, "When you pray, say . . ." Just as an older brother might bend down and quietly instruct a younger sibling about what to say as they are standing before their father, in the few lines of verses 2 through 4 Jesus tells us what to say when

we talk with God.

Does Jesus intend for us to use these exact words when we pray? On the one hand, we read prayers offered both by Jesus and the apostles after this time, and none of them repeat these lines. On the other hand, Jesus does explicitly instruct, "When you pray, say . . ." To answer this dilemma we must go back to Matthew 6:9-13 where Jesus teaches the same prayer in the Sermon on the Mount. In that instance He introduced the prayer by saying, "Pray, then, in this way: . . ." There He teaches the prayer as a model to follow, an example using broad headings of the things we should desire and love in prayer. In Luke 11:2-4 we find grounds for repeating the prayer verbatim, a practice maintained by the church since at least the second century. While this is permissible, Jesus also warned about praying with "meaningless repetition" (Matthew 6:7), something that can be done even with an inspired prayer. That's one reason why, as we'll see later, He also stressed in this context the role of the Holy Spirit in true prayer (Luke 11:13). Since, however, the other prayers of the New Testament follow the *model* of the Model Prayer and not its *form*, I believe Jesus is giving us a guide for prayer in Luke 11:2-4 more than a script.

Thus each line (such as in verse 2, "Your kingdom come") is a model or example of the things we should pray. For instance, "Lord, I long to see Your kingdom come in my daughter, that she would submit to You as her King and Savior. And may Your kingdom begin to come through Todd and Tara as they share the gospel of Jesus with Muslims on the mission field." Even without using the exact phrases of the Model Prayer, the same meaning may be prayed. Prayers for the blessing of God upon the work of your church can be another, more localized and personal way of saying to the Lord, "Your kingdom come."

Having said that, allow me to step back from the Model Prayer for an even wider view. When the disciples asked Jesus to teach them how to pray, He did not say

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something like, "Say whatever you feel, and it will be pleasing to God." Instead, on both occasions when He taught the Model Prayer, God the Son verbalized specific instructions. These words of education are God-breathed. Or to put it another way, we are taught how to pray by the Word of God.

"Okay," you reply, "but what does that mean? In what practical ways does that help me learn to pray?" To begin with, realize that His answer to us when we ask, "Lord, teach us to pray" is exactly the same inspired answer He gave to His disciples in Luke 11. That means we should turn first to His words there when we ask what was asked of Him in Luke 11. What were His words? The Model Prayer. Part of the basic curriculum in Christ's school of prayer is learning to use the Model Prayer in the way Jesus intended. This prayer is not the only divinely-inspired model given to us. God has placed prayers throughout the Bible to serve as examples for us to follow. But we should give primacy to this one because it was Jesus' explicit answer to the specific request: "Lord, teach us to pray."

"If we pray rightly," said the fourth-century theologian, Augustine, ". . . we say nothing but what is already contained in the Lord's Prayer. And whoever says in prayer anything which cannot find its place in that gospel prayer, is praying in a way which, if it be not unlawful, is at least not spiritual." He goes on to illustrate how the elements of prayers from other parts of the Bible are nothing more than restatements or amplifications of some part of Jesus' example prayer in Luke 11.1

### PERSISTENCE AND ASSURANCE

After setting forth the Model Prayer in verses 2-4, Jesus continues His primer on prayer in the succeeding verses by teaching us about persistence and the assurance of answered prayer: "So I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks, receives; and he who seeks, finds; and to him who knocks, it will be opened" (Luke 11:9-10). Have you given up asking for things? Unless you are convinced they are outside the will of God, and you can fit them under one of the requests found in the Model Prayer, let Jesus teach you to keep on asking, seeking, and knocking in prayer. Meditate on and pray through

every part of what He teaches here about prayer.

In Luke 11 Jesus teaches not only the basics about the *content* of prayer, but also about the *spirit* of it. The conclusion of His answer to "Lord, teach us to pray," is: "If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him?" (verse 13). Prayer is more than saying the right words or putting them in the correct order or repeating them the certain number of times. Prayer, like worship, must be done in both "spirit and truth" (John 4:24). So to pray, even using the words of the Model Prayer, apart from the help of the Holy Spirit is like trying to fly a plane with one wing.

If your prayer life is one-winged, just spinning around in boring, earthbound circles, perhaps it's because you haven't been asking for the Holy Spirit and His help in prayer. All Christians have the Holy Spirit from the first moment of faith in Christ and forever (John 7:38-39). Asking the Father to "give the Holy Spirit" is not, therefore, asking for the initial gift of the Spirit, nor to get more of Him than before, but rather for more of His help and influence. Our heavenly Father, by His Spirit, helps us—we who are sinful, selfish, and mortal—to speak with Him. He opens our eyes to lines of Scripture we should talk about. He opens our minds to pray more in accord with how the Bible says we ought to pray. He opens our hearts so that we feel what we pray instead of merely muttering lifeless phrases into the air.

A great man of prayer as well as the pulpit, Charles Spurgeon said, "We must all feel that if we are to pray aright, we must be taught of God, by his Holy Spirit. We are full of infirmities, and if there is any time when our infirmities are felt most, it is when we engage in prayer, but 'the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as are ought.' Let us, then, breathe this prayer to our great Teacher, 'Lord, teach us to pray.'"<sup>2</sup>

### GROWING FROM HERE

*Pray the Model Prayer and ask for the Holy Spirit's help in prayer.* Pray through the Model Prayer until you know its parts like a professor of English knows the parts of speech. And ask the Holy Spirit to help you pray so that the guidelines found in the Model Prayer become more than the parts of prayer, but the means of communion with God.

*Expect your heavenly Father to answer.* The disciples, largely a group of poor plain-folk, asked, "Lord, teach us to pray," and He was willing to do so with all His heart. He is just as willing to teach His disciples now. He who gave His Son to reconcile us to Himself will surely give His Spirit to help us enjoy that relationship. Furthermore, Jesus promises that the Father will give the Spirit to those who ask.

*Pray.* To learn to pray but remaining prayerless is like a pilot always learning in a flight simulator but never leaving the ground. Our Master teaches us how to pray so that we will pray. Would you be a man or woman of prayer? Turn to the words of Jesus in Luke 11 and begin.

### SIDEBAR: TIPS FOR CULTIVATING A PRAYER LIFE

- **Pray habitually**

Those who pray haphazardly, that is, "When I have the time," never pray as much as those who make prayer a part of their daily routine. Not that the content of prayer becomes routine, but only the timing of it. Link your prayer time with your Bible reading/meditation time so that the habit of daily Bible reading strengthens your prayer life also.

- **Pray through Scripture**

Whether in my seminary classes or church meetings around the country, nothing seems to ignite and sustain the passion for prayer like the teaching on praying through Scripture. Take a Psalm (or a paragraph from a New Testament letter) and pray through it verse-by-verse. Simply talk to the Lord about what each verse says and about what comes to mind from it.

- **Pray with your church**

Prayer in the New Testament is far more church-based than we tend to realize. Support congregational prayer at your church. If the prayer life of your church is disappointing, work with the pastor to improve it or to develop a new prayer ministry. Pastor, try to incorporate congregational prayer into your Sunday worship service.

- **Pray with pray-ers**

Pray frequently with at least one believer whose prayer life enriches and encourages yours. This may be your pastor or another spiritual leader, or may even be someone from another church.

- **Read biographies of great pray-ers**

You'll be roused from prayerlessness by reading the lives of people like George Mueller, David Brainerd, and other prayer warriors.