

**“Touching Heaven:
A PRAYER FOR ALL SEASONS”**

Luke 11:1-4

Jesus teaches his disciples how to pray.

A sermon preached by
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If you want to see the greatest memorabilia of any sport or activity, one good place to look is the Hall of Fame. If you're a baseball fan, go to the Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, New York. If you're a basketball fan, go to the Basketball Hall of Fame in Springfield, Massachusetts. For football, go to the Hall of Fame in Canton, Ohio. Are you a bowler? Don't miss the Bowling Hall of Fame in St. Louis, Missouri. There's even a Daredevil Hall of Fame, located appropriately enough in Niagara Falls, New York—although very few make it into that Hall of Fame alive. There's a Country Music Hall of Fame, a Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, a Jazz Hall of Fame, and a Ukulele Hall of Fame. There's a Hall of Fame for just about any sort of human endeavor.

If there was a Prayer Hall of Fame, I'm sure the centerpiece exhibit would be what we call "The Lord's Prayer." We call it that because Jesus used this prayer to teach the disciples how to pray. We could also call it "The Disciples' Prayer," because it is a prayer intended for use by everyday disciples like you and me.

The Lord's Prayer is something we teach our kids—or we should—at an early age. Many of us could say it even before we knew what we were saying. I heard about one little girl who began ending her nightly prayers by saying, "Good night, Howard." Every night, she would say her prayers and close with, "Good night, Howard." Finally her mother asked her, "Honey, who's Howard?"

Her daughter replied, "That's God's first name. We learned it in Sunday School. 'Our Father, who art in heaven, Howard be thy name...'"¹

If we're going to learn this prayer, I want us to learn it right. But learning it right doesn't mean just repeating the words verbatim over and over again. I am more concerned that we learn what kind of prayer this is. I think Jesus was giving this prayer to his disciples as a pattern for genuine prayer, not as something to be repeated by rote without even thinking about it. That's why I picked for our Scripture today the less familiar version of the Lord's Prayer from the Gospel of

Luke. I want us to think about the Lord's Prayer today as a pattern of prayer that we can use in all the circumstances and seasons of our lives. This is how Jesus would have his disciples pray.

Jesus teaches his disciples to pray, first and foremost, in an attitude of **worship**. The very first word of the prayer speaks of the relationship between a person and God. "Father" is the Aramaic word "Abba," a personal term of endearment, sort of like "Daddy." Our prayer time should be an experience of fellowship with a personal God who loves us and knows us and is worthy of our praise.

So we say "hallowed be your name." Holy is your name, Daddy! The first thing we do when we pray is to worship God, to adore him, to exalt and extol and praise him just because he is God, and there is no other. We get to talk to him, and he makes time to listen! Isn't that a deal?

One year on vacation, I was sitting on the porch of the beach house we had rented, enjoying the early sun and doing my devotional reading for the day. I had just read Psalm 46:8: "*Come, behold the works of the Lord.*" But I still had some things on my mind. I was not really focused on the Scripture or on God. Just then, from the beach house next to us, a little toddler came out with her grandpa. She was still in her pajamas, leading her grandpa by the hand. She got a few steps out onto the sand, and suddenly a seagull flew over her head. She looked up and started to clap her hands in joy. Then her grandfather began to applaud with her.

Suddenly I remembered what my prayer time was all about. I was beholding the works of the Lord—the sun, the sand, the water, the birds. I should be clapping my hands in joy. I should be exalting my God. The first attitude of prayer is worship—"Yay, God! Well done! Bravo!"

Jesus teaches his disciples also to pray in **hope**. With God, there is always hope; there is always a future. Our prayers should not be imprisoned by the pains of the past. Our prayers should not be bound by the problems of the present. Our prayers should soar with the

wings of hope, because our God is an overcoming God. His kingdom is coming, and when it comes, his kingdom will have no end. So we pray, “Your kingdom come.” If we pray it enough, we will begin to get a glimpse of its glory. The vision of the kingdom will sustain us, even when we walk through the darkest valleys of our lives. We pray in the hope that God’s kingdom will come.

In fact, it is already here. In Matthew’s version of the Lord’s Prayer, and the way we usually pray it, we pray for God’s kingdom to come “on earth as it is in heaven.” The kingdom in heaven is perfect; earth still needs a lot of work. But we can experience glimpses of the kingdom while we are yet alive. The kingdom is “not yet,” something that happens at the end of time or when we go to heaven. But it is also “now,” something we can work for and pray for to happen in our midst. The first preaching of Jesus simply said, “*Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.*”² We pray for that kingdom to become more and more a reality.

Thirdly, Jesus teaches his disciples to pray for **help**. There are needs we have, very practical and specific things we can pray for, and God will hear our prayers. Jesus prayed, “Give us this day our daily bread.” Some translations say “the bread we need,” and I think that is the key to understanding this part of the prayer. God cares for us, and he will provide what we need to live and live abundantly, so we can pray expecting God to give us what we need—maybe not everything we want, or everything we pray for, or all the luxuries and extravagances that we often mistake for needs. We need the faith to see that what God gives us is what we need and that everything we have comes from him. God is faithful, and he will help us when we pray to him. He will give us our daily bread.

In 1986, the oil boom in Oklahoma had gone bust, and many over-extended banks were failing. Many business owners in Oklahoma City had already closed their doors in defeat and declared bankruptcy. In the corporate offices of Hobby Lobby, David Green’s world was crashing in around him. He had put years of his life into developing a

multi-million dollar hobby and craft business, but now his bank was ready to foreclose on his loans and send the business into oblivion.

But the Green family knew where to turn for help in a crisis. Although the foreclosure of the business was the worst thing they could imagine, they came to see it as a defining moment not only in their business, but in their spiritual lives. "I know I prayed prior to that time," David Green said, "but that's when I got really serious about it."

He converted the space beneath his desk into his prayer closet. He would literally crawl under his desk in his corporate office and seek God's help in prayer. And God gave it. It was God's response to those prayers for their business that the Green family believes pulled the company out from under looming bankruptcy and set it on its feet again.

In the 30 years since that crisis, David Green has not stopped praying. Hobby Lobby now has over 700 stores and produces more than \$4 billion in annual sales. Green is listed by *Forbes* magazine as one of the top 100 wealthiest people in the United States.³

When we hit those bankrupt times of our lives—physically, spiritually, emotionally—we can turn to God for help. Jesus teaches us to pray to God in our time of need.

The fourth thing Jesus teaches his disciples is to pray in **repentance**. We know we have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. Not only are we imperfect and prone to make mistakes; we are ignorant of and antagonistic toward the will of God in our lives. We need to be forgiven. Which God does, on one condition: "forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us." We do, don't we? All those people who have hurt us and abused us and betrayed us and criticized us—we don't hold an ounce of bitterness or resentment against them at all, do we? They are forgiven, right? Right?

According to Jesus, until they are, we are not. Until we forgive others, we cannot find forgiveness for ourselves. Jesus went to the

cross for our sin. He bought our pardon with his own blood. How can we expect him to forgive us if we hold a grudge and harbor hatred over something that was probably small to start with?

When you pray the Lord's Prayer and really mean it, you can have power to forgive the greatest wrong done against you. In return you will feel the power of God's refreshing grace washing your sin away forever. That's true and complete repentance.

On Palm Sunday of this year, a suicide bomber attempted to enter the worship service of a Coptic Christian church in Alexandria, Egypt. Naseem Faheem, a guard at St. Mark's Cathedral, redirected the man, who then detonated. Naseem was probably the first of the 17 people killed in the blast. 48 were also injured. His action saved countless lives.

Egyptian television interviewed Faheem's widow. With her children by her side, she said, "I'm not angry at the one who did this. I'm telling him, 'May God forgive you, and we also forgive you. Believe me, we forgive you.' You put my husband in a place I couldn't have dreamed of."

Hearing this, Amr Adeeb, one of the prominent television personalities in Egypt, was speechless for a full 12 seconds, an eternity on the air. Finally he stammered out, "The Copts of Egypt are made of steel! ...How great is this forgiveness you have! If it were my father, I could never say this. But this is their faith and religious conviction." Across Egypt and the world, millions marveled with him.⁴ God forgives as we forgive.

Finally, Jesus teaches his disciples to pray for **resistance**. "Do not bring us to the time of trial." Matthew's version of the Lord's Prayer adds the words, "But rescue us from the evil one." The classic phrasing that we are used to says, "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil." There is a dual meaning here. The "time of trial" is a reference to the painful times of evil and tribulation that happen just before the coming of the kingdom of God on earth. We should pray to be spared that experience.

But the time of trial can also mean any encounter with evil. We deal with that every day. Temptation is always around us. We really can't avoid it. But we can pray for resistance to it. Martin Luther, the great Reformer, once said, "Temptations, of course, cannot be avoided, but just because we cannot prevent the birds from flying over our heads, there is no need that we should let them nest in our hair."⁵ Prayer builds walls of defense against evil.

Every day is a spiritual battleground, and every day you make decisions that can turn you toward God or away from God. I Peter 5:8 says, "*Discipline yourselves, keep alert. Like a roaring lion your adversary the devil prowls around, looking for someone to devour. Resist him, steadfast in your faith.*" Friends, don't be naïve about this. Pray for discipline. Pray for resistance to the forces of evil. Pray to avoid the time of trial. Pray the way Jesus taught his disciples.

This lesson Jesus gave to his twelve chosen friends 2000 years ago was not just intended for them. We are disciples, too. We are the disciples of today. And if we want to build a solid prayer life in the year 2017, there is no better model than the Lord's Prayer. It's a prayer for all seasons, every day we're alive. Pray, then, in an attitude of worship. Pray in hope. Pray for help. Pray in repentance. Pray for resistance to evil. Then you will pray as Jesus wants you to pray. Then you will pray touching heaven. Amen!

¹Charles Allbright, *The Consecrated Cross-Eyed Bear* (Little Rock: August House, 1990), 27f.

²Matthew 4:17.

³Suzanne Jordan Brown, "Prayer-Driven Enterprise," *Pray! Magazine*, July/August 2006, p. 26. And *Forbes.com*.

⁴<http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2017/april-web-only/forgiveness-muslims-moved-coptic-christians-egypt-isis.html>.

⁵Martin Luther, "Martin Luther—The Early Years," *Christian History*, No. 34.