

PRAYER

4 week series on prayer

Prayer – Lesson 2

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Prayer

Lesson 2: Learning to Pray

Bible: Matthew 6:9-13

Description: Prayer is all about talking to God. There isn't a set of rules you have to follow. God isn't sitting up in heaven making sure you don't mess up your prayer; He just wants to hear from you! In fact, Jesus actually has already taught us how we can talk to God.

Supplies

- 2 Sets of the Jenga game
- Five candy bars

Game: Jenga Relay

Split the group into two teams. Have each team line up behind a Jenga tower already set up. When you say go, one at a time a player from each team must remove one of the Jenga pieces and place it on top of the tower before going to the back of the line.

While this is happening, go back and forth between the teams. Pick a certain player and stand very close to them while it's their turn, saying things like, "I don't think you're doing that right. Don't you think you should try it another way? BE CAREFUL! Oh wow, that was close! Don't mess up! Don't mess up! Don't drop it!" Then go and do the same to someone from the other team, and continue doing this for the remainder of the game.

The team whose tower is still standing when the other team's falls is the winner!

Teach

Today, we're going to talk about learning how to pray. Maybe you already know how to pray, or maybe you want to learn. Maybe you think you know how to pray, but you can't help but wonder if you're really doing it right.

Can I get two volunteers?

Okay, volunteer 1, I want you to tell volunteer 2 about your day. Just tell them how your day was, what you did, all of that good stuff.

Let the volunteers talk, then let them go sit down.

Do you want to know what I noticed about that conversation?

I noticed that you didn't use any fancy language; you didn't worry about using big words or sounding smart and professional. You just talked!

Do you know that prayer is just talking to God? In the same way that you didn't worry about talking to your friend in the "right" way, you don't have to worry about praying the right way.

Before we get started on talking about how to pray, I want to tell you a few things that are NOT true about how to pray.

It's not true that you have to pray for a certain amount of time every day or God gets mad at you.

It's not true that you have to use big, fancy words in order for God to listen to your prayer.

It's not true that there is a list of rules you have to follow if you want your prayers to be answered.

And it is most definitely not true that God is sitting up in heaven making sure that you don't break any of those pretend rules.

I just wanted to get all of those things out of the way in case any of you have ever been told those things about prayer.

See, the problem with believing things like that about prayer is that it makes God seem like someone who doesn't want to talk to us. There aren't a bunch of hoops you have to jump through to be able to talk to God because He's not trying to trick you. He actually wants to talk to you!

Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake

instead? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!” –Luke 11:11-12

See? God is your father in heaven who cares about you! And if you think about praying as something with a bunch of rules and requirements, are you painting a picture of the father who wants to trick their kids or the father who wants to give good gifts to their kids?

God isn't sitting up in heaven with a timer critiquing your words and making sure you reach your daily quota of prayer. He's a good father, and when you pray He actually listens!

So now that we've covered what praying isn't, it's time to learn how to pray.

Here's the deal - I could try my best to teach you guys how to pray. I could tell you about books I've read or what I've learned, but when it comes to this subject, someone else is a much, much better teacher than me.

In fact, the greatest teacher there's ever been has already taught us how to pray, and that's the one we're going to learn from tonight: Jesus! There's no better teacher to teach us how to pray than Him.

This, then, is how you should pray: “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.” – Matthew 6:9-13

If you've ever been worried about knowing how you should pray, this should make you feel better right away. If there's anyone who can teach you how to pray, it's Jesus. So let's walk through the things He says here.

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name

Jesus could have started this lesson on how to pray many different ways. But the way He starts it out shows us a lot about prayer. He starts it off by reminding us that God is our father.

I'm not sure what kind of relationship you have with your dad. When you talk to your dad, it may be stiff and uncomfortable and you may feel unloved. Or, maybe you have a great relationship with your dad, and talking with him is like talking to someone who loves you and is looking out for you.

Whatever you think about your earthly father, God is the best dad you can imagine. Having a conversation with Him should be all of the best things. It should be comforting to know that you're talking to someone who loves you, who has a plan for you and wants the best for you, who is cheering for you to succeed.

This verse that teaches us how we should pray could have started out any number of ways, but it starts out by addressing God as our father, which really sets the tone for how you should pray. Doesn't that tell you a lot about how God wants us to pray?

So the first part of Jesus' lesson on how to pray tells us this: God is our father, and He should be honored as holy.

Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

This part can be difficult, but it is definitely worth it.

We're humans, and there are many times when we're convinced that we know what's best. We think that the things we want for our lives are the best things, the decisions we make are the best decisions, and the plans we make are the best plans.

Really though, we don't know what's best. Not even close.

But you know who does? God.

So when you pray, you're supposed to ask for His will instead of your own. And it can be hard! But you have to know this - God wants the best for you.

"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." – Jeremiah 29:11

You may have heard this verse before, but I want you to really think about it for a second. Think about what it means. God has plans to prosper you, to give you hope and a future. He doesn't have plans to harm you!

If this is really true, don't you think that God's will is going to be the best for you? It is!

So that's how you should pray—for God's will because He knows what's best, and He wants the best for you. So ask Him for it.

And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.

Forgiveness must be a pretty big deal if Jesus included it in how we should pray. Here, Jesus is talking about two things: receiving forgiveness and giving forgiveness. They're both important.

Let's just get real here: forgiving others is not an easy thing to do. It's uncomfortable. Often, we feel like if we forgive someone, it means we're saying what they did was okay.

But God forgives you, even when the things you do are not okay. Remembering that should help you forgive others.

I need a volunteer! Come stand up at the front here with me.

Okay, so I'm going to ask you to give me a candy bar.

Wait a second and allow them to react, since they don't have a candy bar.

Why can't you give me a candy bar? Because you don't have one to give!

Have a leader come and give them one candy bar. Have the leader tell them that the candy bar is theirs to keep; they don't have to do anything with it unless they want to.

Okay, what about now? If I ask you for a candy bar now, what's your reaction?

If the student does give you a candy bar, ask them if it was hard to do since they only had one. Then, have the volunteer come up and give them all five of the candy bars.

What if I ask you for one candy bar now?

See how much easier it was for you to be generous with me when someone else was being generous to you?

That's how it is with forgiveness. And that's how it should be when we pray.

When you pray, you should ask God to forgive the sins in your life. But you shouldn't stop there - you should also pray and forgive others. You know those people in your life that you feel have really hurt you? Forgive them. Forgive them because God has generously forgiven you. If God can continually forgive you and your sins, you should be able to forgive others.

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.

Temptation is a part of life. For most of us, temptation is a daily thing. God knows that, and He wants you to talk to Him about it.

Notice that Jesus doesn't say that we should be asking God to take the temptations away but that we should ask Him to lead us away from them.

Jesus knew that we would have questions about how we should pray, so He taught us how. But He didn't do so through a bunch of rules. He simply gave us a template that teaches us a lot about prayer and opens the door for us to talk to God about a lot more than just asking Him for things.

Small Group Questions

1. Have you ever wondered if you know the right way to pray?
2. Before today, did you think there was a right way and a wrong way to pray?
3. Did it surprise you to find out there aren't a lot of rules about praying?
4. Do you think that God listens to you when you pray? Why or why not?
5. Now that you know that Jesus taught us how to pray, does that clear up the questions you had?
6. Do you sometimes feel like you need to use big words or proper language when praying? Why?
7. Have you ever thought of prayer as a conversation with God? Do you think that's what it is?
8. Previously, has prayer been something that's part of your entire day, or just part of a few minutes of your day? Is that something you want to change?
9. Did you learn anything about prayer tonight that you didn't already know? What was it?
10. Do you think that remembering that God is always with you is something that will change how often you pray throughout the day?

Teach Close

Plain and simple, prayer is just talking to God. If you don't feel like you know how to pray, then talk to God about it! And what do you know, you're praying!

During the game we played, I interjected my thoughts while some of you were playing. I watched closely and critiqued you, making sure to tell you what I thought you were doing wrong.

Did that make it harder to focus on the game when I did that? Did it make you nervous? I'm sure it did!

That's what's so cool about prayer - it's just you and God. No one is listening in; no one is interjecting their thoughts and critiquing what you're saying. There's no need to be nervous or feel uncomfortable because it's just you and Him! And He is always with you.

Prayer shouldn't be something you start and stop. Prayer should be a continual thing that lasts all throughout your day because God is always with you.

If you look at the model Jesus gave for how to pray, you'll see that it's simple to make prayer a permanent part of your life instead of just 10 quick minutes in the morning.

Remember that God is your Father.

Remember to ask for His will to be done.

Remember to ask for forgiveness and to forgive.

Remember to ask God to lead you away from temptation and evil.

Is God only your father for a quick part of your morning? No! Do you only need forgiveness during a "quiet time" of reading the Bible? No, you always need it! Do you only face temptation for ten minutes every day? Of course not.

So why would you give prayer such a tiny slot of your day when the things you need to pray about make up the rest of your day?

I hope that you feel more confident about how to pray now! Remember, if you ever are confused about how to pray, it can be summed up very simply: Just talk to God!