

What Did Jesus Mean?

Digging deep into Jesus' teachings.



What Did Jesus Mean?
Praying Like Jesus

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Introduction

Why is prayer important? Why is it hard for us to have a consistent, effective prayer life? How did Jesus pray? What did he teach us about prayer? How can we develop a love for and a devotion to praying like Jesus?

What did Jesus say about prayer?

This is what Jesus said just before he gave the disciples the Lord's prayer:

Matthew 6:5 - 8

And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. ⁶But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. ⁷And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. ⁸Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

What specifically is Jesus teaching us here about prayer?

How much private time do you spend in prayer in a typical day?
The length of that time is not as important as the consistency of that time.

The Disciples' Prayer

Matthew 6:9 – 13

This, then, is how you should pray:
Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,
¹⁰your kingdom come, your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven. ¹¹Give us today our daily bread.
¹²And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.
¹³And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.

This was a revolutionary way for these disciples to pray.

- First, Jesus taught it in Aramaic language, affirming that praying is for everyone, not just for those born Jewish.
- This is a divergence from the fairly strict guidelines followed in the time of Jesus.
- Jesus is teaching them how to pray personally, not just a formulaic pattern to follow, not just the same words repeated every day.

Luke 11:1

One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he finished, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples."

How often do you think of learning how to pray? Have you ever asked God to teach you to pray?

There is great flexibility in how we can pray, but the prayer Jesus gave—the Disciples' Prayer—tells us what is important to include in our prayers.

Our Father in heaven

We find this prayer in Matthew 6 and in Luke 11, and they are almost identical with a few differences. Both, however, begin with “Father.” This was different because Jews did not typically address God as Father.

Jesus’ favorite way to refer to God was Father. Examples:

Matthew 10:32: *Whoever acknowledges me before others, I will also acknowledge before my Father in heaven.*

Luke 2:49: *“Why were you searching for me?” he asked. “Didn’t you know I had to be in my Father’s house?”*

John 5:17: *In his defense Jesus said to them, “My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I too am working.”*

Jesus also referred to God as the disciples’ Father:

Matthew 5:16: *“In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.”*

Mark 11:25: *“And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive them, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins.”*

Luke 6:36: *“Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.”*

Teaching the disciples to begin prayer with Father or Our Father is teaching them a new intimacy with God that was not known in the more formalized praying of the religious leaders of that day.

In the parable of the prodigal son, we have the most definitive description of God as Father. (Luke 15) Jesus gave a new image of God as Father for the disciples and for us, as a compassionate, tender, loving father.

Henri Nouwen wrote about this parable:

“All boundaries of patriarchal behavior are broken through. This is not the picture of a remarkable father. This is the portrait of God, whose goodness, love, forgiveness, care, and compassion have no limits at all. Jesus presents God’s generosity by using all the imagery that his culture provides, while constantly transforming it.” (Henri Nouwen, *The Return of the Prodigal*, p. 131)

Here are some of the shocking ways Jesus described the father in this parable—ways that were antithetical to the culture of that day:

- No father in that culture would have divided up his inheritance even before his death and allowed that prodigal son to take it and leave.
- No father in that culture would have been searching for that son to return.
- No father in that culture would have run to meet his son when he saw him coming.
- No father in that culture would have thrown a huge party to celebrate this wayward son’s return, and restoring him to full fellowship in the family.

How often do you think about the incredible privilege that is yours to enter into the presence of God Almighty and call him Father? You are on a first-name basis with the one and only true God. He knows your name.

Isaiah 43:1: *But now, this is what the LORD says— he who created you, Jacob, he who formed you, Israel: “Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine.”*

What other things does our Father God know about each of us personally?

Psalm 139:1 – 6

You have searched me, LORD, and you know me.² You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar.³ You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways.⁴ Before a word is on my tongue you, LORD, know it completely.⁵ You hem me in behind and before, and you lay your hand upon me.⁶ Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too lofty for me to attain.

God knows you better than you know yourself. He is a personal God who knows you and loves you more than your small mind can begin to comprehend.

Hallowed be your name

"Hallowed" means that God's name, and therefore God himself, is sacred and holy, set apart, like no other. He is to be praised and worshipped because he is holy.

Why is it important to begin our prayers with praise?

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

We pray for the condition of our world, recognizing that his kingdom has not fully come on this earth. The phrase "on earth as it is in heaven" implies that the world currently is not as it ought to be, and believers pray for God's will to be done despite the ongoing presence of sin and disobedience. The kingdom is both "now" and "not yet."

Do you pray for the world—not just your little corner? Do you stay in touch with situations around the globe that need prayer? How small is your prayer world?

Do you pray for God's will to be done in your life—in your world—just as it is done in heaven?

Give us this day our daily bread.

What does daily bread mean? Just enough for one day—is that what we are to pray for? Perhaps a more correct translation would be "Give us today the bread that does not run out." It really is a prayer to deliver us from fear of whether we'll have enough tomorrow and forward.

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

Asking for forgiveness needs to be a daily part of our prayer because there are always things we need to confess. And he wants you to confess because he wants you to be set free from the consequences and the burden of unconfessed sin. He wants you to know the joy of a pure heart.

Psalm 51:10: *Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.*

Furthermore, and perhaps even harder, is to make sure you are not harboring unforgiveness. Forgive with or without those affirming good feelings that you have forgiven. Do it by faith with a sincere heart and trust God to make it a reality in your mind.

Matthew 18:21-22: *Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?" Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times."*

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

Would God ever lead us into temptation? What did Jesus mean?

We know that God never leads us into a temptation.

James 1:13: *When tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone...*

The word translated "temptation" here can refer to being enticed to sin or being tested in a trial. It could be better translated "lead us away from temptation or testing."

Not only does God not lead us into temptation, but he always provides a way to avoid any temptation.

1 Corinthians 10:13: *No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it.*

You can put on the armor of God regularly. Literally put it on.

Ephesians 6:13 - 17

Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. ¹⁴Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, ¹⁵and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. ¹⁶In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. ¹⁷Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

Does prayer require certain positions?

Here are the places where we are told the position or posture Jesus used in prayer.

Luke 22:41: *He withdrew about a stone's throw beyond them, knelt down and prayed. . .*

John 17:1: *After Jesus said this, he looked toward heaven and prayed...*

Mark 1:35: *Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed.*

Matthew 14:19: *Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves.*

There is no one position or posture we are required to take when we pray. You won't find any reference to closing your eyes when you pray. In fact, Jesus did the opposite—he looked up toward heaven, eyes wide open, and prayed.

I want to encourage you to develop a habit of praying with your eyes wide open—all through your day. Just live your day in prayer mode. Walk and pray. Work and pray. Drive and pray.

More of Jesus' teachings about prayer

Luke 11: 5 – 13

Then Jesus said to them, "Suppose you have a friend, and you go to him at midnight and say, 'Friend, lend me three loaves of bread; ⁶a friend of mine on a journey has come to me, and I have no food to offer him.' ⁷And suppose the one inside answers, 'Don't bother me. The door is already locked, and my children and I are in bed. I can't get up and give you anything.' ⁸I tell you, even though he will not get up and give you the bread because of friendship, yet because of your shameless audacity he will surely get up and give you as much as you need.

⁹"So I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. ¹⁰For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.

¹¹"Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? ¹²Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? ¹³If 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!"

Jesus is teaching us here how to pray those desperate prayers we have. We are to persist and never give up when we know our prayer is according to God's will.

Jesus is teaching us to have a bold confident attitude when we approach God's throne and have desperate needs.

Hebrews 4:16: *Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.*

Luke 18:1 – 8:

Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up. ²He said: "In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared what people thought. ³And there was a widow in that town who kept coming to him with the plea, 'Grant me justice against my adversary.'

⁴"For some time he refused. But finally he said to himself, 'Even though I don't fear God or care what people think, ⁵yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she won't eventually come and attack me!'"

⁶And the Lord said, “Listen to what the unjust judge says. ⁷And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? ⁸I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?”

Once again Jesus emphasizes that we should be persistent in our prayers. The point Jesus is making is that we should always pray and not lose heart because God is NOT reluctant to answer our prayers like the unjust judge.

God's delays are sometimes to change us; maybe even to change our prayer in some way. Both Jesus and Paul prayed repeatedly for the same thing—and they didn't get the answer they wanted.

Mark 14:39: *Once more he (Jesus) went away and prayed the same thing.*

2 Corinthians 12:8: *Three times I (Paul) pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me.*

“Too many prayers are like boy's runaway knocks, given, and then the giver is away before the door can be opened.” (Spurgeon)

Mark 11:24: *“Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.”*

Here Jesus is teaching us that faith is important when we pray. Simply do what Jesus said to do by faith, believe when you pray, and tell your feelings they'll just have to take a back seat!

Matthew 26:41: *“Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.”*

Jesus teaches us that prayer will keep us from falling for the tricks of the devil—from sin. Your flesh is weak, and without consistent prayer in your life, you will fall into temptation.

Closing

If you decided to pray like Jesus prayed and like he taught us to pray, how would that change the way you pray now?

The enemy of your soul does not want you to pray. He will fight you every step of the way. You will need strong discipline to pray like Jesus prayed, like he taught us to pray. But the reward—the results—will amaze you.