

**Text:** Luke 11:1-4  
**Theme:** Teach Us Lord, How to Pray (Brief comment and reflection II)  
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## I. How Should We Pray?

In Luke 11:1 Jesus' disciples asked, "Lord, teach us to pray." And when Jesus began his prayer, it was with "Our Father, who art in heaven...may your name be hallowed..." (v2). The prayer did not start with my needs, the world's, or others. It started with God. The focus was on Him and if we get this right, other things will flow into shape.

### A. We Should Worship God First, and Praise His Character and Work.

Bible prayers quite commonly included many descriptions of the glory and greatness of God. Jesus began the model prayer by praising God's name (Matt 6:9). Many psalms are filled with praise (note Psalm 86:5-12).

Consider:

- **God's authority and lordship** - He is the true God, in contrast to idols - 1 Chronicles 29:10-13. [see also Psalm 86:8-10; Neh. 9:4-6; 1 Kings 8:23; 2 Kings 19:15; Matt. 6:13; Rev. 11:17; 2 Sam. 7:22]
- **God's power** - He is great, all powerful, glorious, splendid, majestic - 1 Chronicles 29:11, 12. [see also Jer. 32:16-23; Eph. 1:16-19; Job 42:1, 2; Neh. 9:4-38; Dan. 2:20-23]
- **God's holiness, goodness, and righteousness** - God is good, holy, righteous and forgiving - Psalm 86:5-12 (note v5). [see also Psalm 143:1-12; 1 Sam. 2:2]
- **God's mercy, grace, kindness, and willingness to forgive** - God has provided redemption and salvation for His people, especially sending Jesus as our Saviour - Psalm 86:5. [Col. 1:12-14; 2 Sam. 7:23; Neh. 9:4-38; Luke 2:37, 38; 1 Kings 8:23; Ezra 9:8, 9; Psalm 17:7]
- **God's wisdom and knowledge** - Jeremiah 32:16-23 (note v19). [Dan. 2:20-23; 1 Sam. 2:3]
- **God's justice** - God cares for His people and rewards them but punishes the wicked - Jeremiah 32:19, 23. [see also 1 Sam. 2:6-10; Gen. 18:25; Psalm 90:7-11]
- **God's eternal existence** - Psalm 90:1-4. [see also Psalm 102:1, 12, 24-27]
- **God's faithfulness to His word** - Nehemiah 9:4-8. [see also Neh. 1:5; 1 Kings 8:23-30; Dan. 9:4; Psalm 143:1]

- **God's work as Creator and Source of life** - He made the heaven and the stars of the sky. He made the land and sea and everything in them. Nehemiah 9:4-6. [see also Jer. 32:17; Psalm 90:2; 102:1, 24, 25; 2 Kings 19:15; Acts 4:24; 1 Sam. 2:6]

We could never list here all the great qualities and works for which God deserves our praise. Yet, surely we ought to praise God in prayer, so we should meditate about why He deserves our praise? Instead of just thinking of more things for God to give us, do we need greater emphasis on describing His greatness?

## **B. We Should Pray on Behalf of Others.**

1 Timothy 2:1, 2 says we should offer prayer, supplication, intercession, and giving of thanks on behalf of all. Yet we sometimes neglect to pray for others because we concentrate so much on our own interests.

Bible prayers are filled with requests and thanksgiving for people other than the one offering the prayer. Consider some groups of people for whom we should pray:

- **Rulers** - 1 Timothy 2:1, 2. [see also Ezra 6:10; 1 Chron. 29:19]
- **Children and family members** - our spouse, relatives, etc. - 1 Chron. 29:19. [Matthew 19:13-15; Gen. 25:21, 22; 24:12-14; 18:23-33; 1 Sam. 1:10-12; 2 Sam. 12:15, 16; Luke 1:13]
- **Lost sinners** - Romans 10:1-3. Remember, however, that these people must meet the gospel conditions of salvation in order to be forgiven. [see also Matt. 9:36-38; Luke 23:34; Acts 7:60]
- **Enemies and persecutors** - Luke 6:27, 28. [see also Acts 7:60; Luke 23:34]
- **People sick and suffering** - 3 John 2. [James 5:16; Num. 11:2; 2 Sam. 12:15, 16; Gen. 20:17,18]
- **Ministers, elders, deacons, preachers, and teachers** - Ephesians 6:18-20. [Col. 4:3, 4; Acts 4:25-29; 6:6; 14:23; 13:3; 1 Thess. 5:25; Matt. 9:36-38; 2 Thess. 3:1, 2; Heb. 13:18]
- **Other Christians** - Ephesians 6:18. [see also James 5:16]

The Bible contains multitudes of examples in which men of God interceded on behalf of God's people. Here are just a few of them:

- **Moses** - People complained to Moses and Moses cried out to the Lord on their behalf. [Num. 11:2; 21:7; 14:13-20; Deut. 9:18-20, 25-29; Ex. 32:9-14, 31, 32].
- **Samuel** - Prayed for the people [1 Sam. 7:5-11; 12:19-25].
- **Jesus** - Luke 22:31, 32 (for Peter); John 17:9-22 (for all believers). [Luke 23:34]
- **Peter** - Acts 8:24 (for Simon)
- **Paul** - Col. 1:3, 9-14 [Rom. 1:9-12; Eph. 1:15-19; Phil. 1:3-11; 1 Thess. 1:2; 2 Thess. 1:11, 12; 2:13; 2 Tim. 1:3]

Note that most examples were prayers, not just for God's people in general, but for specific individuals or congregations. Do we show this personal concern for others in our prayers?

## **C. We Should Make Requests and Give Thanks.**

We should pray for the things we truly need, however some people forget to thank God for what they have received. Their prayers consist almost entirely of asking for more. God is a generous God, willing to give what we need. But He also expects appreciation for what He gives.

Passages teaching we can request what we need:

- **Philippians 4:6, 7** - Instead of worrying, let your requests be made known to God. "Supplication" refers to requests for needs to be "supplied."
- **Matthew 7:7-11** - God is like a loving father who gives what his children need. If we ask, we will receive.
- **1 Peter 5:7** - Cast your cares on God because He cares for you.
- **James 4:2, 3** - Sometimes we do not receive because we do not ask. On the other hand, God will not answer selfish requests for things we do not need.
- **1 John 5:14, 15** - If we ask according to God's will, we receive our petitions.

[Cf. 1 John 3:21, 22; John 14:13, 14; 15:7, 16; 16:23, 24, 26]

Passages teaching we should also give thanks for our blessings:

- **Philippians 4:6, 7** - Our requests should be made known with thanksgiving.
- **1 Timothy 2:1** - Prayers for others should include thanksgiving.
- **Ephesians 5:20** - Give thanks to the Father always for all things.

[Cf. 1 Thess. 5:18; Col. 4:2; 2:7; 3:17]

## D. Some Specific Things We Should Pray About.

No one prayer or combination of prayers could mention all the possible subjects there are to pray about. But an examination of Bible prayers can teach us the kind of specific things that are commonly included in Bible prayers. We may pray about these things for ourselves or for others. We may request them and should give thanks when we receive them.

All these things are mentioned in Bible prayers:

- **God's will to be done** - Matthew 6:9-13 (note v10). [see also Matt. 26:39]
- **Necessities of life** - Matthew 6:11. [Acts 27:35; Matt. 15:36; 14:19; 1 Tim. 4:3-5; Luke 24:30]
- **Forgiveness of sins and deliverance from the consequences of sin** - Matthew 6:12. But note that one who has not been baptized should not pray for forgiveness but be baptized - Acts 2:38; 22:16; Mark 16:16. [Acts 8:22, 24; James 5:16; Luke 18:13, 14; Psalm 32:5-7]
- **Ability to recognize and resist temptation** - Matthew 6:13. [Matt. 26:41; Eph. 6:11-18; 2 Cor. 13:7; Luke 22:31, 32; John 17:14-16]
- **Good health and freedom from other threats to life or safety** - 3 John 2; 2 Kings 20:1-7 (Hezekiah) [James 5:13-18; 2 Cor. 12:7-10; 1 Kings 8:35-53; 2 Chron. 7:13-15; Jonah 2:1-10; Psalm 50:15; 86:6, 7; 32:6, 7; 2 Sam. 12:15, 16; Num. 11:2; Luke 21:36]
- **Deliverance from enemies and persecution** - Acts 12:1, 5, 12. [2 Thess. 3:1, 2; 2 Cor. 1:8-11; Acts 4:23-31; 16:25; 1 Kings 8:33-35; 2 Kings 19:4, 15-19]
- **Freedom from oppression by rulers** - 1 Timothy 2:1, 2. [Neh. 1:11-2:5]
- **Safety in travel and care for loved ones we are separated from** - Acts 21:5. [Acts 20:36-38; 28:15; Ezra 8:21-23; Gen. 24:26, 27; 1 Thess. 3:9-11; 2 Tim. 1:3-5; Rom. 1:10; 15:30-32; Philem. 22]

- **Peace, courage, joy instead of disappointment or discouragement** - Philippians 4:6, 7. [1 Samuel 8:6-9; 2:1-11; Jer. 29:7; Psalm 122:6; 1 Peter 5:7; Matt. 26:36-46; Col. 1:11; 1 Thess. 3:9; 2 Sam. 7:18-29]
- **Knowledge, wisdom, and understanding of God's will** - Psalm 119:169-172. Note that this comes today through the Scriptures, not by direct revelation. [James 1:5, 6; Col. 1:9, 10; Phil. 1:9, 10; Psalm 86:6, 11; 143:1, 8, 10]
- **Salvation of lost sinners** - Romans 10:1-3. [see also Luke 23:34; Acts 7:60]
- **Labourers to teach the lost** - Matthew 9:36-38.
- **Bold, clear preaching** - Ephesians 6:18-20. [see also Col. 4:3, 4]
- **Opportunities to preach and teach** - Colossians 4:3 [see also 2 Thess. 3:1]
- **Support for preachers** - Philippians 1:3-5.
- **Choosing of leaders, deacons, teachers, etc.** - Acts 14:23. [see also Acts 6:6; 13:3]
- **Jesus' death, the Lord's supper** - Matthew 26:26-29. [see also 1 Cor. 11:23-26]
- **Faithfulness, good works, a life pleasing to God** - Philippians 1:3-6, 9-11. [see also Col. 1:9-11; 4:12; John 17:9-12; 1 Thess. 3:10-13; 2 Thess. 1:11]
- **Love** - Philippians 1:9. [see also 1 Thess. 3:10-12; Eph. 3:14-19]
- **Strength** - Colossians 1:9-11. [see also Eph. 3:14-19; 2 Thess. 1:11]
- **Patience, long-suffering** - Colossians 1:11.
- **Grace and mercy** - 2 Corinthians 4:15. [see also Psalm 4:1; 86:3-6; 1 Cor. 1:4]
- **Proper speech** - Psalm 141:1-3.
- **Sanctification** - John 17:17.
- **Eternal life, eternal glory** - John 17:24-26.

This is not a complete list, but it suggests many things we could properly pray for. Remember that these are things both to make request for and to give thanks for.

## II. When, Where, How Long, and How Often Should We Pray?

What are the proper circumstances for prayer? Should we pray only in church meetings or as daily routine or spontaneously as circumstances dictate? Should we pray in public or in private? What posture must we use?

### A. General Admonitions about Frequency, Place, etc.

Notice these passages that generally discuss where and how often we should pray:

- **1 Timothy 2:8** - Men should pray "everywhere."
- **Acts 2:42** - "Continue steadfastly" in prayer.
- **1 Thessalonians 5:17, 18** - Pray "without ceasing"; in everything give thanks.
- **Ephesians 5:20** - Give thanks "always" for all things.

[Cf. Eph. 1:16; 6:18; Col. 1:3, 9; 2:7; 3:17; 4:2, 12; Luke 18:1-7; Rom. 12:12; Acts 6:4; 1:14; Phil. 1:4; 4:6; 1 Cor. 1:4; 2 Thess. 1:3, 11; 2:13; 2 Tim. 1:3; 1 Thess. 1:2; 2:13]

These verses do not mean we should pray 24 hours a day, seven days a week, for then we could not do the other good works God has commanded. Even Jesus and his apostles did not pray all the time (Luke 11:1).

The passages do mean that prayer should be a regular, frequent part of our daily lives and that we should never quit or cease the practice of prayer. Further, we should live so that we are always ready to pray at any moment. We should never participate in practices such that we would be ashamed to pray to God in the midst of that activity.

## B. Specific Examples of Frequency, Place, etc.

To give us a fuller understanding, consider these examples showing specifically when and where people prayed:

- **In public worship assemblies** - 1 Corinthians 14:15 (see the context). [see also 1 Kings 8:22; Ezra 9:4, 5ff; Neh. 9:1-5]
- **In special gatherings regarding special needs** - Acts 4:23ff. [see also Acts 12:5, 12; 20:36]
- **In one's own home** - Matthew 6:6. [see also Dan. 6:10, 11; 2 Kings 20:1-3]
- **Before meals** - Acts 27:35. [see also Matt. 15:36; 14:19; Luke 24:30]
- **On a mountain, in a garden, or other deserted place** - Matthew 14:23. [see also Mark 1:35; Luke 6:12; 9:18; Acts 10:9; Matt. 26:36-46]
- **In the morning** - Mark 1:35 (a long time before day). [see also Psalm 5:3; 88:13]
- **In the evening** - Matthew 26:36-46. [see also Ezra 9:5]
- **Morning, noon, and evening** - Psalm 55:16, 17.
- **All night** - Luke 6:12.
- **Night and day** - 1 Thessalonians 3:9, 10. [see also 1 Tim. 5:5; Psalm 88:1]

**Note:** We should pray in private but also in public worship assemblies. We should not pray to make a show before others, but we should not be ashamed to pray around others at times when we otherwise would pray (cf. Acts 27:35). We should pray habitually throughout the day but also at special times when needs arise.

## C. Posture and Physical Conduct During Prayer.

Some people believe we should kneel or sit for prayer, but not stand. Must we speak out loud for God to hear us? Must we fold our hands, bow our heads, and close our eyes as we often teach children to do? Consider these Bible examples:

- **Kneeling, falling down prostrate** - Luke 22:41. [see also Matt. 26:39; Acts 9:40; 20:36; 21:5; Eph. 3:14; Dan. 6:10, 11; Deut. 9:18-20, 25; 1 Kings 8:54; Ezra 9:5]
- **Sitting** - Nehemiah 1:4. [see also 1 Kings 19:4; 2 Sam. 7:18]
- **Standing** - Mark 11:25; Luke 18:13, 14. [see also 1 Sam. 1:26; Gen. 24:12,13; Neh. 9:4,5ff] Note: If someone demands an example of standing in a congregational assembly, I ask, where is the example of kneeling in a congregational assembly?
- **Bowed heads** - 1 Chronicles 29:20 (Israel), Luke 18:13 (the publican would not lift his eyes to heaven). [see also Gen. 24:27, 48; Ex. 34:8, 9; 4:31; 12:27; 2 Chron. 20:18; 29:30; Neh. 8:6]
- **Eyes lifted toward heaven** - John 17:1ff (Jesus). [see also John 11:41; Matt. 14:19]
- **Speaking in the heart, but no sound from the lips** - 1 Sam. 1:12, 13 (Hannah).

Other postures, due to special circumstances, include:

- **On the cross** - Luke 23:46, 34
- **In the belly of a fish** - Jonah 2:1
- **In stocks in prison** - Acts 16:24, 25.

The variety in these examples shows that the position is a matter of choice or expediency and does not, of itself, determine whether or not God hears us. We can pray anytime or place, yet certain positions may at times better suit our circumstances or reverence.

Other information regarding posture and related points:

- **Prayer with fasting** - Neh. 1:4; Dan. 9:3ff; Acts 9:9-11; 14:23; Luke 2:37; 5:33-35; 1 Cor. 7:5.
- **Hands lifted up** - 1 Kings 8:54; Ezra 9:5; 1 Tim. 2:8; Isa. 1:15(?); Psalm 28:2. But note: Did Hannah lift her hands (1 Sam. 1:12, 13)?
- **Hands laid on other people** - Acts 6:6; 8:14-18; 13:3; Matt. 19:13-15

### III. Can Prayer Really Change the Future?

Does God really answer prayer, or are the benefits of prayer just psychological? Because we have prayed, does God so intervene in the course of history that events occur differently than they would have had we not prayed?

#### A. Promises that God Will Answer Prayer.

Consider several Bible passages expressly stating that God does answer prayer:

- **1 John 5:14, 15** - We can have confidence that, if we pray according to God's word, He will hear us and grant what we ask.
- **1 John 3:22** - Whatever we ask we receive because we keep His commands and do what pleases Him.
- **James 5:16** - The fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much. Elijah prayed and it did not rain for 3 1/2 years. He prayed again and it rained (v17, 18).
- **Matthew 7:7-11** - If we ask, seek, and knock, (are persistent in prayer) we receive what we requested. God is like an earthly father who gives good gifts to His children who ask.
- **1 Peter 5:7** - Cast your cares on Him for He cares for you.

There are conditions we must meet in order for God to answer our prayers. If we meet those conditions and if He can answer our prayers in harmony with His will, He has promised to do what is good for us.

[Cf. Mark 11:24; John 14:13, 14; 15:7, 16; 16:23, 24, 26; James 1:5, 6; Luke 18:1-8; 1 Peter 3:12; Matthew 6:6, 8; Psalm 55:22; 86:7; 28:6; 31:22; 118:5; 120:1; 116:1; 21:2]

#### B. Bible Examples of Answered Prayers.

Many Bible examples show God's response to the prayers of His people. God does not do miracles today (1 Cor. 13:8-10), but He is able to control events according to natural law so as to answer prayer without miracles. We will focus on cases of this nature.

- **1 Samuel 1:10-20, 26-28** - Hannah was barren, having no child. She prayed, and as a result she conceived and bore Samuel. [see also Luke 1:13]
- **1 Samuel 7:5-11** - Samuel prayed for Israel's deliverance from an enemy, and the prayer was answered. [Cf. 2 Kings 19:15-37; 2 Chron. 33:10-13.]
- **2 Chronicles 7:11-14** - God promised to hear Israel's prayer for deliverance from pestilence, famine, etc.
- **2 King 20:1-7** - God said Hezekiah would die, not live. Hezekiah prayed about it, God promised to add 15 years to his life, and Hezekiah recovered.
- **Exodus 32:9-14** - God said He would destroy Israel, but Moses prayed and God changed His mind. [see also Neh. 1:4-2:8; Psalm 32:5-7]

#### IV. What Conditions Must Prayer Meet?

God has promised to answer prayer, yet some prayers are not answered. How can this be? The only possible explanation is that there are conditions prayer must meet in order for God to answer, just as there are conditions we must meet in order for God to forgive our sins. What conditions must prayer meet in order for God to answer?

##### A. We Must Pray in Jesus' Name (though Him as Mediator).

Consider these verses:

- **John 14:13, 14** - If we ask anything in Jesus' name, He will do it. [Cf. John 15:16; 16:23, 24, 26; Eph. 5:20]
- **Romans 1:8** - Paul thanked God through Jesus Christ. [Col. 3:17]
- **1 Timothy 2:5** - Jesus is the one mediator between God and man. The immediate context refers to salvation, but the broader context refers to prayer (see vv. 1, 2, 8). Jesus is the mediator in prayer because He is our mediator in salvation. He is our High Priest (Heb. 4:14-16).

##### What does it mean to pray in Jesus' name?

Are these just meaningless words we mouth at the end of a prayer to make it effective [like a magic spell - "Open, Sesame"]?

A person's name stands for the person and all that He is. God's name is "hallowed" because God Himself is hallowed (Matt. 6:9). More specifically, a person's name represents his will and authority. Your name signed on a check or other legal document authorizes it as acceptable to you. "Halt in the name of the law" means the authority of the law requires you to stop.

Further, Jesus is the mediator who makes it possible for us to approach God in prayer. We pray "through Him" because His authority enables us to be heard. Because of our sins, we could never approach God. We need a "go-between" to reconcile us to God so we can communicate with Him. Because Jesus died as our sacrifice, He is the only one who can authorize us to approach God in prayer.

##### B. We Must Pray According to God's Will.

This follows from the concept of prayer "in Jesus' name". Note further:

- **1 John 5:14, 15** - God hears us if we ask according to His will.

- **Matthew 26:39** - Jesus prayed for the Father's will to be done. [see also Matt. 6:10]

But God's will may fall into one of two categories:

- **In things essential to salvation, God's will is revealed in the Scriptures.**

Note 2 Tim. 3:16, 17; 1 Cor. 14:37; etc. Regarding such matters, we must never pray for things that do not harmonize with God's revealed will. For example, God says we should not pray for things just to satisfy our selfish lusts (James 4:3).

- **In things not essential to salvation, God's will may not be expressly revealed in Scripture.**

Many events of everyday life may not be a matter of right or wrong, so we may not know God's expressed will. For example, we know God allows suffering and death, so in a particular instance of illness we may not know whether God would be willing for the person to get better or not. [2 Cor. 12:7-10]

In these cases we may pray for what we believe to be best, but then we should ask God to do what He knows to be best. Then by faith, we accept the outcome.

### **C. We Must Pray with Sincerity and Earnestness.**

- **1 Samuel 1:10, 15** - Hannah poured out her soul in prayer.
- **Jeremiah 29:12, 13** - God promised He would hear His people when they prayed with "all their hearts."
- **Luke 22:44** - In Gethsemane Jesus prayed earnestly.
- **Matthew 6:5** - Do not pray from hypocritical motives such as to be seen of men. Pleasing, impressing and entertaining people are not proper motives for prayer. We must pray to please God and honour Him. [Cf. Mark 12:40]

Prayer must never become a mere formality or outward ritual that we go through without meaning what we do. Our hearts must be involved in fervent prayer, thanksgiving, and appeals to God.

[Cf. 1 Cor. 14:15; Psalm 17:1; Psalm 145:18; James 5:16, 17]

### **D. We Must Pray in Faith.**

- **James 1:5-8** - Ask in faith without doubting. One who doubts will receive nothing from God. First we must believe that God exists then believe that He has power to answer prayer. The sceptic or agnostic who prays ("just in case there is a God") is wasting his breath.
- **Mark 11:24** - To receive the blessing we request, we must believe that God will answer.

Praying in faith also requires us to accept what God sends as being what is best. Too often, when we do not receive exactly what we asked for, we complain or think God broke His promise. Faith requires us to believe He will give the best thing at the best time, and then believe that the result is what is best.

### **E. We Must Pray with Humility and Respect for God.**

- **2 Chronicles 7:14** - God will hear His people if they "humble themselves" and pray.
- **Luke 18:9-14** - The self-righteous Pharisee praised and exalted himself in prayer, instead of exalting God. Such a person will be abased by God, not justified.

- **Matthew 6:9** - Pray, "Hallowed be Thy name." Prayer must express respect and reverence for God.

God should not be approached casually as another human ("Hi, Pop!"), nor as a servant at our beck and call. Our attitudes and speech should exalt His greatness while recognizing our weaknesses, sins, and human limitations. [See also 2 Chron. 33:10-13; Gen. 18:27]

#### **F. We Must Pray with Repentance for Sin.**

- **2 Chronicles 7:14** - In order for God to hear His people's prayers, they must turn from their wicked ways.
- **Acts 8:21-23** - When a child of God has sinned, they must repent and pray for forgiveness. (See our earlier list of other passages teaching this.)
- **Luke 18:13, 14** - The publican received justification because he was willing to admit his sins. Forgiveness is not granted to those who persist in sin, excuse it, rationalize it, overlook it, or hide it. To receive forgiveness when we pray, we must be truly sorry for sin and determine to overcome it. [See Psalm 32:5-7; Dan. 9:3-12; James 5:16; 1 Kings 8:33-36,46-53]

#### **G. We Must Pray with Forgiveness for Others.**

- **Matthew 6:12, 14, 15** - God will forgive us only if we willingly forgive others. [See Mark 11:25; Matt. 18:21-35]
- **Matt. 5:23, 24** - To have a right relationship with God we must pursue right relationships with people.

#### **H. We Must Pray While Living a Faithful Life.**

- **James 5:16** - The supplication of a righteous man avails much.
- **1 John 3:21, 22** - We receive what we ask from God because we keep His commands and do what pleases Him.

### **Conclusion**

God will answer your prayers. He desires to meet your needs and offer you everything He has promised to His faithful children.