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teach us
to pray...”

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by Pastor Tim Dodson
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Luke 11:1-13 Now it came to pass, as He was praying in a certain place, when He ceased, that one of His disciples said to Him, "Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his

disciples." 2 So He said to them, "When you pray, say: Our Father in heaven, Hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done On earth as it is in heaven. 3 Give us day by day our daily bread. 4 And forgive us our sins, For we also forgive everyone who is indebted to us. And do not lead us into temptation, But deliver us from the evil one." 5 And He said to them, "Which of you shall have a friend, and go to him at midnight and say to him, 'Friend, lend me three loaves; 6 'for a friend of mine has come to me on his journey, and I have nothing to set before him'; 7 "and he will answer from within and say, 'Do not trouble me; the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot rise and give to you'? 8 "I say to you, though he will not rise and give to him because he is his friend, yet because of his persistence he will rise and give him as many as he needs. 9 "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. 10 "For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. 11 "If a son asks for bread from any father among you, will he give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent instead of a fish? 12 "Or if he asks for an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? 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!"

There are many immediate misunderstandings concerning the passage before us. One, it is often called “The Lord’s Prayer” but in truth, it is far more accurate to call it the “Disciples Prayer.” For one thing, Jesus would not have had to pray concerning the forgiveness of sins, for He didn’t have any. But the apostles had yet to arrive at ‘sinless perfection’...so for them, it applies! Secondly, we hear the words “Lord teach us *how* to pray...” when in truth it says “Lord, *teach us to pray...*” So while we can easily receive this as a kind of methodology in prayer, it was never meant to be a mantra to recite or a child’s rhyme to memorize. If we can first understand what it ISN’T, it is much easier to grasp what it IS and what Jesus was offering up here.

If we take the time to step back and look, we see that Jesus was a real man of prayer. Perhaps the acknowledgment of such a fact will change the way we look at prayer. Because while there are indeed aspects of prayer that Jesus would not have needed to include (such as seeking forgiveness), we find Him still often before the Father in such communique. He was the living Son of God...deity in flesh, and yet it was still an important practice and He still seemingly *needed* that time with God and the relationship that it fostered. We read of Jesus praying often. He would often *attempt* to slip away from the pack...away from the hub-bub, and seek the Father in an intimate fashion. It was never an easy task for Him to escape His kingdom service, just as it is no doubt difficult for us also...at least for those of us that seek to be *used* by Him not just *heard* by Him.

Our Father in heaven. While I have been known to often include the Son in my prayers, it is important for us to understand that the real wonder of prayer is that we have in this process a ***full access to the Father***...to Jehovah God, creator and ruler of the universe. How we can so easily, even flippantly, take such access for granted! For those of us that have been around the greater church for an extended time, it can sadly all become commonplace, instead of a constant experience of awe. Such a wonder that we can have the free and accessible personal audience with the all-knowing, all powerful, one true God and Creator of the universe! Oh if we can just hold on to the wonderment of such an experience!

I remember how in the early 60's President John F. Kennedy purposely tore down the façade of the "ivory tower" when the pictures came out of the Kennedy children playing in the Oval Office and under the presidential desk. I think about those photos sometimes when this subject of prayer comes up. While such is awesome as to its simple attitude of access to such an important man, how much greater is this incredible approach to more than a president, but to a ***KING***...the king of everything.

Hallowed be Your name. So Jesus firstly points the disciples in the direction of the Father...teaching them that they *could* come and further, living out the example that they *should* come. He expressed in this "lesson" the idea of both acknowledging as well as manifesting ***honor***. And what exactly is that or moreover, ***how do we do that?*** Honoring is to firstly show 'great respect'...so while our access is indeed open, may we always approach Him with great esteem. Honoring also is the fulfilling (of an obligation) or keeping of an agreement. So I honor something or someone by doing what I promised to do and being faithful in the agreement...the *covenant* that I have with Him. This reinforces the principle that prayer is not merely 'a talk', especially not a unilateral one! Prayer, like worship, is not just an event or an activity, but an actual state of being, and a framework of relationship.

Your kingdom come. Next in this issue is the expression of desire to see the kingdom of God manifested. While this is certainly speaking of the heavenly eternal realm to come...something we all would so often like to see come to pass, it is also speaking of the kingdom that exists today and operates amongst us that are his followers. Many of us are quite unaware of such a realm and fail to understand that once reborn, we are now residents of such a realm. Or at least *can* be residents!

I often liken such to an embassy in a foreign country. All parties involved consider such a gated community of sovereign ground no matter what national soil it exists upon. For the United State, inside that embassy fence in Italy, in France, in the Ukraine, or any such place, is a little bit of America. It operates according to American law and order, along with its constitutional freedoms, guarantees, responsibilities and rule. So while we respect our 'host country' and make every attempt to obey their laws, we know we ultimately live in an embassy of the "kingdom of God." We have a king, and our own set of freedoms, guarantees, responsibilities, and rules. I may live here in this host country, but my nationality is Christian. We may indeed love our host country, but our ultimate desire and purpose is to further the kingdom of God. That is to be our first priority, our greatest desire, and our ultimate passion. This interest is also part of "prayer."

Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. It is our desire now...expressed through verbal prayer and living manifest prayer, that the will and plans of our king be furthered, and the national interests of this 'land of Jehovah' be given priority and free movement. Because in this world, our monarchy has many enemies and while they are led also by a subservient leader to our king, he is still a very powerful dictator in his own right. If they can stop us, ***they will***. Further, they will kill us if we failed to be protected by our king!

Give us day by day our daily bread. Then in our prayer instruction, we are told to seek the Father for our simple needs. No encouragement herein to entreat the Lord for a better cable TV package and a new wide screen TV. He has promised to take care of our *needs* not our *wants*. But let's face it...*haven't we all been given things to enjoy in this life that can hardly be called necessities?* Paul reminds us in 1Corinthians 4:7 "...*what do you have that you did not receive (from God)?*" God has granted us much in this life. I pray that such is enjoyed with thanks and will not serve to be our priority, a distraction, or our life focus. God is not Santa Claus! May we remember that our "heart will be where our treasure is." Such is a sure gauge of how much we love Him...*if we are willing to look into that truth!*

And forgive us our sins, For we also forgive everyone who is indebted to us. This is not in reference to the prayer of repentance and salvation. No, this is the ongoing awareness and acknowledgement before God that we aren't 'there yet' when it comes to a perfect holy living. But such also is not meant to serve as a 'long leash' of allowance to dabble in sin because we have been provided the 'magic incantation' with which to absolve us of such after the fact. Our life in Christ should be an ongoing pursuit of holiness, a 'broken vessel' in which the Holy Spirit can manifest a level of godliness beyond any personal degree of effort. But without God's grace, we still would never be able to be in His presence because we are still fallen creatures.

We must however remember that a true acknowledgement and understanding of our forgiveness is manifested in OUR forgiveness of those who sin against us! How quick we are to receive forgiveness and redemption for ourselves while quite slow to give the same to others. Mark 11:26 reminds us that "...*if you do not forgive, neither will your Father in heaven forgive your trespasses.*" Such a truth has factually condemned innumerable souls that practice church and religious living, Churched but quite lost to eternity because they are holding on to bitterness and an unforgiving heart towards others.

And do not lead us into temptation, But deliver us from the evil one. A difficult phrase to grasp, because God doesn't 'tempt us' to do evil. He does however **allow** us to pursue that road for varying reasons. *One*, because we insist, and He allows us to love what we want to love. *Other times*, He has allowed us to endure such because we have a need to grow up and wise up, and sadly, only pain is going to be our teacher. And we need to understand that perhaps even the word 'temptation' is a regrettable interpretation as the original also means 'trials' and 'testing.' So this phrase is a humble plea for God's protective intervention. And *that* is a good prayer! Because the 'evil one' is most definitely out to get you.

Jesus goes on now to give a practical example. As we have dealt with similar passages before, this one too is not to be taken out of its context to be used as some sort of 'proof text' for fringe theologies. The fact is, we will never 'strong arm' God. You will never put him in a 'holy headlock' where you will muscle **your** will to become **His** will. Again, He may **allow** you to go your own way, but that way will never be His if it isn't His at the beginning. God doesn't change, and He doesn't change His mind. YOU will not debate him into supporting you, nor threaten Him into backing a path that is contrary to His divine will. If God's nature is fundamentally changed by your insistence, then YOU are the supreme deity.

You need to understand that to believe otherwise carries implicit and dramatic character ramifications which cannot be ignored, and would profoundly change the way we see Him and interact with Him. Suddenly, God would not be the father figure so carefully demonstrated throughout scripture. It would rather relegate Him to a teasing sibling or a distant, uncaring recluse. God becomes the grumpy old man being bothered in the middle of the night, saying no because it is inconvenient to Him. But is God ever inconvenienced?

Do we know better than God? Are we embracing a theology that says we should keep pushing until we ‘wear God down’ and He gives us what we want? Because we won’t. And if so, what happened to the instruction to pray “thy will be done?” In reality, our prayer before God should be humble and fully expectant of His answer, an answer that is sure to come, but will not always be a yes, *no matter how much we ask*.

There is no scriptural prohibition on asking God more than once on an issue. Often the answer is not ‘no forever’ but ‘no for now,’ because timing is always a critical aspect to God’s will. It may be that God is saying to simply wait. But if it becomes clear that the answer is clearly “no,” we need to acknowledge that *HE* is God and ruler of our lives and receive that decision. Remember that even the great Paul the apostle asked God three times to remove the thorn from his flesh, and ‘across the board’ he got the same ‘no’ as the answer.

If this analogy before us is a picture of God...telling us to just keep bugging Him until He grows tired and gives us what we want, then are to also see God as a grumpy guy who won’t deal with us in the middle of the night? No, His door is *always* open, and He is *always* there. He needs no arm twisting, for He loves His kids and loves to give good gifts to us! So this story isn’t telling us to think in human and earthly ways...to just push until you get what you want. This story is saying the opposite: *just ask, seek, and knock* and He will be there for us!

We are told to ask, to seek, and to knock. We are also told that if we do, it will be **given to us**, we will **‘find’** and the **door will be answered**. But before we run off to the bank to deposit our millions, let us remember what scripture *also* says about this subject:

James 4:3 “*You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures.*”

Job 35:12 “*There they cry out, but He does not answer, Because of the pride of evil men.*”

1Jo 3:22 “*And whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight..*”

Mt 6:8 “*...do not be like them. For your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him.*”

Let us remember that our desires and seeking does not in any way alter the very nature of God! He is still the same God as always, and further, still the same *Father*. Which means He will not give us a rock instead of the bread we need, nor a scorpion or a snake, *even if we think we want one and beg Him to give us one!* Daddy *always* knows what’s best for His kids.

But it does appear that the desire to give us spiritual gifts supersede even the earthly need for bread. Because this whole story for Jesus seems to have been leading somewhere...specifically to verse 13, where ‘out of the blue’ we hear Jesus tell us “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!***” Apparently God *isn’t* the grumpy guy who gives us what we want in the middle of the night if we pester Him enough. He is the guy who *loves* to give good gifts to us...of which the indwelling Holy Spirit apparently reigns supreme! I wonder though...*do we actually KNOW what gifts are good?* And if we do...*do we want them?*

“For ***Yours*** is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.”