



Praying Prayers Like Jesus

BY REV. BRIAN NOACK

Opening Prayer: Lord Jesus Christ, You have invited and taught us to pray, promising to hear our cries as they come before You. Grant us Your Spirit that we may learn to pray aright, be faithful in our praying, and grow in our confidence, entrusting all things into Your merciful care; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Sing or say stanza one of “Hear Us, Father, When We Pray” (*LSB* 773).

Introduction: When teaching confirmation students regarding the Lord’s Prayer, I begin by asking them to define what prayer is. After all, we pray each Sunday at church, we are encouraged to pray every day, many families begin their mealtimes with prayer, and we hear encouragement from others with the words, “I’ll be praying for you.” Prayer is something we do, and it is something others do for us. How would you explain prayer to someone?

Teach Us, Lord, to Pray

Many view prayer as something we can do as Christians, that it is our part to play in our relationship with God. In truth, prayer is a gift given to us, an invitation to call upon the Lord in the full assurance that He hears and answers us in accord with His will. God does not need our prayers, as Luther rightly says in his explanations to the first few petitions of the Lord’s Prayer (*Small Catechism*): God’s kingdom comes, His will is done, and daily bread is given “without our prayers.” Certainly, God knows our needs better than we do, so before we ask, He knows the mercy and grace we seek. As such, prayer is really something given for our benefit and not a burden placed upon us by a needy God.

Read **1 Thessalonians 5:17** and **Ephesians 6:17-18**. How often does Paul say that we ought to pray? _____

What do you think he means by this? _____

Prayer, then, is a gift, and it is something we are to be doing often. This leads to the question of how to pray. This is the disciples’ direct request of Jesus in Luke 11: *Lord, teach us to pray* (v. 1b). Interestingly, Jesus does not give them a “how-to” manual on prayer. In fact, if you search the Bible, you will not find a guide on how to pray. Instead, what we are given in the Bible in general, and from Jesus in particular, are examples of prayer. From Jesus, we receive the Lord’s Prayer as the greatest and most complete prayer. Other Scripture reveals certain things to us about God’s design for prayer.

Read **Luke 5:16**, **Matthew 6:6**, and **Acts 2:42**. Where are we encouraged to pray? _____

Read **1 Timothy 2:1-4**. What kinds of prayers should we offer? _____

How would you define these? _____

For whom should we pray? _____

Would you describe your prayer life as following that guidance? Why or why not? _____

Read **Luke 11:9-10** and **John 14:13-14**. Does Jesus really mean that we can ask for anything and we will get it? Why or why not? _____

What does He mean by these statements, and how do they impact our prayers? _____

Considerations of Prayer Language

Aside from this guidance concerning prayer, many well-meaning Christians have added ideas and language to the practice of prayer which, on the surface, seem nice, but are not exactly biblical. Here are a few examples:

1. "The more we pray about something, the better the outcome." Read **Matthew 6:7-8**. What does Jesus say in response to this? _____
2. "Sending prayers your way." "We are covering you with prayer." Read **Psalms 18:6, Jeremiah 29:12, and Luke 6:12**. What does this teach us about to whom our prayers ought to be directed? _____
3. "We're calling on all prayer warriors to intercede for this situation." The term prayer warriors is not actually a biblical term, but has been introduced by evangelicals and has made its way into various other denominations, including ours. Many link that term with Ephesians 6 and the "Armor of God" passage. Read **Ephesians 6:10-18**. How does prayer fit in with the other pieces of armor Paul talks about? _____

What might be unhelpful in using the term "prayer warrior"? _____

When you pray, say ...

With these in mind, how ought we to pray? The answer lies in following the guidance Jesus has given us in His prayer. Remember, it is the perfect prayer and can become the very pattern we use to pray our prayers like Jesus. Here are four things to consider when praying:

1. While prayer is something we do, it always starts with what is received. Read **1 Corinthians 4:7**. All things are given to us by God, including prayer. The shape of our prayers is also given to us by God. Listening first to God's Word is a good start to speaking back to God prayers that are faithful and align more perfectly with His will. Additionally, Luther writes in the *Large Catechism*, "God ... Himself arranges the words and form of prayer for us. He places them on our lips for how and what we should pray" (III:22).
Why is this a good place for prayer to begin? _____
2. In his instruction to Peter the Barber, Luther suggested that prayers could be crafted into a garland of four strands: 1) a teaching; 2) a thanksgiving; 3) a confession; and, 4) a prayer.

Take a look at the Lord's Prayer. How might Jesus' words fit into these categories? _____

Jesus gave us the Lord's Prayer, not so that we would never pray anything else, but that we would have an example by which to base our own prayers.

What might be the benefit of following the pattern of Jesus or the lines of Luther's suggestion as we craft our prayers? _____

3. We always pray out of the faith given us. Read **Psalms 138:3**. What do we believe happens in response to our prayers to God? _____

Read **Romans 8:26**. What happens when we cannot put our prayers into words? _____

Read **John 15:7** and **1 John 5:14-15**. How do we know our prayers are faithful and heard? _____

4. We often hear, "Prayer is powerful." Read **James 5:13-16**. Why is that so? _____

Conclusion: Prayer is a blessing and a joy. It is a gracious gift given to us by our Father, taught to us by Christ, and powerful only in Him. As Jesus invites us to join Him in praying to the Father, we know that He stands as our intercessor. Through Him, our prayers are heard and answered in accord with God's will and purpose. Grounded in the Word, and guided by the Spirit of God, we can pray prayers like Jesus. We pray, trusting in the Father's grace. He knows our hearts, hears our cries for mercy, and brings us safely into the kingdom eternally.

Closing Prayer: Gracious Father, in love You have sent Your Son to bear our sin and be our Savior. As He prayed to You in every need, grant us faith to cry to You in our times of need and trust that You will supply all that is needful for us. Let Your Spirit form us by Your Word and give us hearts to pray and sing Your praise forever; in Jesus' name. Amen.

Sing or say stanza two of "Eternal Spirit of the Living Christ" (*LSB* 769).

The Reverend Brian Noack is the LWML Senior Pastoral Counselor and pastor of Saint John's Ev. Lutheran Church in Sayville, New York.