

“LORD, TEACH US TO PRAY”

I. Introduction

- A. One of Martin Luther’s longest friendships was with his barber, a man named Peter Beskendorf.
1. On one occasion, Beskendorf asked Luther how he could be more effective and consistent in his prayers.
 2. Luther responded by writing a brief treatise on prayer.
 3. In the opening paragraph of that treatise, Luther offers the following counsel: “when I feel that I have become cool and joyless in prayer because of other tasks or thoughts (for the flesh and the devil always impede and obstruct prayer), I take my little psalter, hurry to my room, or, if it be the day and hour for it, to the church where a congregation is assembled and, as time permits, I say quietly to myself and word-for-word the Ten Commandments, the Creed, and, if I have time, some words of Christ or of Paul, or some psalms, just as a child might do.” [cited in Trueman, *Luther on the Christian Life*, 119-120]
 4. The thing that stands out here is that Luther relies on the Word of God, not on his feelings, to fuel his prayers.
 5. If we only pray when we feel like it, we will never have much of a prayer life.
 6. There are powerful factors that make us indifferent towards prayer.
 7. In the words of Carl Trueman, “That the Christian may not feel like praying is one of the Devil’s tricks played on weak and sinful flesh; the answer is the discipline of reading and meditation, both corporate and individual.” [122]

- B. It was right and good for Peter the barber to want to develop a more robust prayer life.
 - 1. Prayer is at the heart of the Christian life.
 - 2. It is one of the chief means by which we cultivate communion with God.
 - 3. If your prayer life is weak, your relationship with God is weak.
 - 4. We should be troubled when we see ourselves neglecting prayer.
 - 5. We should be like the disciple in this passage when he asks Jesus to teach him how to pray.
 - 6. As we study this text this morning, we will reflect upon the things that Jesus had to say in response to the request, "Lord, teach us to pray."

II. A Model for Prayer

- A. The first part of Jesus's response sets forth a model for prayer, the prayer that we know as the Lord's Prayer.
 - 1. Millions of Christians throughout the past two millennia have used this prayer in all sorts of contexts and circumstances.
 - 2. As one commentator points out, "In this prayer the whole Christian world of all the centuries has a glorious common bond of unity and of mutual fellowship." [Geldenhuys, 322]
 - 3. You may have noticed that Luke's version of the Lord's Prayer is slightly different than the one found in Matthew's Gospel.
 - 4. There is no contradiction between these passages.
 - 5. It is simply that each is recording a teaching that took place in a different setting.

6. Luke's version is shorter, lacking the petition "Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven" and the phrase "deliver us from evil."
 7. Still, even though those phrases are not present here, the basic ideas conveyed by them are implicit in the other parts of the prayer.
- B. Jesus's model for prayer begins by teaching us to address God as our Father.
1. We should not overlook the immense privilege we have in being able to call upon God as our Father.
 2. This should encourage us to approach God with reverent trust and with confidence in his fatherly goodness to us.
 3. Though he is the God who is high and lifted up, the One who inhabits eternity and whose name is holy, he is also Father to all who believe in Christ.
- C. The first petition in this model prayer is "hallowed be your name."
1. This teaches us that our primary concern in prayer should be for God's honor.
 2. In all our prayers, our first priority should not be our needs but the hallowing of God's name.
 3. God's name is the expression of his being.
 4. It is the means by which he reveals himself to us.
 5. When we pray that God's name would be hallowed we are asking that it would be sanctified and given highest honor among all people.
 6. Hallowing God's name is the opposite of profaning his name.

7. We don't have to think very hard to envision the many ways in which God's name is profaned in our world.
 8. We should marvel at the fact that we are actually told to pray for God, to pray that he would be honored and revered.
 9. Though God does not need our prayers, he is pleased to use them to cause people to acknowledge and extol his majesty.
- D. The next petition is "Your kingdom come."
1. This has to do with the expansion of God's rule.
 2. In praying this, we are asking that more and more people would come under the control of God's dominion and that those who are already under his dominion would walk in a manner that is in keeping with their identity in Christ.
 3. God's kingdom comes in this present age as the Spirit works through the proclamation of the Word to gather and perfect the saints under Christ's kingly rule.
 4. God's kingdom will come in its final sense when Jesus returns in glory to consummate our redemption and to overthrow and subjugate all of his enemies.
 5. This is what is ultimately in view when we pray, "Your kingdom come."
- E. The next petition is "Give us each day our daily bread."
1. The term "bread" stands for everything that we need for our earthly existence.
 2. This encourages us to bring all of our needs to the Lord and to trust him to care for us.
 3. We should take special note of the word "daily" in this petition.

4. God wants us to ask for his provision every day.
 5. This is how we express our continued dependence upon him as the one who daily bears our burden and ensures that we want for nothing.
- F. The next petition is “forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone who is indebted to us.”
1. This reminds us of our need to acknowledge our guilt before God and seek his forgiveness for the sins that we continue to commit.
 2. Anyone who refuses to seek forgiveness for his sins is not a true Christian.
 3. As John warns in his first epistle, “If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.” (1 Jn. 1:8)
 4. We all sin.
 5. We sin every day of our lives.
 6. We do not even know the full extent of our sin.
 7. What a blessing it is for us to know that when we sin we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous, and that he is the propitiation for all of our sins.
- G. This petition for God’s forgiveness is offered in connection with the assertion that we forgive those who sin against us.
1. The point being made by this is not that we earn God’s forgiveness by extending forgiveness to others.
 2. On the contrary, it simply means that one of the fruits that is produced in us when we receive forgiveness from God is a willingness to forgive those who offend us.

3. There should be not be any unwillingness on our part to forgive others when they sin against us.
 4. We should have an attitude of forgiveness toward everyone.
 5. Having said that, it is important to understand that we can only grant forgiveness to those who seek it.
 6. God does not forgive those who do not confess their sins and ask for his forgiveness.
 7. Neither should we, though we should always be ready to forgive.
 8. And when you do forgive someone, you are promising that you will not dwell on the offense, or seek retribution, or bring it up before others, or hold the matter against them in the future.
 9. Forgiving someone means letting go of what you have against them for the offense that you are forgiving.
- H. The final petition in Luke's version of the Lord's Prayer is "lead us not into temptation."
1. You may have heard that Pope Francis recently proposed that this petition be altered to say, "Let us not fall into temptation."
 2. The problem with that proposal is that it is not an accurate translation of the Greek text.
 3. The text really does put God in an active role here.
 4. It really does say "lead us not into temptation."
 5. Of course, this does not imply that God himself is the source of temptation.
 6. As it says in the epistle of James, "Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am being tempted by God,' for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. But each person is

tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.” (James 1:13–15 ESV)

7. God does not tempt us, but he sometimes leads us into temptation in order to test, prove, and perfect our faith.
8. In praying this petition, we are admitting that we have no strength to live a holy life apart from God’s power and help.
9. Unless he delivers us, we will constantly be falling into sin.
10. It is good for us to ask God to guide us away from circumstances in which we will be exposed to temptations.
11. This is a request that every Christian should be able to make earnestly, because we do not want to sin and because we realize that we are still plagued by the weakness of the flesh.
12. We should not want to be exposed to temptation.
13. At the same time, we can have confidence that our God will see us through the trials he chooses to lead us into.
14. In the words of one commentator, “we must pray that we be led as seldom as possible into circumstances fraught with temptation. But when God nevertheless allows us to be led into such circumstances, we must rejoice in the Lord who gives us the victory and causes everything to contribute toward the good of those who love Him.” [Geldenhuys, 321]

III. Encouragements for Prayer

- A. After giving his disciples this model for their prayers, Jesus then offers encouragements to spur them on in their prayer life.
 1. First, he tells a story that shows the importance of being persistent in prayer.

2. He tells about a man who received an unexpected guest in the middle of the night and went to his friend's house to ask for some bread.
 3. Since people lived in pretty close quarters in that culture, it would have disrupted everyone's sleep for the friend to get up and comply with his neighbor's request.
 4. So he stays in bed and tells his neighbor to leave him alone.
 5. But when his friend keeps pounding on the door, he eventually relents and gives in.
 6. In telling this story, Jesus was setting up an argument from the lesser to the greater.
 7. If an imperfect human being will grant a request when it is persistently made, how much more will God grant the requests that are persistently made by his children in their prayers?
 8. We need to pray with persistence.
 9. This does not mean that God needs any rousing.
 10. In fact, it is the other way around.
 11. We need to be roused from our sense of independence.
 12. We need to learn to look to God for everything we need.
- B. Jesus offers a strong motivation to pray with persistence when he assures us that we will be heard.
1. Those who ask will receive; those who seek will find; those who knock will have the door opened to them.
 2. This does not mean that God will give us everything that we ask of him.

3. It would not be good for us if God treated us that way.
 4. He knows far better than we do what we really need.
 5. He alone knows what is truly for the best.
 6. Jesus's point here is that prayers that are offered in persistent faith are never offered in vain.
 7. Such prayers demonstrate our confidence that God does not turn a deaf ear to the pleas of his children.
 8. Though he may not always grant our requests, he always hears us and gives us what is good.
 9. When we understand this, we begin to see how foolish it is to neglect prayer.
 10. In the words of John Calvin, "To know that God is the Lord, to know that everything good comes from him, to know that he invites us to ask him for what we need, and yet not to call on him and pray to him, is like knowing of a treasure hidden in the earth and, through indifference, to leave it there, without taking the trouble to dig it up." [*Truth for All Time*, 51]
- C. Our passage ends with Jesus offering a comparison in order to help us remember who it is that hears our prayers.
1. Jesus likens the goodness and care that God shows to his children to the goodness and care that human fathers show to their children.
 2. Of course no human father is perfect, and some are abusive or neglectful.
 3. But in general, fathers do give good things to their children.
 4. In most situations, a child who asks his father for a drink of water is not going to be given a cup of poison.

5. During the Christmas season we see parents taking great joy in giving nice things to their children.
 6. This is another argument from the lesser to the greater.
 7. If sinful parents know how to give good gifts to their children, how much more will God give good gifts to those whom he has adopted as his children through Jesus Christ?
- D. Notice, however, that it is not merely “good gifts” that our heavenly Father gives to those who ask him.
1. Jesus says that the Father gives the Holy Spirit to those who ask him.
 2. This helps us keep things in proper perspective.
 3. We have all sorts of burdens on our minds.
 4. We can think of many things that we would like to ask God to do for us.
 5. And it is fine for us to bring those concerns to God in prayer.
 6. He wants us to do so.
 7. But we always need to remember that the thing that we most need from God is the effectual working of the Holy Spirit in our hearts.

IV. Conclusion

- A. The Heidelberg Catechism calls prayer “the most important part of that thankfulness God requires of us.” [Q. 116]
1. Prayer is the way we express our gratitude to God.
 2. It is the way we exercise our faith in God.

3. It is the God-appointed means by which we lay hold of the riches that are laid up for us in heaven.
- B. The start of a new year is a good time for us to resolve, in reliance on the power of the Holy Spirit, to be more persistent in our prayers.
1. If you are neglecting prayer, you are forgetting how utterly dependent on God you are.
 2. That is a cause for concern, because being dependent on God is at the very heart of the Christian religion.
 3. As Calvin puts it, “the man who is rightly instructed in the true faith sees clearly how very poor he is, how totally bereft of all that is good, and how he lacks any possibility at all of saving himself. Hence, if he wants to find a source of help for his beggary, he must go out of himself and look for it elsewhere.” [*Truth for All Time*, 50]
 4. This is what we are doing when we pray.
 5. We are going outside of ourselves and looking for help from the One who is sovereign over all and who is also our Father in heaven.