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LEADER'S GUIDE

OUR FATHER • PRAYER



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WHAT'S THIS ABOUT?

This study examines some of Jesus' key teachings on prayer.

WHAT DO I NEED TO KNOW?

LUKE 11:1-13

The Lord's Prayer

The study begins with a parallel text in Matthew 6:5-15, where the Lord's Prayer is also taught. In Matthew, Jesus contrasts His teaching on prayer with the vain and empty prayers of the pagans who endlessly recite the same words, believing that somehow they will grab God's attention. This is important to realize because many have done this very thing with the Lord's prayer, believing that somehow through its repetition, God's favor will be garnered. It is for this reason that the study approaches this as a "model" prayer. In other words, Jesus here gives us a sample of the way in which we should pray, intending for us to personalize and adapt it, not simply repeat it.

The Person of God

In seeing this prayer as a model, there are several principles that we can apply to our own prayers. Jesus prays, "Father, holy is your name." In doing this, He begins His prayer by focusing on the Person of God. Like the address on a letter, there is no better way to begin a time of prayer than to praise God for His incomprehensible character—goodness, love, kindness, mercy, holiness, etc. This appropriately takes our gaze from ourselves, and focuses it on God.

The Purposes of God

Next, Jesus prays for God's kingdom to be manifest. The heart cry of a Christian is for God's will and glory to be made known on the earth. Taking time to pray in this way, aligns our heart to God's Purposes for our lives and the world. We are to be the vehicles of bringing about His purpose and will, not the reverse.

The Need for God's Provisions

Jesus then instructs us to pray for our daily Provisions. Our prayers will most naturally focus on our felt needs; God is concerned and wants us to pray about these things. James 4:2 says, "You have not, because you don't ask God." Jesus invites us to submit all of our concerns and requests to God, that He might provide for our needs.

The Need for Pardon

Pardon is the next principle. It is essential that in our times of prayer, we deal with the specific sin in our lives, and ask for forgiveness. Experiencing cleansing from our sin is vital to maintaining our close fellowship with God.

We want to hear from you! Please send your feedback on this study to cru.comm@uscm.org.

Protection

Last, Jesus prays for Protection from temptation and the author of it—Satan. There is a great spiritual war that is raging. Christians are in the middle of it, and must never lose sight of this fact, or their need for protection in the battle.

There are other ways to principalize the Lord's prayer, but Person, Purpose, Provision, Pardon, and Protection are easy to remember, and a helpful format to begin to structure our times of prayer with the Lord.

Ask, Knock, Seek

A common form of Jewish teaching utilized a format of argumentation that argues from the lesser to the greater. Here, Jesus uses the example of a neighbor who is not overly compassionate. Yet, He says, because of the boldness of the one asking, and we can assume incessant knocking, this reluctant neighbor will get out of bed and help. This form of teaching anticipates the logical question, "How much more then will God, who is rich in mercy, help those who are persistent in making their requests?" A great deal more!

Thus, Jesus' second teaching related to prayer is persistence. The difference between simply striking a door and knocking on it, is repetition. This is a different kind of repetition from the kind Jesus condemns in Matthew 6: 5-15. Jesus is not teaching to say the same words over and over again, but to be assertive, confident, and persistent in approaching God with our requests. This stretches our faith, as well as demonstrates our trust in God's goodness. It also cultivates our own hearts to deeply desire to see our reality changed.

How Much More

Once again, Jesus argues with a "how much greater than" analogy. His point here is that if human parents know how to give good gifts to their children, then how much more does God? If we are honest, our prayers can be tainted with doubt as to whether God is favorably disposed toward us. Jesus wants to say, as powerfully as it can be expressed, that God cares and loves to give good gifts to His children—more than we can imagine. In fact, His major reason for withholding our requests is that the things we ask for might not really be for our good. In John 14:12-14, Jesus says that He will grant any prayer that is asked in "His name." By this He means anything we ask for that is in accordance with His will. The more we grow as Christians, the more our prayers align with God's will, and as a result, the more we see our prayers answered.

This study is accompanied by an article. Take the time to read it over before the study. Hand it out to the group at the end of the study and have them read it this week.

WHAT IF THERE'S A PROBLEM?

Someone might note that this prayer differs somewhat from the Lord's prayer stated in Matthew, Chapter 6. It is important to realize that as a traveling teacher, Jesus taught the same lessons multiple times. Depending on the occasion, He probably modified or slightly altered His content. The words are nearly identical and clearly teach the same principles.

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WHAT'S YOUR POINT?

A major application is in having the group write out their own prayer following the model that Jesus gave. What the group needs is some help structuring their prayer time, and this format can be very helpful toward that end. It is also important that they understand Jesus' value on persistence in prayer, as well as the importance in asking in alignment with God's will and purposes.

MEMORIZE

The following pattern will give you a helpful way to structure your prayer times:

God's Person, Purpose, Provision, Pardon, and Protection

WHAT ARE THE ANSWERS?

1. Jesus emphasizes the need for sincerity. Not praying so that other will think us more spiritual, and not simply repeating empty words.
2. We shouldn't simply repeat the Lord's prayer with the same vain repetition as unbelievers.
3. Give the group time to read through the prayer and write their answers.
4. That God would be glorified in all that we do, and that His will would be accomplished in our lives and in the world.
5. Let the group share their answers.
6. This might take some time, but it's an important exercise. Have the group share some of their prayers.
7. Be persistent.
8. Jesus wants us to be persistent in asking, not simply repeating, the same words.
9. He wants to engage our hearts, and persistence does this. It also, both expands our faith, as well as expresses our trust in His care and goodness.
10. You might begin by sharing an example from your own life.
11. In the example of the uncaring neighbor.
12. Let the group share their own areas of doubt.
13. Because we have asked for things that are ultimately not good for us, and have not asked in accordance with His will and purposes. That's why the initial focus in prayer upon God's purpose and will for His kingdom, is so important.
14. There is no right answer. It is critical that enough time is spent to renew our thinking and cultivate our fellowship with God.