

“Who Taught You How to Pray?”

Luke 11:1-13

Preached by Dr. Robert F. Browning, Pastor

First Baptist Church

Frankfort, Kentucky

July 28, 2013

Charlie Brown knelt beside his bed to say his evening prayers. He folded his hands and bowed his heads. After a few seconds, he looked over at Lucy and announced, “If you point your hands down instead of up when you pray, you will get the opposite of what you pray for.”

This morning, let’s turn our attention toward prayer. There are two places you will find the Lord’s Prayer in the New Testament, Matthew 6:9-13 and our text for today.

There are some noticeable differences in the two accounts. Matthew’s version is longer and more formal. Luke abbreviates the Lord’s Prayer and makes it more direct and personal.

Matthew includes it as a part of the Sermon on the Mount when Jesus taught the multitudes on a hillside overlooking the Sea of Galilee. Luke has Jesus responding to a request by his disciples when they asked him to teach them to pray.

Luke attached two parables to the Lord’s Prayer, both intended to reveal the character and nature of God. If a man would grudgingly disrupt his family’s sleep in the middle of the night to help a neighbor, how much more would a loving and generous God respond to our pleas for help at any time of the day or night? If an earthly father who is capable of making mistakes would never intentionally deceive or harm his son, how much more can we trust our wise and caring heavenly Father to do what is best for us?

There is something else you need to know about Luke’s account of the Lord’s Prayer. The importance of prayer is one of the themes of Luke’s gospel. He frequently mentions Jesus praying, in contrast to Matthew who doesn’t mention Jesus praying until the fourteenth chapter and John who doesn’t mention Jesus praying until the final week of his life.

In contrast, Luke has Jesus praying after he was baptized, before he called his disciples, on the Mount of Transfiguration, before he talked to his disciples about his impending death and on the cross. Luke wanted his readers to know how important prayer was to Jesus and should be to them.

In Luke's opinion, no decision should be made without asking for guidance, and no provision should be received without saying thanks. Devotion to God and dependence upon God required fervent and faithful praying.

The most intriguing part of our text for me is found in the words of the disciples to Jesus when they asked him to teach them how to pray. Didn't they know how to pray? Well, of course they did. However, they came to the realization they didn't know how to pray like Jesus, and they wanted him to teach them what he knew.

You need to know this was not an uncommon request. Every rabbi or prophet, including John the Baptist, taught his disciples how to pray, so it was not unusual for the disciples to ask Jesus.

I do believe, though, there was an element of wonder and awe which struck them when they watched Jesus pray. I am confident they had never witnessed anyone pray like Jesus, which contributed to the timing of this request and made a lasting impression upon them.

Whose prayers have had this kind of impact upon you? While my heart has been touched by the prayers of many people, one in particular is Mrs. Marjorie Warren. She was on the Pastor Search Committee of a former church where I was a pastor.

The first time I met with this group, Mrs. Warren was asked to pray. Immediately, I knew why.

At some point while she was praying, I opened my eyes to get a glimpse of God. She prayed as if no one was in the room but God and her, and they were best friends. The sound of her voice and the sincerity of her words touched me deeply. I felt the same way every time I heard her pray in worship or in a class. I suspect the disciples experienced this every time they heard Jesus pray.

"Lord, teach us to pray," the disciples said to Jesus after observing him in prayer, and he did. **If someone asked you to teach them to pray, what would you say?** I pondered that question a lot last week. Here are some of the things I would tell them.

Talk to God the same way you talk to the person you love and trust the most. Perhaps the most radical thing Jesus included in this prayer was the way he taught his disciples to address God as Father.

This is the word a child would use when speaking to her father. It paints a picture of an intimate relationship based upon mutual love, trust, respect and appreciation. It describes prayer as a conversation with God about this journey we are on and opens the door for a partnership.

I'm not sure we understand how radical this was. No one had ever taught the Jews God was this approachable. Even the Temple was designed to keep people at their proper distance from God with strict boundaries for Gentiles, women and priests, and no place for the sickest among them.

According to Jesus, though, anyone could talk to God anywhere at any time, regardless of their status in life. It made no difference if they were female or male, rich or poor, educated or uneducated, Jew or Gentile, a part of the ruling class or a commoner; all had equal access to God.

No wonder the common people embraced this prayer and the religious leaders mocked it. It opened the door for those who felt they had been forgotten to sit in God's lap like a child would a loving parent, and it stripped those who claimed religious superiority of their hubris and control over the masses.

What would I tell someone about how to pray? I would start where Jesus did. Talk to God like a child sitting in his parent's lap.

Secondly, approach God the same way you do the person you admire the most. Intimacy does not undermine majesty or respect. To call God, Father, doesn't make Him any less God. Certainly, God is greater than we are in every way, but this doesn't make Him unapproachable. Instead, it should make us even more grateful, humble and respectful.

When you pray, offer to become the best team player you can be to make the world the best it can be, or as Jesus said, "To bring heaven on earth."

I have a good friend who says, "We know heaven will be wonderful. Right now we need to be doing everything we can to make earth like heaven." I believe that was Jesus' purpose and passion.

No phrase is used more often in scripture than "the kingdom of God." Jesus came on the scene preaching the good news of the Kingdom of God, and he showed us what it means to live the way God wants each of us to live—how to arrange our values and priorities, treat our enemies, handle our problems, spend our money, run our business, use our time, respond to adversity and be a good neighbor. He prayed for God's will to be done on earth as it is in heaven because he knew it would bring the best out in each one who asked for this and create a just and peaceful world.

When you pray, ask God to help you do your part, to be a good team player. You can make a difference!

When you pray, talk to God about how you feel and what you need the same way you talk to your doctor, counselor or best friend. Be specific. Include the necessities of life--food, clothing, shelter and companionship. Confess your sins and ask for forgiveness, along with the readiness to forgive those who hurt you. Ask to be spared the hardest trials of life, but if they come, ask for the ability to confront them with strength and courage.

It is never wrong to pray for what you need. What is sinful is to receive what you need and not share it with those who are struggling.

Don't overlook the fact that every pronoun in the Lord's Prayer is plural. Praying should make us mindful of the common bond we share with all of God's children and the importance of being a generous neighbor.

When you pray, make a commitment to God that you will share whatever He gives you. I am confident this will put a big smile on His face like it would any parent!

By the way, who taught you to pray? Did you learn by observing them, or did they talk to you about it? Have you passed on what you learned?

Who needs you to share with them what you know about prayer? How could you help them understand the value and importance of prayer?

What tips could you offer which would help them to partner with God on their journey? Why not jot some things down and be ready when that opportunity comes.