

The Lord's Prayer: Jesus Teaches Us How to Pray

SCOTT HOEZEE

If you grew up watching your mother or grandmother making chocolate chip cookies, and if you grew up just knowing the resulting cookies were the best in the world, then at some point, you knew you wanted to make cookies just like that; and so, you asked Mom or Grandma to teach you. Show me how you do it, you might say, and eventually, of course, you wanted the recipe. Well, if the disciples knew one thing about Jesus, it was that he was very good at praying. So, they decided they wanted to learn to pray like Jesus prayed; and when Jesus taught them how to pray, you have to imagine they leaned in. Today on *Groundwork*, and from Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, we ponder how Jesus taught us to pray. Stay tuned.

DARRELL DELANEY

Welcome to *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Darrell Delaney.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I am Scott Hoezee; and Darrell, this is now the fourth of a six-part series on the Sermon on the Mount from Matthew 5 through 7. We have already covered the Beatitudes, words about our being salt and light, words about how Jesus regarded and taught God's law; and so now today we are going to move into Matthew 6, which is the middle chapter of Matthew's version of the Sermon on the Mount, where Jesus launches into a discussion on prayer.

DARRELL DELANEY

And it says in Matthew Chapter 6:5: "And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. ⁶But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. ⁷And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. ⁸Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

I think it is really interesting, Scott, that Jesus assumes they will pray...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DARRELL DELANEY

He doesn't say when you get around to it, or maybe, or...he is already assuming that because of their walk with God and their Christian practices...their believing practices...that they will be praying. So, he is actually teaching them and tweaking how they should do it, and in the right spirit.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And so, Jesus does want to talk about prayer, and positively in the right spirit, but before he gets to that, interestingly, he begins on a negative note or a counter note to say: Don't do it this way.

DARRELL DELANEY

This is what not to do, right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Don't do it this way. Probably some of the people who came to mind for the disciples when Jesus said this were people the disciples would have regarded as pillars of the community, you know. I mean, think of Brother Ezra: Oh, every time you go to the synagogue...every time you go to worship on the Sabbath...Brother Ezra...Oh, great God of the universe; lookest thou down upon us gathered here; we are the people of thy pasture; thou knowest O Great God the praises that well up in our bosoms even now. So, everyone is like wow; Brother Ezra, he can pray. That is just great! And yet, Jesus is saying here: Meh, maybe not.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; knee bowed and body bent before your throne of grace. We come before you, heavenly Father. Oh, Father of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Very pious displays, and Jesus is saying that prayer is much more than just a pious display so that people can say: Oh, wow; you are really good at that! Because some people will compare themselves and disqualify themselves: I cannot pray like that. I might as well not pray. So, they feel they could be disqualified or they could aspire to some other human vision of what that is; and that is not the reason why we pray.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, Jesus says what do I think of those kinds of pray-ers? Showboats...worse; Jesus calls them hypocrites. That is pretty serious... They are just doing it to get attention, Jesus said. They are just doing it so that you will be impressed by their fine, lofty words; and if attention is all they want, that is what they are going to get; and that is their reward; but, Jesus says, it is not true prayer.

DARRELL DELANEY

And Jesus says in the passage that you are supposed to go in your room and close your door and pray in secret; and that your heavenly Father, who sees what is happening in secret will reward you. So, it is a secret place that prayer is supposed to come from, but it doesn't mean that he is condemning all public prayers either.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; let's make that clear. Almost all of us who go to church on a weekly basis hear a public prayer, by an elder, a lay person, a deacon, the pastor mostly, right? And Jesus is not condemning all such public prayer; and he isn't even condemning people who use good language in prayer; because, Darrell, when you and I are pastors, when we lead worship, when we do the congregational prayer, let's say, we are leading people in prayer. So, even if we pay attention to our words, and I used to write out my prayers ahead of time. I wanted to give it a little bit of thought. But not to draw attention to me. I wanted to invite others to join me; and so, when we lead people in true prayer to God, even if it is a public prayer, that is not what Jesus is talking about. He is talking about people who just want to have people think all about how good you were when you were done praying. No; bring people into prayer, Jesus says, and that is fine.

DARRELL DELANEY

Prayer should not alienate, it should unify.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly.

DARRELL DELANEY

And so, what we have done in the past...you have done this at congregations you have led, is that you have done a responsive reading as a prayer, so that people will be able to say in unison what it is that we are praying for; and that is a unifying thing. It is also a conversation with God; and so, it is very important that

we keep that in mind as well.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; prayer has to be true prayer, and it shouldn't be an artifice, it shouldn't be an excuse to do something else. I remember years ago hearing about a pastor who tended to drop hints to his congregation of things he wanted, you know: Oh, Lord; you know, my family could use a good vacation soon. He was kind of hoping people would donate their cottage to him or something for a week. No, Jesus says, no; don't use prayers to make announcements; don't use prayers to advance an agenda. It is a private conversation, as you said, Darrell, between you and God; and I think, Darrell, that is one of the most important things Jesus makes clear, you know, everything we are going to look at in this program...it's the relationship. When you are in a relationship with your Father in heaven, you talk. It is natural.

DARRELL DELANEY

And you talk, and you also listen. So, spending time...everyone knows this. The only way you are going to have a relationship with someone is if you spend time with them; and that you talk and you listen. If it is just one-way, then it is never going to be right; and so, you know, you use the example of your spouse. Your spouse wants to hear "I love you" from you, even though, yes, you know that; but it still is something that we would like to hear as spouses; and our God wants to hear the worship; he wants to hear the acknowledgement; he wants to hear that in our prayers to him, even though he already knows it. It is very important for the relationship.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; God needs to hear from us; but then, Jesus says, you know, say what you need...ask for what you need and then be done with it. Don't think you have to pile up oodles and oodles of words, or put on some big show or harangue God or lobby God. God hears you the first time. So, say it and be done with it and give God the glory, because that is what it is about. It is about a relationship...

DARRELL DELANEY

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And in all relationships, we have trust. Relationship and trust, love and conversation, I think that is really what Jesus is saying is foundational to prayer. It is about expressing love to the God who already loves us.

DARRELL DELANEY

And we wouldn't pray if we didn't have faith on the line when we are trying to trust the God who is able to do anything. We pray to someone greater than us, and so, we are praying to our heavenly Father that he would intervene into whatever situation. That is a divine act of trust, that is an opening in a vulnerable space of relationship, and everyone is invited into that with our God; but next, we want to talk more about the most important prayer in the world that many have said and many have recited, so stay tuned.

Segment 2

SCOTT HOEZEE

I am Scott Hoezee, along with Darrell Delaney, and you are listening to *Groundwork*, and we are thinking about prayer, Darrell, in this fourth episode of our six-part series on Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. We are in Matthew 6. Now, in Luke's gospel, what comes next is a direct answer to the disciples when they say: Teach us to pray, Lord. In the Sermon on the Mount, though, it just comes up next, and of course, it goes like this: ⁹ "This, [then,] is how you should pray (Jesus says): 'Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, ¹⁰your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. ¹¹Give us today our daily bread. ¹²And forgive us our debts, as we [also] have forgiven our debtors. ¹³And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.'"

DARRELL DELANEY

This prayer is very powerful. I do believe that this prayer has a form, and it has a function to teach us and train us on how to pray; and the first thing, it starts with acknowledging God for who he is and what he has done; and that is a top priority before we ask for anything; that is very important.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; we forget, because of the familiarity of this prayer, many of us have recited it many times; and indeed, that is one of the things you can do with the Lord's Prayer. You can recite it word of word, and in worship and at funerals and at weddings we have all done that. We have said this prayer just the way I just read it; but this is also a blueprint for prayer. This is also sort of naming for us...kind of giving us a checklist of what should be in *all* of our prayers, whether we are repeating this one word for word or not; but we forget because it is so familiar that it was radical for Jesus to suggest we can call God our Father. Our Father; wow! That is quite amazing. Really, when you think about this prayer, Darrell, it really covers the waterfront. I mean, we start at the pinnacle, of all things: our Father in heaven. We end at sort of the bottom of all things: deliver us from the evil one...

DARRELL DELANEY

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, we kind of move from heaven to hell, and everything in between gets included in this prayer, too.

DARRELL DELANEY

You acknowledge who God is and what God has done; you acknowledge the enemy; you acknowledge the relationships you have with one another and your own basic needs. That is actually everything we need in prayer, and he walks us through just how to do that, but we need to start by acknowledging God and who he is and what he has done for us.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; and we talked about something Jesus talks about all the time: the kingdom. Your kingdom come and your will be done; but not in the abstract, Jesus says; not in some far-off realm, not in some far future time, right? Sometimes we say, you know, oh, I am going to hit this baseball from here to kingdom come! So, we act like "kingdom come" is way down the future, way far away. No; Jesus says it is here now. *Your* kingdom come and *your* will be done...and of course, the kingdom of God is *where* the will of God calls the shots, right? So, they are the same thing...but your kingdom come and your will be done on earth, as it is in heaven. It is a given that it happens in heaven, but it has to happen on earth; right now, today, and that sort of tells us how we are supposed to live.

DARRELL DELANEY

You are not saying that we need to wait until the sweet by and by first...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DARRELL DELANEY

You are saying that no: here, now, today. You know, the Bible says now faith is the substance of things hoped for and the evidence of things not seen; and so, Jesus is saying: Yes, today and forevermore. So, we don't need to, I call it pole vault theology, when you leap over today and try to get to the by and by later...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DARRELL DELANEY

When we have actual needs and actual challenges and actual need of God's intervention here, today; and acknowledging where God has us is part of the prayer. That is very important.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Most of us have been taught to pray with our eyes shut. Jesus is, in a sense, saying: Pray with your eyes wide open or your eyes wide shut; but pray with your eyes wide open. Look around you. This is the context where the kingdom and the will of God has to happen; and while you are looking around you anyway, feet firmly planted on the earth, think about the practical considerations: What about breakfast? What about lunch? What about dinner? Give us this day our daily bread; and even if we are blessed enough, Darrell, to be in a situation where our daily bread, what we are going to have for lunch or breakfast is already in the fridge, we have to ask God to give it to us because that reminds us that is where it really comes from. My daily bread doesn't come from Costco.

DARRELL DELANEY

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And it doesn't come because I've got money in the Wells Fargo Bank account. It comes because God feeds me. So, training ourselves to ask for our daily bread is an act of gratitude, but it is also a reality check: Hey, God is the giver of all good things.

DARRELL DELANEY

We actually have been training our kids with this. When they see food on the table, the food does not give life; God gives life, but he gives us food to sustain that life; and so, we acknowledge it and that is what we thank him for; and when we say grace we acknowledge the fact that he is providing and that we continue to ask him for his provision. He is our Father, and fathers provide; therefore, we are able to ask him to provide for us in our very basic needs. It doesn't say ask for a Cadillac; it doesn't say ask for a brand new house or whatever. Those are wants, but what we need our heavenly Father is there for us and we get to ask him for that; that is our right as believers in the family of God.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, the context for the Lord's Prayer is today...life...daily food...and while we are at it today: well, God; I gotta admit I don't always do things right for you. I try, but I fail. Forgive me. Forgive me my debts, right? Forgive me the things that I owe you because I didn't do it right. But as we said in the first program of this series, in the Beatitudes when Jesus said: Blessed are the merciful for they will be shown mercy, if we know we have been forgiven, then we have to forgive others. Share the love; share the joy; you are happy about being forgiven, great; now go forgive Susan, go forgive George, go forgive your wife, your husband, your kid.

DARRELL DELANEY

Forgive yourself.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Forgive yourself. If you have been forgiven, now go forgive others.

DARRELL DELANEY

You cannot have what I call Jonah syndrome, where he experiences the grace of God under the shade of the tree, but he wants the Ninevites to be destroyed. You cannot sit in the grace of God and ask for judgment for someone else when, you know, you have to actually, freely receive it and freely give it; and that is part of the prayer. It is interesting that Jesus connected forgiveness to the provisions and everything else. You cannot ignore that part of life because brokenness is actually a part of life as well.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And we pray that God, you know...deliver us from the things that tempt us and from the clutches of the evil one. Keep us on the path, oh, God. I cannot ask you to forgive me for my sins when I have every intention to go out right after I am done praying this and do it again...

DARRELL DELANEY

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, keep me, Oh, Lord, at your side. So, as we said, Darrell, we can pray the Lord's Prayer word for word and it is a good exercise to do and it is a good thing to have memorized; but it is also something we riff on. It is a checklist. Hey, if I look at all of the prayers I have prayed in the last week, Darrell, how often have I prayed for God's kingdom to come and his will to be done? How often have I prayed for the forgiveness of others who have hurt me?

DARRELL DELANEY

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

How often do I ask for daily bread? Am I including all the stuff Jesus says here; and if not, my prayer life is out of balance, and the Lord's Prayer calls me back.

DARRELL DELANEY

That is true. It is actually a step of maturity to find out if you are including these things in your prayer, because your prayers, as you grow in the faith, become less about you and more about God; and as we see in this Sermon on the Mount, we have Jesus giving us things to say about prayer and how it can challenge us; and in the next segment, as we wrap up, we want to look at that; so, stay tuned.

Segment 3

SCOTT HOEZEE

You are listening to *Groundwork*, where we are digging into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Scott Hoezee.

DARRELL DELANEY

And I am Darrell Delaney.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So far in this program, Darrell, from the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 6, we have looked at Jesus' warnings about kind of false, hypocritical kinds of prayers—prayers that are just for public show; and we have looked at the Lord's Prayer, the classic prayer Jesus taught us. Now, we are going to jump into Chapter 7, the final chapter of the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew, and hear some additional words that Jesus has to say.

DARRELL DELANEY

Starting at verse 7, it says; "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. ⁸For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened. ⁹Which of you, if your son asks for bread, will give him a stone? ¹⁰Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? ¹¹If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him! ¹²So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets."

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, we are familiar with these words, but we are not always sure how to understand them—how to parse them, because it ends up looking like a blank check, like every time you ask you are going to get it. Knock on the door, it always opens; seek, you will always find; but as even the great writer C. S. Lewis wrote after his wife died, when he was really feeling such great grief, he said he knocked on God's door in prayer a lot, but not only did the door not open, it sounded like he could hear the bolting and double bolting of the locks on the other side. So, we all know that if we take Jesus' words about ask, seek and knock to be like a blank check, we are going to end up in a world of hurt.

DARRELL DELANEY

I think that because our motives are not always aligned with God, when we hear *ask, seek, knock* sometimes we feel like we get super powers. Well, I am going to ask for anything. We are going to rub the lamp, we are going to get whatever we wish for; and that is not what scripture teaches, because God has a will; and if we are praying according to his will, 1 John Chapter 5 says: If we pray according to his will, he hears us. And when he hears us, we know we have what we ask, and it is because we have to align it...even ask him: Is this according to your will for me to have? Is this according to your will for me to ask for? And that actually is something that can help align us; and if we don't do that, we could be in a world of disappointment.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Or we could hurt others. Yes, there are possibilities, you know, where we pray for the wrong thing; or we have all prayed for things that later we are glad we didn't get.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

It's like, oh, man; if God had given me that...oh, no! So, that happens; but we want to be very careful that we don't say to somebody: Well, I prayed that my spouse would recover from cancer, and she did. You prayed for your spouse and he died...huh, there must have been something wrong with your prayer. You know, if you just had more faith—if you had really asked, knocked, sought—God would have saved your spouse, too. We don't want to say that because we don't know that; we cannot know that. So, it is not a blank check such that if you don't get what you asked for, it is because you asked wrong or you are weak in your faith: Nope! Jesus didn't get what he asked for in the Garden of Gethsemane; the Apostle Paul didn't get the thorn in the flesh removed...

DARRELL DELANEY

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

We have all known saints and wonderful people who didn't always get what they prayed for. So, then the question becomes, Darrell, if it is not a blank check, Jesus sure made it *sound* like a blank check. Why would he do that?

DARRELL DELANEY

Well, I believe that he does that because he is trying to encourage us to participate by asking, by seeking, by knocking. Hey, you got a measure of faith, why don't you put it into practice by asking?

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DARRELL DELANEY

Because he also says: If you actually hear my words and put them into practice, you are like a wise person who builds your house on the rock. So, you have to not just hear it, but do something with it. So, he is calling us to participate—he is calling us to use it.

SCOTT HOEZEE

You know, there is a parable in Luke's gospel, the persistent widow, where this woman kept bothering a judge until he finally gave in; but what is interesting is, Jesus closed that little parable by saying: When the Son of Man returns, will he find faith on the earth? Which seemed to be Jesus' way of saying are people going to keep praying? Because that, I think, is the main message about... The writer Frederick Buechner said this years ago: The bottom line of almost everything Jesus says about prayer in the New Testament is this: Keep at it.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Keep at it; keep praying. So, yes; Jesus is very strong here: Ask, seek, knock; but he is encouraging a robust faith. Keep praying. If you don't get what you prayed for, it is not because God didn't hear you; it is not because God doesn't love you; it is not because God doesn't want to come through for you. The main thing is to keep the relationship going with your Father in heaven. Keep praying.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, I love how you just put the "ings" on the end of that, because in the Greek it is the present continuous, which means you are supposed to keep asking and you are supposed to keep on seeking and you are supposed to keep on knocking; if you do that, then you can continue to keep the avenue of communication to God open. That is what it is. Keep the line open...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DARRELL DELANEY

Keep...stay on the line with God, because God is going to keep his faithful part by allowing you to have a way to contact him and communicate with him. We are the ones who need to keep up our end of the bargain; and it isn't about striving, and it isn't about our efforts; like I said earlier, it is not about how pious you look, it is about our hearts; but the communication with God needs to stay open, not just when we need things, but when we want to talk to God, we want to listen to God. That is what prayer is for.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And then Jesus includes a little...is it a parable...an analogy? Jesus says: Look, if you are a father...if you are any kind of *good* father anyway, and your kid asks for bread, you don't toss him a stone...

DARRELL DELANEY

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

If he asks for a fish, you don't give him a snake; only an abusive, terrible parent...and there might be parents who do that...but, no; that is not how a parent treats... And that is who God is to you, you know; if you would never, if you could help it, do anything but give your child what he asks for, especially when it is as basic as something to eat, what do you think God's posture toward you is? It is even *more* loving, Jesus says; it is even *more* desirous to hear from you. So again, keep praying. Your Father loves you; your Father hears you; just keep on praying.

Then there is this odd little addition to the Golden Rule, there: Do unto others as you would have them do unto you. I am not quite sure where that came from in this context. It doesn't seem to have anything to do with prayer; but maybe it does in this sense, Darrell. Again, all of what Jesus says in Matthew 6 and 7 on prayer, that it is all about a relationship; and when you have a relationship with your Father in heaven, you communicate and you keep the lines of communication open.

DARRELL DELANEY

Not only do you keep it open with him, you keep it open with one another, because the law and the prophets...the greatest commandments are loving God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength, and loving your neighbor as yourself. So, both the law and the prophets hinge on that...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DARRELL DELANEY

Both the law and the prophets hinge on this, because we are to have a relationship with God, and the fact that God loves us and he wants us to hear from him, and then we share that with one another is one of the reasons why many Christians have said: Let us pray. Thanks be to God.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Thanks for listening and digging deeply into scripture with *Groundwork*. We are your hosts, Scott Hoezee and Darrell Delaney. Join us again next time as we continue studying the Sermon on the Mount with Jesus' teachings about treasure and worry.

Connect with us at our website, groundworkonline.com; and when you are there, share what *Groundwork* means to you and make some suggestions for future *Groundwork* programs.

DARRELL DELANEY

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