

## **Hold You: The Lord's Prayer Part 1**

### **Luke 11:1-13**

My two kids, Kallie and Wiley, get along great, which is amazing considering how different they are. One of the main ways that they are different is in their desire for knowledge. Wiley, my seven year old son, wants to know everything. If he doesn't know something or if he hears something said that he doesn't fully understand, he'll ask you about it. And in your reply if there is even one word that he doesn't understand or know, he will ask about that, which will no doubt lead to another question and another and another. A few months ago he saw a commercial on TV about title loans. For the next forty-five minutes, we talked about, not only title loans, but car loans, home mortgages, second mortgages, interest rates, how to refinance your house, and property taxes. When the conversation somehow turned to pensions and life insurance, I finally just had to tell him to go outside and play.

Kallie, my ten year old daughter, is much more like I was growing up. There are certain subjects that really interest her, but if she asks a question, it is only because she is directly affected by the answer, and then she doesn't need or want to know all the details. She just wants the simple answer. On more than one occasion as I have begun to ramble on in my explanation of why, she has simply said, not trying to be rude, "Dad, I really don't care. You already answered my question."

In other words, while Wiley wants to understand what it is that causes a Coke to fizz and why over time if left out a Coke will go flat and why Coke is brown but Sprite is white, and why it cost a \$1.25 to buy either a 2 liter Coke or a 1 liter Coke... I mean shouldn't the 1 liter Coke be cheaper, and if Diet Coke has less carbs than regular Coke why doesn't everyone just drink Diet Coke, and if they did, would they still advertise both, and speaking of advertising what is the best form of advertising, and if someone wanted to do that for living what classes would they take in college... Kallie, like me, just wants to know if she can have one.

Reading through the Gospels we find that the disciples are really no different than Kallie or I. They don't ask a lot of questions simply for the sake of learning, but instead when they ask a question, it is because they feel that there is something that directly affects them.

Prior to our New Testament lesson this morning, Jesus has been very busy teaching, healing, and visiting with people. But finally, there is a small break, so Jesus steals away from the crowd and finds a quiet place to pray. When he is finished, one of the disciples says, "Lord, teach us to pray."

As the boat was sinking, the captain yelled out, "Does anyone know how to pray?" One man answered, "Yes, Captain. I do." The Captain said, "Great. You pray while the rest of us put on life jackets. We're one short."

I've got to be honest with you. One of the most frustrating aspects of my faith has always been prayer. This is because prayer doesn't always make sense to me. If God knows everything, if God is all powerful, if God wants what is best for me then why

should I tell God what I think needs to be done in my life? Why should I try to convince God that I know better than him? Or why do I need to ask God to do something as if God might have missed it? Again, doesn't God know everything? If it needs to be done, won't God just do it even if I don't ask? Or is God simply waiting for me to pray before he will act?

Add to this that for so many of us, when we have a need or simply want someone to talk to, it is often just easier to turn to a friend or a loved one who can and will respond to us rather than to an invisible God who may or may not be listening.

For the disciples the question about why we pray probably never entered into their minds because for them they simply grew up knowing that you prayed about everything. William Barclay says, "No nation ever had a higher ideal of prayer than the Jews had; and no religion ever ranked prayer higher in the scale of priorities than the Jews did." And so they prayed when they first woke up and when they went to bed and at various times throughout the day. They prayed for and about everything. So while I understand that it was customary for a rabbi to teach his disciples a simple prayer that they might use over and over again, I find it interesting that one of the disciples came to Jesus and asked him to teach them **how** to pray. They knew how to pray, and yet, there was just something so different about the way that Jesus did it. There was something so unique in the way he prayed. When he prayed he didn't stand on the street corner for all to hear, he didn't come with a laundry list of things he wanted from God, he didn't go into prayer half heartedly, but when he prayed, he was totally immersed in his prayer... he was totally immersed in his time with God and he seemed to come away from his prayers strengthened and prepared for whatever he might face next. Jesus did not pray because it was required of him, he prayed because he personally needed it. And so one of the disciples said, "Lord, teach us to pray..."

Today, we as his disciples, still pray together the prayer he taught them two thousand years ago. Unfortunately, this has become a prayer that many of us know so well that we have stopped listening to the words.

But when we do hear the words, when we do stop and listen to what Jesus taught his disciples, not only does it teach us how to pray, but it also teaches us to whom we are praying and why.

As I alluded to earlier, I think that part of our struggle with prayer, or at least part of my struggle, comes from not fully understanding what is accomplished in prayer, and we will get into this more in two weeks, but another struggle comes with not fully understanding to whom we are praying to. Who is God?

This week, this is the part of the Lord's Prayer that I want to look at... who did Jesus teach us God is?

I enjoy reading the Old Testament and hearing how the story unfolds. Watching as God makes a promise to be our God and then seeing how God keeps that promise to us, but the God we meet in its pages seems very different than the God revealed to us in Jesus Christ. The fall, the flood, Sodom and Gomorrah, the plagues, the wars... The God we meet in the Old Testament is a God of love, but the emphasis here is really on his power and might... the emphasis is on God's Holiness, and God as Holy is a God who

demands our obedience. And to those who fail... to those who disobey, God's wrath... God's judgment... and God's punishment awaits.

Even today we meet this God in the eyes of many who claim that natural disasters are God's punishment for the sins of a particular people: Fires in California, Katrina, 9/11, the earthquake in Haiti... after each of these events, I have heard arguments declaring that God caused these things to happen in order to punish the sinners and to serve as a wakeup call for the rest.

Unfortunately, I have also heard similar arguments made in trying to understand the bad that has happened in one's own personal life. Divorce, the loss of a job, abuse, disease, an unexpected death... too many times I have heard people say in the midst of pain, "I will never understand God's will, but clearly he is trying to teach me something."

Is this who God is? Does God inflict pain to send a message?

Jesus said, "When you pray say, 'Father'.

When I was in college, I went to a Christian conference for college students. It was at that conference where I first heard Brennan Manning speak. And he set the tone for the entire weekend that first night when he read the same New Testament lesson we read this morning and said, "What Jesus said to his disciples that day was one of the most revolutionary things ever said. Isaiah began his ministry with a vision of God seated on a throne and angels singing 'Holy, Holy, Holy,' but Isaiah never heard what the disciples heard. Elijah was taken into heaven before he died, but he never heard what the disciples heard. John the Baptist came to clear the way for Jesus to come, but John never heard what the disciples heard. Deborah, Ezekiel, Jeremiah, Micah, and all the others all called by God to lead God's people, but none of them heard what the disciples heard that day when Jesus taught them to pray saying, "Father" or in Jesus' language "Abba."

According to the Oxford Companion to the Bible, "Abba was probably a child's word, but it had become an accepted way of speaking to or about one's father. It expresses a close relation to God on the part of Jesus, an intimate relationship that is also expected of the disciples."

Brennan Manning goes on to say, "What Jesus Christ is teaching his people is that the God in whose presence Moses had to remove his shoes because he was standing on holy ground, the God from whose fingertips this universe fell, the God beside whose beauty the Grand Canyon is only a shadow, the God beside whose power the nuclear bomb is nothing, Jesus says, we may dare to address the infinite, transcendent, almighty God like a child. With the same intimacy, tenderness, familiarity and reverence as a sixteen month old baby sitting on his father's lap calling, "Daddy."

This is how Jesus consistently prayed throughout the Gospels. He prayed to his dear father and he asked his disciples to do the same.

But for Jesus this was more than a simple word.

In the 15<sup>th</sup> chapter of the Gospel of Luke, a group of people had gathered to hear Jesus teach, but the Pharisees and teachers of the law began to whisper about how Jesus welcomes sinners and even eats with them, so Jesus responds telling them three stories... three parables, the parable of the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost or prodigal son. Jesus says, "I'll tell you why I eat with sinners... because I know what my father in

heaven is like... God is like a father who even after his son essentially says, "I wish you were dead. Give me my inheritance, so that I can leave and never have to see you again" and then walks away, the father stands outside... waiting... hoping that his son will return. And one day when he finally see his son off in the distance, the father runs to him as fast as he can and before the son can even explain himself, the father has put a ring on his finger, a robe on his back, he has killed the fatted calf, and he takes his son inside to celebrate before the son can change his mind and run off again." Jesus says, "I am like my father who celebrates when the lost are found."

The God we call Father is not the cause of our pain, but when we are hurting, the Father is ready to comfort us... he is ready to hold us.

When Kallie and Wiley were little, Amy and I would often ask, "Do you want me to hold you?" And so it seemed funny that as they each learned to speak, one of the first things I remember them saying with their arms stretched out was, "Hold you." They still love to be held.

I think my favorite time of each day is when I come home from work, say hello to everyone, and then try to find a quiet place to sit and relax for a few minutes while watching part of a movie, the Simpsons, or ESPN. But soon one or both of them has found me and snuggled up next to me, and before I know it, I am holding him or her in my arms as they tell me all about their day. It is in those moments when I am reminded of how much they love me, how much they trust me, how much they need me. And it brings me so much joy because I know that at that moment, they have chosen to be with me and me alone.

I hear people all the time say, "You better enjoy this time while it lasts because the time will come when your children won't want anything to do with you."

What is it that God really wants from us? Sure, God wants us to reach out to those in need, and God wants us to live good lives, but God also wants us to spend time with him... not because we have to or because God can give us something, but because we enjoy being in his presence. God wants us to realize how much we need him and how much he needs and loves us.

I said earlier that it is often easier to talk face to face with a friend or a loved one rather than to pray to an invisible God who may or may not be listening. When we call God Father, we know who God is. And as Father... as a loving parent, God wants so badly to hear our stories... as we rest in our Father's love.

I heard a story once about a priest who was sitting in his office when a young woman came in, and said, "I'm sorry to bother you. I'm not a catholic. I have never been to Mass here, and we have never met. I have been to my pastor, and he is a good person, but he is just so busy. My dad is dying, and I wonder if you would be willing to come over and pray with him?" The priest said that he would be over in one hour.

When he showed up at her house, she led him to the back room where her dad was lying in bed. As the priest walked in, he saw an empty chair sitting next to the man, and so he said, "I see you've been expecting me." The man looked up at him and said, "I don't know who you are . . . I'm not expecting anyone." The priest said, "Well, I just noticed the empty chair." The man said, "Come in and close the door." When the door

was closed, the man said, “I’ve never told this to anyone . . . not even my daughter. When I first started going to church, I wanted to learn how to pray, so I asked my minister. He gave a book and said, ‘This is the best book on prayer. Read this and you’ll know how to pray.’ The man said, ‘I had to look up five words in the first chapter.’ I said, ‘Thanks, but no thanks.’ So I went to a nearby seminary and asked a professor. He gave me three more books. Finally, a friend of mine told me, ‘when you pray, take an empty chair and set it in front of you and just know that God is sitting in that chair. Then talk to God like you are talking to me. Talk to God like you are talking to a family member. Talk to God like you are talking to your best friend.’”

The man looked at the priest and said, “I’ve been praying like that ever since. I don’t know how to pray any other way.” The priest thanked him for sharing. They talked awhile longer. The priest prayed with him and anointed him with oil, and left. The next day, the woman came to back to thank him again, and then she said, “My dad died last night.” The priest asked, “Did he seem to go peacefully?” She said, “He really did. At about 10 o’clock, he called me into his room, told me a few of his corny jokes, kissed me on the forehead, and went to sleep. I found him dead this morning.” She paused then she went on, “but the strangest thing . . . when I found him this morning, he was lying with his head in that empty chair next to his bed as if he was reaching for something.”

Why do we pray? One of the reasons is that when Jesus revealed the true face of God to us as father, we learned that as Father God will always listen to us, God will always hold us, God will always accept us, God will always love and care for us, and nothing we could ever do could change this. But we also learned that when we pray... when we call to God as Father or as a loving parent, we bring God so much joy because God knows that you have chosen to be with him and him alone for that moment in time.

As this woman’s day was dying, the last thing on his mind was that he wanted to be held by his father, and so he reached over and laid his head in his loving father’s lap as he passed away.

When Jesus was ask how to pray, the first thing he did was to let us know that God is like a parent...full of love, compassion, mercy, and grace ready to hold...ready to hear his children.

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