

ENJOYING GOD

Teach Us to Pray

When a person is born again, the life of the Son of God is born in him, and he can either starve or nourish that life. Prayer is the way that the life of God in us is nourished. Our common ideas regarding prayer are not found in the New Testament. We look upon prayer simply as a means of getting things for ourselves, but the biblical purpose of prayer is that we may get to know God Himself.

“To say that ‘prayer changes things’ is not as close to the truth as saying, ‘prayer changes me and then I change things.’ God has established things so that prayer, on the basis of redemption, changes the way a person looks at things. Prayer is not a matter of changing things externally, but one of working miracles in a person’s inner nature.”

- Oswald Chambers, My Utmost for His Highest

The purpose of prayer is TO ENJOY God and to BE ENJOYED by God.

There are other reasons to pray, different methods of prayer within orthodox Christianity. But this must be central, which is why we’re calling this series on prayer, “Enjoying God.” Our goal in this series isn’t necessarily to improve your prayer life. My goal is to help us learn to enjoy God more deeply, and the byproduct will be that your prayer life improves. Prayer is the means to your enjoyment of life in God.

Martin Luther wrote in one of his works on prayer,

“How many pray the Lord’s Prayer several thousand times in the course of a year, and if they were to keep on doing so for a thousand years they would not have tasted or prayed one iota, one dot of it! In a word, the Lord’s Prayer is the greatest martyr on earth... Everybody tortures and abuses it; few take comfort and joy in its proper use.”

- Martin Luther, Luther’s Prayers

We live in one of the most difficult times in human history to genuinely enjoy God in prayer. For many of us, we’re too distracted by the sheer volume of noise in our lives to even think about prayer this way.

The invention of the Smartphone is distracting us into spiritual oblivion. It’s the first thing we look at when we wake up and the last thing we check before we go to bed. Then there’s social media and all the different digital streaming services. Add to that the pace of life with families, and careers, and all the different demands of life vying for your full attention. In an overstimulated, distracted, and hurried world, it’s very easy for prayer, and life with God, to take a backseat to all the other urgent demands and distractions of life.

If you struggle to pray—if you're not even sure what "enjoying God" in prayer looks like—the good news is, you are not alone. And the bad news is, you're not alone. Because this is far too prevalent in the modern church.

Thankfully, Jesus not only teaches us an enormous amount about what prayer is and isn't, he also models this for us. What we see in the life of Jesus is that He was unhindered in His relationship with the Father, and it enabled Him to live very differently than anyone else in human history.

Luke 11:1, "Now Jesus was praying in a certain place..."

When you read through Luke's account of the life of Jesus, you see that He's praying all the time.

In Luke's gospel, Jesus prayed at His baptism (3:21), He prayed at the time of the choosing of His disciples, and He actually prayed all night long (6:12). He was often going off to be alone to prayer. In a few instances, the disciples can't find Jesus because He keeps going off to pray (5:16; 9:18), and He also prayed with others (9:28–29). He prayed for Simon (22:32), and He prayed in the garden before His betrayal (22:40–44). He continues to pray before and during His crucifixion (23:46).

Luke 11:1, "Now Jesus was praying in a certain place, and when He finished, one of His disciples said to him, 'Lord, teach us to pray...'"

Jesus did amazing things, but we don't have a single recorded instance of the disciples asking Jesus to teach them how to heal the sick, or to cast out demons, or perform miracles. But right here, they ask Him to teach them how to pray.

We have to understand the context. The disciples aren't asking this question because they don't know how to pray. The disciples have grown up in a culture where they were taught to pray from childhood. Everyone knew how to pray; they memorized the prayers and practiced them religiously.

Q: So why are they asking Jesus this question?

The scholarly consensus is around two primary reasons.

As the disciples watched the rhythms of Jesus' life with the Father, they made the connection that Jesus was unlike any other rabbi or human because of His inner life with God. They saw the external byproduct of Jesus' enjoyment and intimacy with the Father.

For Jesus, prayer wasn't duty or something to be checked off the religious obligation list. Jesus was regularly enjoying the Father's love through rhythms of prayer, and the disciples wanted the same.

But I also want you to notice what the disciples' full question is.

Luke 11:1, "Lord, teach us to pray as John taught his disciples."

What in the world does that mean?

Rabbis in the 1st century typically adopted and implemented a prayer for their disciples the way the creeds have been used throughout church history.

Before the Apostles Creed, or the Nicene Creed, rabbis would use prayers. Whether that was Gamliel, Nicodemus, or John the Baptist, the common practice of a Rabbi was to give their disciples a prayer that would function almost like a differentiating creed from the other rabbis and their disciples.

In the Hebrew tradition, there's Rabbi's Kaddish, which starts, "Exalted and hallowed be His great Name..."

As you read through the Kaddish, there are some similarities to the Lord's Prayer, but it's very different in one incredibly profound way. It's not personal. It's not relational. It's awe, it's reverence, but there is no sense of warmth, of closeness or intimacy with God.

When Jesus responds to the disciples' request, and gives them the Lord's prayer, it's very likely that what Jesus is doing is taking a cold, impersonal prayer from Hebrew orthodoxy, and making it deeply relational. Jesus is making the point that God is not just all powerful and to be revered and hallowed, but that He's also a loving Father, and we can know Him in that way.

Today, we want to personalize the disciples' question and make it our own, "Lord, teach us to pray..."

Matthew 6:9-13, "Pray then like this: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come, Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day 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 evil. (ESV) For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen." (NKJV)

1. THE IMAGE OF GOD

The very first thing that the devil tries to distort is Adam and Eve's view of God, the image of God, what they believe about God. Isn't it interesting that in the very first words of the Lord's Prayer, Jesus is restoring an accurate picture of God's image?

Matthew 6:9, "Our Father..."

“There is not a single example of the use of abba... as an address to God in the whole of Jewish literature.”

- Joachim Jeremias, *NT Scholar*

If we think that God is angry with us, disappointed in us, just waiting to let us have it...

Or you think that God is your sidekick, accessible when it's convenient for you and there to serve your purposes...

Or if you project your image of your earthly father onto God, it's an incomplete picture...

Any of these things are a distortion of the image of God. God is a perfect, loving, compassionate, kind, gracious, and all-powerful Father.

2. THE NEARNESS OF GOD

Matthew 6:9, “Our Father in heaven...”

The word Heaven in Greek is “Ouranos,” which means “the air.”

Dallas Willard took the Lord's Prayer and paraphrased it in his great book the Divine Conspiracy. “Dear Father, always near us.” Or I like thinking about it this way, “Our Father all around us.” That's how close God is. That's how available and accessible He is.

3. THE AWE OF GOD

Oftentimes we come to God to get something from Him that we think will make us happy or make life easier.

It's not wrong to pray when your circumstances aren't what you'd like them to be. We're invited to bring those things to God and be honest with God about them. But if that's the only time we come to God, then here's the hard reality: If we only go to God when we want something from Him, it's a clear indication that we're still searching for satisfaction outside of God Himself.

For many of us, God hasn't yet become the source of our joy. We want what God can give us, but do we want God for God?

This is what it means to Hallow the name of God...

Matthew 6:9, “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name.”

To revere, to hold in high regard. To be in Awe of Him. It means to be caught up in grateful joy toward God. To share in the love of the Father, the Son, and Holy Spirit. To be caught up in the beauty of God.

To enjoy Him! To enter into the beauty of God, with God. If you've ever truly experienced that with God, you can't help but want the rest of the world around you to experience Him in that way too.

4. THE INVITATION OF GOD

Matthew 6:10, "Your kingdom come, Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven."

Now remember, Jesus is teaching us to pray this. To pray to the Father that His kingdom would come, which assumes that His kingdom has not yet fully been established and that His will is not yet fully complete.

Yet God has invited us to play a role in bringing His Kingdom to earth. The invitation Jesus extends to us is to partner with the Father in order to establish His kingdom on the earth.

Jesus does not start off by teaching us to just say things to God. Jesus teaches us to pray in a specific way for a specific reason.

ADORATION: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name."

SUBMISSION: "Your kingdom come, Your will be done,"

INTERCESSION: "On earth as it is in heaven"

PETITION: "Give us this day our daily bread,"

CONFESSION: "Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors."

PROTECTION: "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil."

There are many different ways to approach prayer. This is how Jesus teaches His followers to pray.

Here's my encouragement to you today. Whether you're a prayer expert, or you're brand new to praying...

"There's no bad way to pray and no single starting point for prayer. The spiritual masters offer one nonnegotiable rule: You have to show up for prayer and show up regularly."

- Ronald Rolheiser

Find 5, 10, 15 minutes, grab a bible, and a journal, find a quiet place where you won't be distracted or interrupted, and spend a few moments working your way through the Lord's prayer.

Once you find the time and space to pray, sit down and work your way through it.

"Our Father in Heaven, hallowed be your name."

This is about adoration of who He is and your relationship with Him. *"Father, thank you that you call me your son, your daughter. How incredible it is that You, the Almighty, the King and Creator of all things, invite me in to converse with You personally. To know you and be known by you. What a privilege it is to simply be with You. I did nothing to deserve it, and yet you chose me. Wow. Thank you."*

"Your Kingdom Come, your will be done"

"Father, before I bring any requests to you, your plan, your way is far better than my own. I put your agenda first. Help me to not only submit to your will but cooperate with you in my home and in my work. Reveal to me which of my ways need to change in order to be aligned with You."

"On earth as it is in heaven..."

"Father, this situation is not OK. My friend is hurting, this relationship is broken, I'm asking you to intervene and bring healing."

If you're new to prayer, maybe just starting with a pre-written prayer is more helpful for you. Pre-written prayers give us language that we don't currently have the ability to articulate with God.

If this is new for you, don't expect to go from 0-100 by next Sunday. You won't. This will feel clunky, and unfamiliar, and maybe a bit too vulnerable for your liking at times. That's OK and normal.

You won't go from 0-100. But you can go from 0-5. And then 5-10. And over time, as you invite God to teach you to pray, as you learn to be with Him and enjoy Him, prayer eventually will no longer be a discipline but a delight that you cannot go without. You'll be able to tell when you've missed it.

Prayer isn't a formula. It's a relationship that changes us. It requires learning and humility. Sometimes it will be incredibly refreshing and formative, and other times you'll wonder if you're even doing it right. Keep at it. Stick with it.

Church, if we're going to learn to enjoy God, to open ourselves up to God in order to experience what Jesus prays for in John 17, "Union with God," we must start somewhere.

"God meets us where we are, not where we pretend to be or wish we were."

- Dr. Larry Crabb

Let God meet you where you are, not where you wish you were or where you pretend to be.
Who know what He'll do in you, for you, through you?

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