

"PRAYER . . . COMMUNICATION WITH GOD"
Selected Scripture
Chris Grattan

For me, growing up Catholic, my daily prayers were very simple, "Good morning sweet Jesus, I give you myself and my day." At night it was very similar, "Good night sweet Jesus, I give you myself and my night." And, of course, we always said grace before each family meal, funny how I still know it, "Bless us O Lord! And these Thy gifts, which we are about to receive, from Thy bounty through Christ our Lord, Amen."

Of course, we also learned the "Our Father," or the "Lord's Prayer," at a very young age, which we prayed on a regular basis, "Our Father which 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 trespasses as we have forgiven those that have trespassed against us. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil."

What does it mean to pray, to communicate with God? We see a beautiful verse in **1 Chronicles 16:11** "Look to the Lord and his strength; **seek his face always.**"

This verse is within the Psalm of Thanksgiving (verses 8-36 of 1 Chronicles 16) that King David appointed Asaph and his associates to sing to the Lord before the Ark of the Covenant, this beautiful symbol of God's presence.

What does it mean to "seek His face always?"

If we simply look at the Hebrew meanings of this portion of the song sung by Asaph (the Levite singer, prophet and poet that served in the temple during the times of David & Solomon), we get an understanding of what it means:

- **Seek** – to search out, to strive after, to desire. The diligent pursuit of!
- **His Face** – His presence, His countenance, to be in His presence.
- **Always** – continually, perpetually, regularly. Something ongoing, maintained without interruption.

The diligent pursuit of being in His presence without interruption!

Does this mean that we are to be like Monks in a Monastery? Interesting, monasteries started in the 4th & 5th century where monks shunned the world to live a simple life of prayer and devotion. However, to much extent, as wonderful as this sounds, you probably have heard the phrase, "**so spiritually minded that they were no earthly good.**" God doesn't desire that our pursuit of Him would take us out of the world, He desires that we shine the light of Jesus Christ to a world that so desperately needs to see that light.

In John 15 (which you studied a couple weeks ago) we see Jesus tells His disciples: **John 15:5** “I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.”

If you remain in Me – this word “remain” is a very similar Greek word to the phrase that we saw in 1 Chronicles 16:11 “seek His face always.” The Greek meaning for remain is: It conveys a sense of persistence and continuity, often implying a steadfastness or enduring presence. In the New Testament, it is frequently used to describe the believer's relationship with Christ, emphasizing a continual, abiding connection.

It is this beautiful relationship that the believer has with his Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ! **A relationship.** A sustained life in Christ Jesus!

To “seek His face always”, to “remain or abide in Christ”, prayer is truly this beautiful relationship between the Redeemer and the redeemed, a channel of communication between man and God, an exchange between friends, a communication of guidance, and the channel for love to flow between the God and His children.

And it is only this type of relationship that will “bear much fruit.” It is the “life flow” from Jesus Christ (the True Vine) to those that abide in Him. Prayer is therefore not elective but a true essential. No prayer – no life flow; no life flow – no fruit.

Christ's formula for a sustained life flow can be divided into in three parts:

- 1) **Abiding in Christ** – that means relationship – the premise of prayer is that it's based on a relationship, fellowship and partnership;
- 2) **My words abide in you** – that means the pattern of prayer is communion and communication and petition;
- 3) **Ask whatever you wish, and it will be given to you** – that means partnership – the purpose of prayer is change - change in us, in our circumstances and in our union with God. The praying person will not remain the same; he will either change or cease to truly pray.

This sustained life flow in Christ is a relationship and a relationship is always a back-and-forth; it is talking to God and listening to Him. It's not bringing God a long list of our needs and wants, but speaking to Him, praising Him for Who He is, thanking Him for the goodness of life, and desiring for Him to change our human wishes and desires to His wishes.

Earlier I mentioned that from a very early age, I learned the “Our Father” from my days of attending the Catholic church. The Our Father or Lord's Prayer is listed in the Gospel of Matthew and the Gospel of Luke. In Matthew, Jesus starts by saying: **Matthew 6:9a** ““This, then, is how you should pray.”

In **Luke 11:2a** Jesus says, “When you pray, say:”

We see that the Bible references the need for prayer in many passages; however, these two references (in Matthew and Luke) are the only places in Scripture where we see Jesus specifically teaching His listeners and readers on “how to pray.”

What does Jesus mean when He says, “This is how you should pray?” To the world, prayer is defined as, “a solemn request for help or expression of thanks addressed to God or an object of worship” or “an earnest hope or wish.” For most people, even many Christians, the focus is usually on the first part of that prayer definition, “a solemn request for help.” For many, prayer is a list of things that we want from God; i.e, please heal me or a loved one of some sickness, please bring me a job or a spouse, or please remove me from some difficult situation. While these are definitely things worthy of prayer, should they be the main focus of our prayers?

The word that Jesus uses for “Pray” is, “to interact with the Lord by switching human wishes or ideas for His wishes as He imparts faith. Accordingly, praying is closely interconnected with faith.” King David in **Psalm 37, verses 3-5** writes,³ “Trust in the LORD and do good; dwell in the land and enjoy safe pasture. ⁴Take delight in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart. ⁵Commit your way to the LORD; trust in him and he will do this.” To trust in the Lord, to take delight in the Lord, and to commit your way to the Lord, are all required of us before He will give you the desires of your heart. Your heart must be transformed to His desires! (switching human wishes or ideas for His wishes).

Missionary and Theologian, E. Stanley Jones writes, “Prayer is surrender – surrender to the will of God and cooperation with that will. If I throw out a boat hook from a boat and catch hold of the shore and pull, do I pull the shore to me, or do I pull myself to the shore? Prayer is not pulling God to my will, but the aligning of my will to the will of God.”

Surrender to the will of God and cooperation with that will; to interact with the Lord by switching human wishes or ideas for His wishes. This is prayer, pretty straightforward, but how do we do that?

Praise the Lord that Jesus taught everything that we need in the Lord’s Prayer to accomplish this! Let’s take a closer look at that amazing prayer!

The Lord’s Prayer starts with, “**Our Father in Heaven.**” Surely, we understand that God is in Heaven; however, there is great importance to this statement. The word that Jesus uses for “heaven” is a reference to the “highest heaven.” Not the lower heavens of the atmosphere or the universe with all its glory of the stars, planets, sun, and moon. The highest heaven is the eternal heaven, paradise as the Apostle Paul states. It is this heaven where God’s throne is and where He rules over all - **Psalm 103:19** “The Lord has established his throne in heaven, and his kingdom rules over all.” It is the place where our Father dwells and the place that we should

desire and long for above all things. As the Apostle Paul says in **2 Corinthians 5:8** “We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord.”

When we start our prayers with “Our Father in heaven,” we focus our minds on the glory of God and the glory that awaits all believers in eternity. It takes our focus off the things of this world (human wishes), things that are temporary and fleeting, and directs our minds to eternal things (His wishes). It is this mind that longs to be at home with the Lord and the mind that wants to share the Gospel message with the whole world, until the day He takes us home to be with Him!

The next part of the Lord’s Prayer is, “**Hallowed be your name.**” I like the Christian Standard Bible translation that says, “Your name be honored as holy.”

The four living creatures around the throne in **Revelation 4:8** can’t stop saying, “Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord God Almighty.” Most theologians believe using the word “holy” three times shows that God is so far above our understanding of holiness that all the creatures can do to describe His holiness is say “Holy, Holy, Holy.”

God alone is holy! God alone has never been corrupted by sin, God alone is free from wickedness, God alone is holy, pious, and righteous. **1 John 1:5b** “God is light; in him there is no darkness at all.”

Once again, this is foundational to any prayer life, understanding that God is God, and we are not. It is the mind that understands that God’s wishes and desires for mankind are perfect, pure, and true and are of far greater importance than the wishes and desires for our own comfort and pleasures. It is the mind that says, “not my will, but yours be done.” It is the mind that has been transformed and renewed by Christ!

The next part of the Lord’s Prayer is, “**Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.**”

Your kingdom come – His kingdom come! Not a kingdom that we would desire on this earth, but His perfect and glorious eternal kingdom. We pray, “Your kingdom come” because our understanding is corrupted by our sin, by our flesh, and by our earthly desires. We pray, “Your kingdom come” because He is holy, righteous, and perfect and we trust that His eternal kingdom is far greater than anything we could envision in this life. And we pray, “Your kingdom come”, because our desire should be, that all mankind would bring their wills into harmony and alignment with God’s will, God’s perfectly loving, perfectly holy and righteous will.

Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven – What a beautiful desire, that my will and the wills of all mankind on earth would be brought into the same conformity with the divine will in heaven. In 1955 the song, “Let There Be Peace on Earth” was written by Sy Miller and his wife Jill Jackson-Miller. The opening line is, “Let there be peace on earth and let it begin with

me.” In a world filled with such evil and darkness, the only way that true peace will come is if God’s will in heaven would be done here on earth, and my prayer is, “Let it begin with me!”

The Lord’s Prayer continues with, “**Give us this day our daily bread.**”

Once again, we see Jesus teaching the truth that “God is God, and we are not.” It is humbly coming to our Heavenly Father in dependance upon Him, asking Him to provide what we need to sustain us from day to day. And not **just** sustain us, but the literal meaning is, what is needed each and every day so that we may humbly and joyfully serve Him.

Day by day we seek God for our “bread.” Is this the food to sustain us? Yes, but it also means so much more. God knows what we need each day to sustain us - **Matthew 6:31-34**
³¹ So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ ³² For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. ³³ But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

Seek first His kingdom! The word “bread” is everything that God supplies to the yielded believer day-by-day to live in His preferred will. It is everything we need daily to seek Him and His kingdom and to serve Him.

We then see the Lord’s Prayer say, “**And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.**”

This is an extremely powerful statement and part of the Lord’s prayer. The word “debts” is also offense and sin. However, the strength is in the additional explanation from the Greek word, it is a debt that we have, and we are told to focus on the after-effect of that debt or obligation. We are asking God to forgive us our debts/sins, sins committed against a holy and righteous God. The penalty for that sin is eternal separation from God, eternal torment (after-effect of sin). But God, through His Son, Jesus Christ has made a way so that our debts can be fully paid, fully forgiven.

When we truly understand our debt that has been forgiven and the penalty of that debt that has been paid, how could we ever hold a sin against our brethren and not forgive them?

When we pray those words, “And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors,” we are reminded of God’s unbelievable grace and mercy shown to us, and when we truly understand **what** we have been forgiven, we can’t help but show that same kindness to our brothers and sisters.

The last part of the Lord’s Prayer says, “**And do not lead us into temptation but deliver us from the evil one.**”

“**And do not lead us into temptation,**” the word that Jesus uses in the Lord’s prayer for “temptation” is a word that means “trials.” The apostle Paul writes in **1 Corinthians 10:13** “No

temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it.”

Paul uses the same word for temptation as Jesus used, which once again means “trials.” When Paul says that God will not let you be tried beyond what you can bear, we can see Jesus’ words in the Lord’s prayer as, “And do not lead us into a trial that we cannot bear.” It’s not praying that we wouldn’t have trials, but that we would have “stronger backs” to endure those trials. And God knowing us better than we know ourselves, we ask Him, “don’t allow us to be tried above what we can endure.”

But deliver us from the evil one – the truth is, we will only be fully delivered from the “evil one” once we are in Heaven, or after the evil one (as described in the Book of Revelation) has been thrown eternally into the lake of fire. The evil one has no power over the believer; however, he is still roaming this earth, seeking who he may devour. Shortly before Jesus was arrested, He prayed to the Father for His disciples, He prayed this in John 17:15 “My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one.”

To deliver us from the evil one is to give us the strength, through Christ Jesus, to overcome the power of the evil one. When we pray this, we are reminded of the words from the apostle John, in 1 John 4:4 “You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world.” In essence, we are saying, “you have already given us the power to overcome all the schemes of the evil one, help me to stand strong in that truth!”

When the early church was being persecuted in the Book of Acts, the believers prayed this: **Acts 4:29** “Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness.” They didn’t pray for the threats to be removed, but that in the face of the threats, they would have the boldness to continue preaching Jesus Christ!

Jesus told His disciples in **Matthew 16:24**, “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.”

Prayer is not a long list of things that we want but it is the process of us denying ourselves, taking up our cross and following Him. Prayer is to place our focus on eternal things and away from the temporary things of this life!

The Biblical definition of prayer is: To **interact** with the Lord by switching human wishes or ideas for His wishes as He imparts faith.

I love that definition for many reasons and one word that really jumps out is “INTERACT.” Prayer is an interaction, a relationship with our loving, gracious, holy, Heavenly Father. I love the Apostle John’s concluding words in **1 John 5:13-14a** ¹³ “I write these things to you who

believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life. ¹⁴ This is the confidence we have in approaching God."

Not only does God desire to interact with us, but He also tells us, because of His Son Jesus Christ, that we can have confidence in approaching our Father!

Prayer is the beautiful interaction, this beautiful relationship with our Heavenly Father. It is through our prayer life that we surrender our will to the perfect, holy will of God. Prayer is life-giving and life transforming.

You see the truth is, if our prayer life is conformed to the Biblical definition and to Jesus' teaching on prayer, we will never have unanswered prayers, we will never receive a "no" from God and our prayers will always be as described as in **James 5:16 b** "The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective." AMEN!

Let's Pray!