

How You Can Learn to Pray as Jesus Did

Many times throughout their years with Jesus, the disciples had seen Jesus leave the crowd or their group and separate Himself.

They had heard Him praying by Himself and in their midst. They had watched Him open His hands, look up and give thanks. And they had seen the results of their master's prayers.

So, it made sense that after watching and hearing Him pray one day, the 12 men He had chosen to mentor said to Jesus, "Lord, teach us to pray" (Luke 11:1, NIV). The disciples saw Jesus go off to spend time with the Father. They desired to do what Jesus did and have what He had. I can imagine them telling Jesus: "Every time You come back, You return amazing. Every time You come back, You bring revelation. You have wisdom for life. What are You doing? You call us friends. You say, 'You didn't choose Me; I chose you.' So if You chose us, choose us to also know how to have what You have. Teach us how to do what we've seen and heard You do."

Notice that Jesus didn't say to them, "You already know how to pray," or, "Just speak to the Father; He knows your heart." No, Jesus looked at them and gave them the words that many of us grew up learning and that are still repeated in our worship today—words that have been proclaimed from pulpits, whispered in combat and put to music.

Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen (Matt. 6:9-13, KJV).

Jesus wasn't saying, "Every time you pray, speak these words." He was giving the disciples a template, a way to pray. Scripture tells us that we were born into sin and shaped in iniquity (Ps. 51:5). We're spiritually dead. But when we put our faith in Christ and become believers, we learn this new communication. Prayer is two-way, direct conversation that builds relationship. Jesus knows we need to be taught this new way of communication with our heavenly Father. It's almost like learning a second language with a new vocabulary and specific criteria for using certain words.

I think about the prophet Samuel when he was a kid in the temple, looking after the aging priest, Eli. One night God began calling Samuel's name, but he didn't recognize His voice, and every time he heard his name, he ran to Eli, thinking Eli was the one calling him. The third time Samuel went to him, Eli knew what was happening:

A third time the Lord called, "Samuel!" And Samuel got up and went to Eli and said, "Here I am; you called me." Then Eli realized that the Lord was calling the boy. So Eli told Samuel, "Go and lie down, and if he calls you, say, 'Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening'" (1 Sam. 3:8-9, NIV).

What was Eli doing? He was teaching Samuel how to pray and build a relationship through open communication, because before then, Samuel had been running to Eli. We've been taught to run to our parents or our pastor. The disciples were used to running to Jesus.

I was used to running to one of my first spiritual mentors, a man named Edward Christian, who taught a young men's Bible study at the church I attended. But that's not why Jesus died. He sacrificed Himself on the cross so that we could have direct communication and relationship with our Savior. When Jesus taught His disciples to pray, He was pointing them in the right direction—toward a relationship with the Father.

What Prayer Isn't

Christian also showed me and the others in our Bible study group that prayer wasn't going to God only when we wanted or needed something. I grew up hearing people talk about prayer like that. Any time someone would mention a need or say, "I'm going through a really hard time right now," before they could get the words out of their mouths, someone within earshot was saying, "Well, did you pray about that? Did you ask God to heal you?"

Yes, we can take our wants and needs to God. Absolutely, we can ask for healing, for reconciliation, for protection, for comfort, for provision, for a relationship. First Peter 5:7 tells us, "Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you." But prayer is so much more than listing our needs. God is so much more than a magic genie or Santa Claus. Prayer is so much more than what you do when your back is against the wall. Remember this: We talk to God to seek His face, not His hand. When you're face to face with someone you love, you're not thinking about what they can do for you or what you need. It's the same with Jesus. When you're seeking the face of God, you're seeking to know Him, to be in relationship with Him.

I've had people in my life who see me as someone they can leverage or use for their own benefit. Every time we're together, I know they're going to ask something of me. My guess is you've had people like that in your life too. I don't know about you, but I avoid those people. I'm pretty much always busy when they call. God isn't looking for people who seek only His hand. He's looking for hearts that seek Him. He wants for us what Moses, Samuel and the disciples had—to walk with Him and talk with Him.

But it's up to you. God has invited you to walk hand in hand and face to face with Him. He has promised us that when we call out to Him, He hears us. First Peter 3:12 tells us that God's ears are "attentive" to our prayers. And when we come to

Him, we can even come with His words. Have you ever thought about that? Sometimes when I just don't have the words to say, I go to Scripture and let God's Word form my prayers. When we pray His Word, we pray the truth. The Bible promises us that His Word will not return void, that it must accomplish what it is sent to do.

Isaiah 55:11 says, "So is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it."

In prayer, we can quote Scripture and even remind God and ourselves of what He has said. There's nothing more powerful. I've always loved that when Jesus was tempted in the wilderness for 40 days after being baptized and filled with the Holy Spirit, He pounded Satan with Scripture. Every time Satan said something to test Him, Jesus had an "it is written" comeback from the Word of His Father. It was an epic smackdown.

When Satan commanded Him to turn stones into bread, Jesus said, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone'" (Luke 4:4, ESV). When Satan offered Him control of all kingdoms if He'd worship him, Jesus said, "It is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God, and him only shall you serve'" (Luke 4:8). Jesus knew the power of the Word and how to apply it, and we must, also, in order to pray as He did.

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