

## **TEACH US TO PRAY**

### **Luke 11:1-13**

**A few years ago an article in the Denver Rocky Mountain News described various web sites to which people could submit prayers. One site said, “Simply click on the ‘Pray’ button and transmit your prayer to the only known location of God.” The site claims “That it can send prayers via a radio transmitter to God’s last known location,’ a star cluster called M13 believed to be one of the oldest in the universe. “Crandall Stone, 50, a Cambridge, Massachusetts, engineer and freelance consultant, set up the site one winter after a night of sipping brandy and philosophizing with friends in Vermont. The conversation turned to Big Bang theories of creation, and someone suggested that if everything was in one place at the time of the explosion, then God must have been there, too. “It’s the one place where we could be sure he was,’ Stone said. ‘Then we thought that if we could find that location and had a radio transmitter, we could send a message to God.’ “After consulting with NASA scientists, the friends settled on M13 as the likely location. They chipped in about \$20,000, and built a radio-wave transmitting Web site.” Stone reports that they transmit about 50.000 prayers in a week from seekers around the globe**

**I tried to find the site, and it must have shut down, which I think is a good thing, because it’s kind of a pathetic understanding of prayer, that reflects an even worse understanding of God! But what is really sad is that many people know how to surf the internet, text or e-mail, but don’t know how to pray. We can listen to someone else pray, but we struggle with how to pray on our own. Don’t feel bad, though, because the disciples of Jesus felt the same way. They grew up listening to prayers in synagogue, but they saw Jesus praying on a regular basis and knew what He was doing was different, so they asked Him, “Lord, teach us to pray.” And of course that was when Jesus taught them what we now call the Lord’s Prayer, although I have also heard it called, “The Disciples’ Prayer.”**

**I believe Jesus was teaching a prayer for them to repeat – but not to the extent it was meaningless to them. The Lord’s Prayer is the first adult prayer we teach our children to repeat. Some call the Lord’s Prayer a model prayer. There have been countless books written and countless sermons preached about the Lord’s Prayer, but I just want to bring a basic understanding of prayer that might be helpful and two basic understandings of the content of our prayers.**

**One mom wrote: I was tucking our preschooler in for the night when she asked if she could pray. Delighted, I told her it was a great idea to talk to Jesus. As she began praying, her words kept getting softer and softer until only her lips were moving. Then she said, “Amen.” Giving her a hug, I said, “Honey, I didn’t hear a word you said.” “That’s OK, Mama, “she responded, “I wasn’t talking to you.”**

**Even young children understand that praying is talking to God. This is no surprise to any of us – but it does make a natural assumption that is often overlooked – we overlook the obvious – prayer assumes we have some kind of relationship with God, that God is knowable, that God cares.**

Jesus communicated that assumption to His disciples when He said, “When you pray say, ‘Father.’” Or as Matthew’s gospel says it (Matthew 6:9ff), “Our Father in heaven.” Jesus doesn’t use the word, “Abba” or “daddy” here as he often did in His own prayers – He used the word, “*pater*,” which means “father or parent.”

Jesus knew people, then as now, didn’t always have the best relationship with their father or parent, and He addresses this when He says in v.11-13:

<sup>11</sup>"Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead?

<sup>12</sup>Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? <sup>13</sup>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!"

A basic lesson that Jesus teaches about prayer is that prayer is a conversation with God who wants us to have what is good in life.

The first part of the content of the Lord’s Prayer is about that relationship. What do you call God when you pray? How do you refer to Him? He has many names: Yahweh, Elohim, Holy One, Ancient of Days, Almighty God, everlasting father, Wonderful Counselor, Prince of Peace, King of kings and Lord of lords, King of the universe, Lord – He has many names, because a Name defines who a person is – and it is difficult to define God through a single name. And understand a name describes a Person – not a thing. Holy or hallowed or unique or special is His Name. That Name also describes how we view God. What do you call God?

We want His kingdom to come- which means we want Him to rule over our lives and the whole world. We want to be close to Him. We want the whole world to know Him. I’ve read interesting ways kids mispronounce words of the Lord’s Prayer, but in a way they understand this relationship.

Jeff Newton: “My 4 year old son, Jonathan, was trying to learn the Lord’s Prayer. He leaned by listening at church each Sunday. On one Sunday as we were praying the Lord’s Prayer, he could be heard above all the others, praying, “Our Father who art in Heaven, I know you know my name.”” Our Father in heaven knows us by name.

And when we ask that God’s will be done on earth as it is in heaven – we are basically saying, “Not my will, but your will be done.” We want to pray for and accept God’s will. We want to do God’s will – just as if we were standing right there next to Him in heaven. As a kid, if you are always with your parent, you are less likely to get into trouble doing things against their will.

The second part of the content of the Lord’s Prayer has to do with our relationship with others. Someone wrote this little poem: You cannot pray the Lord’s Prayer and even once say “I.”/ You cannot pray the Lord’s Prayer and even once say “My.”/ Nor can you pray the Lord’s Prayer and not pray for one another./ And when you ask for daily bread, you must include your brother./ For others are included...in each and every plea./ From the beginning to the end of it, it doesn’t once say “Me.” (Me game – rubber bracet)

**Our regular prayers do also include our own needs – Jesus assumes that in the rest of the passage in Luke. But in prayer as in our life – the order is God first, others second, ourselves third. We are third. Prayer is personal – it is about relationships – our relationship with God and our relationship with others – dealing with forgiveness and their needs first – Jesus tried to teach that to the disciples, and He is trying to teach it to us.**

**Jesus taught the Lord’s Prayer as a springboard to continued prayer with God. In your prayers talk to God as you would a trusted friend, a trusted parent who cares, loves, protects and provides. And we are just children who ask for things out of that relationship. But don’t just make your prayers a wish list all the time, unless we forget the most important thing of all in prayer.**

**Haddon Robinson said, “When our children were small, we played a game. I’d take some coins in my fist. They’d sit on my lap and work to get my fingers open. According to the international rules of finger opening, once the finger was open, it couldn’t be closed again. They would work at it, until they got the pennies in my hand. They would jump down and run away, filled with glee and delight. Just kids. Just a game. Sometimes when we come to God, we come for the pennies in his hand. “Lord, I need a passing grade. Help me to study.” “Lord, I need a job.” “Lord, my mother is ill.” We reach for the pennies. When God grants the request, we push the hand away. More important than the pennies in God’s hand is the hand of God himself. That’s what prayer is about. When you go to God in prayer, the name that should come easily to your lips is Father.**

**That is why v.13 says what it says and means what it says: ? <sup>13</sup>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!"**

**I have mentioned this before – and I will probably mention it many other times – because I believe it is foundational in our understanding of prayer when Jesus taught His disciples how to pray. In Luke Jesus says, “how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask.” He gives something greater than pennies or fish or bread. He promises to give Himself, the Holy Spirit. And He is all we will ever need.**