

St. Bartholomew's Church in the Town of Tonawanda, N.Y

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Scripture: Luke 11: 1-13

"Teach Us How To Pray"

It would seem to me that sometimes when people want to learn more about praying, they can get frustrated and give up – feeling that prayer doesn't work for them. Why doesn't it work the way I want it to? Why doesn't God give me the answer I want, and need? They may have gotten frustrated because they really never took the time to learn how to pray.

I hope that they are not nearly as frustrated as the man who angrily brought his new chain saw back to the hardware store. He stormed through the door and flung his saw right onto the counter. This brand new saw was bent and beat up, with much of the paint chipped away and the teeth were at all different angles. He shouted to the man behind the counter "I've been using this all day and I haven't cut even a handful of firewood!" The clerk, trying to be helpful, took a chance and yanked hard one time on the rip cord. Sure enough, after some gasps, coughs, and chugs, the motor started to roar. The red faced customer sheepishly shouted "So, that's what that string was for!" If only he had looked at the instructions – or better yet – if he had asked someone how to do it. Instead of learning how to do something – we muddle through and end up like the guy with the chain saw.

The Apostles were blessed with the best imaginable example before them, our Lord Jesus Christ, and they wanted to know how to do what He did. I am sure they asked Jesus many questions over the course of the three years that they were together. They had seen Jesus heal the terminally sick, cast out legions of demons, raise the dead, and use tremendous authority over the forces of nature. As far as we know – none of the Apostles ever asked Jesus to teach them how to preach, how to do personal counseling, or even how to perform miracles; all they wanted to know was "**how do you pray like that?**" Each of the Apostles were witnesses to the remarkable strength and intimacy that Jesus alone knew with His heavenly Father. It is important to note that the Apostles weren't strangers to prayer. They had been praying all of their lives. They prayed all day long; at fixed intervals and then before and after every meal. The average Jew during the time of Jesus prayed about three to four hours a day! What they wanted to know; what they asked Jesus to teach them was to experience the intimate communion that Jesus had with God, the Father.

Today's Gospel from **Luke 11:1-13** and also told in **Matthew 6:5-13** – clearly shows how Jesus answered them. But before we examine Jesus' answer to them more closely, I need to raise some very important questions for all of us.

- **What is your goal when you pray?**
- **Is your goal to have God grant your request?**
- **Is your goal giving God your wish list?**

If so, I have bad news for you! You see, God does not exist so that He can give us what we want. God knows our hearts. God knows our needs even better than we do! Instead, I would like to suggest to you that prayer is seeking to spend time with the Father, in conversation with, and in listening to His response to us. Remember the words that Jesus spoke in Matthew 6:32-33 "*Your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. "But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added to you."*" We should not be praying to inform God, but to enjoy true intimacy with Him, to spend time listening to what He has to say to us.

Trying to set aside time each day is tough, right? I know there's that important phone call, or that letter, or that meeting, that show that you've just got to watch – or maybe you're running to the soccer game or baseball game. There is always something going on that keeps you from spending some time with God. Just think about this:

- Imagine a football team that never practices
- An orchestra or band that never tunes its instruments
- A farmer who never plants any seed
- A salesperson who never calls or goes out to meet clients
- An artist who never purchases any paint

To never do something is the absolute worst way to ever get better at it! If we are to have a relationship – any relationship, take for example a marriage, – it takes work – it takes hard work – but the reward is great, indeed!

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With prayer, the precious reward is being in the glorious presence of the Father. This reward is reserved for those who seek His heart – not His attention!

Are you familiar with the prayer that many pray at dinner time? ***“Bless us O Lord, and these thy gifts, which we are about to receive from thy bounty, through Christ, Our Lord, Amen”*** Quite often it is prayed with speed and hardly any feeling, as one rushes to dig in. I guess one might say the same for the Lord’s Prayer. Have you ever stopped to really think what Christ was saying in Luke 11:2-4 or Matthew 6:9-13? What a precious gift that Jesus gave, as His answer to the Apostles request for him to teach them to pray! It was not meant to be used as a *mantra* or slogan – but a three part commitment, petition, and benediction in which we make a conscious effort to invite God into our lives – to accomplish His purpose in and through us.

Have you ever had to make an important phone call, speech, or even give your testimony, and you spent quite a bit of time planning and rehearsing how to begin; what to say and how to say it. How much care and preparation do we take in thinking about what we will say to the King of the Universe? When we enter into prayer with God it is a privilege – made possible only by virtue of the death, Resurrection, and Ascension of Jesus Christ. When we pray *“in Jesus Name”* it means something. It means that Jesus is entering with us into the relationship with the Father. In the letter to the Hebrews 7:25, we are reminded that *“He is able for all time to save those who approach God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them.”* Remember, with Jesus’ death on the cross – the Temple veil was torn in two – making it possible for each of us as followers of Jesus Christ – to enter into relationship with God – and the Holy Spirit joins us as we enter into God’s Holy Presence. St. Paul in his letter to the Romans 8:26 tells us how the Holy Spirit intercedes for us: *“In the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words”*

Every time you pray the words that Christ gave us, saying *“Our Father”* you are praying a wonderfully relational prayer that assures you that you are being placed into the holy, awesome, glorious presence of God. Jesus gave us this privilege – and it cost Him everything – which is more than we could ever deserve! There is a really good reason that Jesus also taught us to pray this prayer, and all of the personal pronouns are plural!

- ***Our Father***
- ***Our daily bread***
- ***Our debts or trespasses***
- ***Our debtors, or those who trespass against us***
- ***Lead us not into temptation***
- ***Deliver us from evil***

We are part of larger community of believers - and even though we are praying alone we must always remember that we should be praying for our brothers and sisters in Christ! Even our own personal needs become opportunities to intercede for others who are going through the same or similar situations – or as the Apostle Peter reminds us in 1 Peter 5:9 *“knowing that the same experiences of suffering are being accomplished by your brethren who are in the world.”* While you are praying for yourself – pray for someone who needs to know that God cares. Ask God to show you someone else who needs the same kind of encouragement that you receive from your relationship with Him.

Jesus taught us to pray by saying ***“Our Father”*** but if you notice in the Scriptures – He never refers to the Father any other way than *“Father, My Father, or Abba! Father!”* He invites us to share in that relationship – through Him and His sacrifice – with ***“Our Father, who art in heaven.”*** As a part of that relationship, Jesus shows us that *“whatever you ask of the Father in My name, He may give to you.”* (John 15:16) In today’s Gospel – Jesus gives us a parable about an unexpected guest who drops in on a man and his family late at night. He caught them unprepared without enough food to give their guest. His host snuck over to his friend’s house, knocked on the door, asking for three loaves of bread. In Luke 11:8-10 Jesus shows us that his relationship with the man and this fellow’s persistence eventually pays off as Our Lord says *“I tell you, even though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, at least because of his persistence he will get up and give him whatever he needs. “So I say to you, Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be*

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opened for you. For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened." This man was in need, and he knew exactly where to go for help. We know that we can do the same. However, we are called not to focus on the gift, or our needs, but on Jehovah Jireh – my provider – who gives good gifts!

"Hallowed be Thy Name" – God's name is holy. God's name is sacred, sanctified, consecrated, and blessed. Hear these words from the Prophet Ezekiel (36:23) *"I will vindicate the holiness of My great name which has been profaned among the nations, which you have profaned in their midst. Then the nations will know that I am the LORD," declares the Lord God, "when I prove Myself holy among you in their sight."* It was Jesus who put a face to the Name of God. Jesus told us so in the Gospel of John (John 17:6) *"I have made your name known to those whom you gave me from the world."* (John 17:26) *"I made your name known to them, and I will make it known, so that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them."* Every time we act like followers of Jesus – keeping our tempers, maintaining our integrity, we honor our commitment to "hallow" His name!

"Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done" - our prayers are to be God centered and kingdom focused – not "me centered." We need to be looking at Him and not our needs – He already knows them. Let me give you an example: If you play golf you know what it is like to walk up to a short par-3 that should be easy to reach the green – except for one thing – that large water hazard that is sitting between you and the green 150 yards away. Many times a golfer will take out an old ball, not wanting to take a chance of losing a new one to the "drink." Water hazard or not – there should be no difference in form or follow through; head down, front arm straight. The difference is in the focus; are you swinging to hit the green or to avoid the water? So many times our prayers can become like that where we get so caught up in our own needs and wants – instead of focusing on the giver who *"will fully satisfy every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus."* (Philippians 4:19) My brothers and sisters in Christ – Jesus teaches us in this prayer that God knows what we need – when we need them – and we are to seek Him instead of His blessings. *"Your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added to you."* (Matthew 6:32-33) God's kingdom is a coming event – but it is also a present reality. When we pray *"your kingdom come"* we are making a commitment to participating in seeing it unfold right before our very eyes. How exciting is that? **"Thy will be done"** – we have got to be ready for anything the Lord prepares for us – even if it doesn't fit into our plans. Let's say you get home from a rough day at work. All you want to do is "crash" and get comfortable. When you get home – your spouse, or even one of your children has also had a tough day – a very tough day – and they need you to listen. Whose kingdom is going to win? You planned all day to come home and unwind – but the selfless act of love – and listening – is giving of yourself for another. That is a precious gift. Let me give you a better example: Last weeks' Gospel had Jesus traveling when Jairus came to Him, asking Jesus to come and heal his daughter. Jesus responded by going with him, but along the way the bleeding woman worked her way through the crowd and touched the hem of His garment. I find it interesting that Jesus slowed His pace – to allow this woman to reach out and touch Him. The result of putting the agenda aside for others meant that God's Name would be declared Holy at both places that day – at Jairus' house and on the road to Jairus' house. **"Your kingdom come, your will be done."** Next time you are sitting waiting in the doctor's office, on line at the grocery store, or even at that wedding or social event that you had to attend – follow Jesus' lead – and tell others about Him – by words and actions. Be open to it – and watch God turn every day into a marvelous adventure for Him.

"on earth as it is in heaven" - despite what we are told by today's culture and society – life is not separated into two distinct compartments – *the secular and sacred* – and that we are to act differently when we are traveling in different circles. We have one face at church and another at work or school. You know what Jesus would call that – a hypocrite. God cares about every matter of your life, every detail – and He is with you no matter what circle you travel in. We are surrounded by His kingdom and need to be consistent Christians 100% of the time – in thought, word, and deed. Hey, I know it's not easy and that is what this prayer is about – asking the One who created and provides for you – to give you the strength and the courage to see it through – for His holy Name.

"Give us this day our daily bread" - we are not just asking for provision for ourselves – but we are making a commitment to share what we have been given with those who do not have adequate provision. We have been given *"the bread of life"* Jesus, and through faith in Him we have His assurance that we can trust in Him. *John*

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6:35 *"I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.*

"forgive us our debts" – debt is a concept that we all understand. Sin is a wedge between us and our Father. The time we spend in debt to God is time we spend away from Him – wasted forever. Clinging to sin and seeking His kingdom cannot happen at the same time. When we confess our sins – we allow the Holy Spirit to bring areas of sinfulness to mind that are hindering our relationship with the Father and with others. We have to be specific – naming the details – and God replaces brokenness with joy – and the restoration of intimacy that allows us to call God our Father. Anything less than full disclosure always brings less than full release. If you are willing to forgive others is an indication that you have been truly forgiven. Remaining unforgiving toward others who have wronged us means that we have not taken seriously the extent of our own sin – and the cost that Jesus Christ incurred to provide our forgiveness. When we refuse to forgive – we are the ones who are held captive!

"lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil" – Let's face it – we are faced with temptation every day – we are surrounded by it. There is only one, in whom we can turn to be delivered from giving in to temptation and building another mountain of debt to our heavenly Father. As you start your day – ask God to keep you as far away from compromising situations as possible. You know what I am talking about; gossip, improper language, indecent thoughts, and wicked web sites; need I say more? It is simply wherever you lose sight of His Kingdom! As you pray throughout the day – ask Him for the strength to avoid these places, especially when you are tired or discouraged. Remember the words from 1 John 4:4 *"greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world."* In this awesome teaching about prayer – Jesus gave to His Apostles – and to us – everything we need.

- It covers our *past* – with forgiveness for every sin we've ever committed.
- It covers our *present* – our daily needs.
- It covers our *future* – deliverance from coming temptation.

You see, praying Jesus' way – clears our focus – making it a kingdom focus – reminding us for whom it is that we live, pray and worship. I want to suggest to you that as we pray this prayer in just a few minutes during Holy Communion at the Lord's table, and each day – that you consider God's will for today – and decide that your answer is *YES*, no matter what the question is!