

Natalie Ford
June 5, 2011

Teach Us to Pray
Luke 11:1-13

Much like Psalm 23, the Lord's Prayer is *so famous, and so familiar*....
It's words have offered comfort even to those who don't know its author.
Most of us know it by heart...so much so, that we might just lose our place,
If we try too hard to remember it!

The words are so familiar, the danger is that we've forgotten,
Or perhaps we've never known what it is that we're saying, week after week,
maybe even day after day...

What are we saying?

What was Jesus saying with these and all his teachings about prayer?

It all began when the disciples asked....
Lord, teach us to pray.

And this beautiful prayer is what he said.
Luke's version is bare bones, Matthew has a bit more in the wording....
But it's so similar that today we have a prayer that has literally been passed on
from Jesus.

*Our Father who art in heaven,
Hallowed be thy name.
Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done,
On earth as it is in heaven...give us this day our daily bread,
And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.
And lead us not in to temptation, but deliver us from evil,
For thine is the kingdom, and the power and the glory forever. Amen.*

Remember when you first memorized it?
When you started being able to say it from memory?

Most of us have gotten the words wrong from time to time.

Praying the Lord's Prayer can be a little bit like

driving to work for the millionth time and not remembering
how you got from your own driveway to the office.

We get so used to the words that we no longer realize
what we're saying and doing when we pray it.

I love the Children's Letters to God book, because it has some great interpretations of this precious prayer...

3-year-old, Reese: "Our Father, Who does art in heaven, Harold is His name."

Little Caitlin, after practicing the Lord's Prayer for several evenings at bedtime, carefully enunciated each word right up to the end of the prayer: "Lead us not into temptation," she prayed, "but deliver us some E-mail..."

And another four-year-old prayed, quite profoundly about sin and grace.... "And forgive us our trash baskets as we forgive those who put trash in our baskets." (Children's Letters to God).

We smile, but the reality is we too get confused about this prayer....

But inside this simple prayer of Jesus,

Are some very important words,

Inside this prayer, we find out **why we need** prayer.

It's very basic.

More than ½ is about worshipping God,

Then four petitions for us---

For our daily **bread, forgiveness, avoiding temptation, and protection from evil.**

The Lord's Prayer is kind of a **universal language**—

it's a bridge between Protestant and Catholic,

and across most denominations,

even if some say debts, others say trespasses.

Most people know the "Our Father".

When asked HOW to pray, this was Jesus' response.

A prayer to a **personal** God, "Our Father".....

who has a personal relationship with us.

And a **powerful** God who will respond to our prayers.

Thy kingdom come, thy will be done

Give us our daily bread, forgive our debts,

lead us not into temptation, deliver us from evil.

When asked how to pray,
 Jesus went on to tell a story about *hospitality*, a friend persistently coming for
 bread in the night.....and how if we humans help one another,
 how much more will God help us when we come knocking in the night?

When asked how to pray,
 Jesus said, *Ask* and it will be given you,
Seek, and you will find,
Knock and the door will be opened.

Personal, powerful, persistent.

These are the words that describe a prayer life outlined by Jesus.

You ***might not feel*** that personal, powerful, persistent type of prayer life
 Right now...

If so, you are not alone....

So what if we come again to Jesus, and ask him now, "How should we pray?"

And imagine, this is what he says.....

He said the Our Father....

He said go to God like a friend seeking bread in the middle of the night,

He said go to God, like a child to a parent expecting good gifts....

This isn't always easy for us.

Deep down inside we might avoid prayer because we have some
bad images of ***God***, of ***ourselves***, and of ***prayer*** itself.

Maybe our ***God is an oppressive judge or far-off ruler***

A ***cruel earthly father***.... instead of a heavenly one,
 longing for relationship with us.

Maybe we see ***ourselves as unworthy*** to approach God in prayer, or
 unworthy to ask for God's help in our daily lives,
 instead of believing that we are beloved by God.

Maybe we believe that ***prayer has to be done just a certain way***,
 in certain postures or places,
 instead of any way,
 anytime, in any place.

Haven't you ever wondered if you're doing it right???

So we too come asking, at one time or another in our lives,
 Lord, Teach us to pray....
 teach us ***busy people with troubling ideas*** about prayer...
 how to pray.

And here's the Good News--
 It is then, when we come to Jesus asking for help with prayer,
 that we can finally ***let go of our flawed ideas*** about
 God, ourselves, and prayer.

One of my favorite Christian authors and professors is Roberta Bondi.
 She believes the majority of people have to overcome preconceived notions
 about prayer,
 and most of these ideas come from our own experiences.

An ***overbearing parent***, can make it difficult to trust God, and address God as
 'Father'.

Too much ***criticism or chaos*** may lead us to believe that
 we're not worthy of God's attention,
 or our lives aren't important enough for prayer.

Picking up an ***attitude of perfectionism*** can lead us to think that prayer has to be
 done in a very particular way.

But what does she say about letting go of these flawed ideas?
 Bondi suggests ***we just show up and meet God***,
 whenever and wherever we feel most comfortable.
 Maybe not even with any words at all at first.
 And we just keep showing up again and again,
 And we offer some simple words,
 Like the Lord's Prayer. .

She says, *prayer is a pretty ordinary, everyday kind of thing. Yes, it has its high moments, but a lot of prayer is just a matter of showing up.*

What better words to show up with, than Jesus' own words for prayer?
 In fact, Bondi suggests we use the Lord's Prayer, and other parts of the ***Bible***—
 because much of it is prayer.

Only in showing up for prayer do we learn what prayer is,
And what it is not.

Only in showing up for prayer do we learn how to let go of all the old crazy
ideas about prayer, and truly start praying.

And I don't know anyone who couldn't use a better prayer life.
It's a rough world out there.

Sister Joan Chittister describes our world this way, *It is such a busy, changing world. ..the kind of world that consumes us, drains our souls, dries out our hearts, damps our spirits, and makes living more a series of duties ... We find ourselves spending life too tired to garden, too distracted to read, too busy to talk, too plagued by people and deadlines to organize our lives, to reflect on our futures, to appreciate our present. We simply go on, day after day after day. How can we find God in all of that?*
(January 2002, 30 Good Minutes).

Through **prayer**. That's how we find God.
That's how we find our connection, our foundation in God.

Jesus clearly made prayer a priority in his own life.
He prayed constantly, not only at meals and special occasions,
but he also retreats from the crowds and his disciples to pray alone.
He **makes time** for prayer in the midst of an incredibly full and busy life of
service, and he makes time to teach his followers about prayer.

The disciples saw the fruits of that prayer life.
And that's when they said, Lord, teach us to pray.
And he offered them 'The Lord's Prayer'.

The truth is that prayer is our spiritual **connection, our foundation**.
Without the spiritual foundation inside,
Eventually it's hard to keep everything going on the outside.
In fact, all too often life can be very, very full on the outside—
a career, a family, a group of friends, financial security—
but we can be falling apart on the inside.

Prayer is what keeps us going,
 It's knowing that God will provide for our every need,
 It's trusting---asking, seeking, knocking,
 And knowing there will be an answer.

Prayer is something we do to ***maintain a relationship*** with God.
 Remember how Jesus prayer starts?
 Our Father—in the original language, our 'daddy'.
 We pray to ***have a relationship*** with God,
 like a child with his or her parent.

And this heavenly parent deserves our praise, and respect.
 'hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done'.
 So, We pray ***to show our praise and respect.***

We pray because we have a God who meets our needs.
Give us this day our daily bread.
 We pray because we have ***God's grace, and protection.***
forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

As ***you leave this place***, and go out into the world,
 As you enter your homes, your cars, your work, your families....
 I pray that you will pray.
 Such a simple little thing, showing up to be with God.
 And yet—it is ***the very thing*** that can keep us going.

And when our own words fail us,
 Or simply when no other words will do,
 The Lord's simple prayer ***may be all we need.***

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. (For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever.) Amen.

That is our ***Good News of the Gospel***, Amen.