

Kip Hamby

“Your Bible: Why Not Use It” / “Use the Bible to Shape Your Praying”

Christ Community Church (3/18/18)

Good morning! Let me add to your welcome here at Christ Community Church. If you are new, my name is Kip Hamby, and I’m the Upward Sports Director here. To give you a quick report, we just finished an amazing basketball season three weekends ago, and are so grateful for God’s good work. We had over 500 participants, and nearly 200 incredible coaches and refs and game day volunteers who worked faithfully to “promote the discovery of Jesus through sports”. Of these 500 players, only 55 attend church here at Christ Community, so 89% of what Upward Sports is doing is an outreach to families in the community. Please keep praying for us that we will hear clearly from God on how to make the most of this incredible opportunity.

Today is the next-to-last message in our current series, **“Your Bible: Why Not Use It.”** Kyle did a great job of sharing last week on using our Bible to discern right from wrong, and next week David will be back and will wonderfully wrap up the series. Today we will focus on how to use the Bible to shape our praying. I hope you’ve been encouraged by all the ways that God’s Word can be practically used in our lives. I also hope that your heart has been warming up to the beautiful truth that God did not design us to live self-sufficient lives, but to live in humble, joyful dependence upon Him and his revealed Word.

I have a question for you this morning. Have you ever enrolled in a school or class, and not seen it through? Maybe you signed up in college for a foreign language class and dropped it after seeing your first test score, or you got frustrated with golf or piano lessons and threw in the towel. But I know there is one class that all of you finished, even though it was incredibly difficult. And it’s probably a class that you have completely forgotten about.

Learning to talk.

The School of Language Acquisition 101 is amazingly important, isn’t it? And no doubt it is amazingly complex for a non-speaker, or beginner! Yet a young child is motivated to push through the walls of ignorance and repeated failure, all for the goal of being able to communicate with their world. To be able to speak to their mother and father, and peers. Kind of like Bambi (video clip).

I shared the video in part to let you in on a painful period of my life. During my seventh-grade football season in Texas, because of my last name being Hamby--I was given the nickname Bambi. Hardly the vicious nickname you want to have as a Texas football player: Bone-cruncher, Hulk, the Assassin, Bambi...

Wimpy deer and years of counseling put aside--I believe prayer—speaking and listening to God--is designed to be like this. God desires that we learn how to communicate with him in natural, authentic, and joy-producing ways. As new Christians, we often begin praying with a great deal

of enthusiasm. We delight in learning new words and phrases, and experiencing our first answered prayers. But often, somewhere along the way, we find the schooling more difficult. More time and effort is needed, perseverance is required. And we drop out. We decide that we're not going to go on any further. Over time we begin to associate prayer with guilt and failure, and it becomes an occasional duty at best. As author O. Hallesby put it in his contemporary classic, *Prayer*, "so few of us become sanctified and skilled practitioners because we do not continue in the school of prayer."¹

But let's take a quick time out. If you are God's son or daughter and you're feeling condemned about prayer, know that God is not angry with you. He wants to connect with you, that's what prayer is all about. To not pray to your loving Creator, your heavenly Father, is like not speaking to your earthly family. Ask God and perhaps a mature believer to help you understand your disconnect. I can't imagine too many things more important than that.

If this is you, I want to invite you back to class. Or if you're brand new to the idea of prayer, I want to invite you as well. No matter your age or experience, the benefits of becoming a man or woman of prayer are well worth the effort!

So who's teaching? Who's the prof? If you had to learn about prayer from just one person, to whom would you turn? Of course, the answer is easy, isn't it? "Jesus!" Turn with me to Luke chapter 11, and we will focus our attention on what I believe to be the most helpful passage in all the Scriptures as to how we should pray. (**read Luke 11:1-13**)

The first principle I want us to see about praying biblically is that Biblical prayer inspires others. Look carefully at verse 1: **Now Jesus was praying in a certain place, and when he finished, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples."** First of all, note that Jesus was not interrupted by the disciple. It would be like asking Michelangelo to leave painting the Sistine Chapel to help you change the oil in your car! Imagine what it must have been like to listen to Jesus praying! His passion, his intimate relationship with the Father, his focus on others as he interceded for them with unique insight and confident expectation. Sometimes prayer is more caught than taught. The picture I get as I read this account is that this disciple was saying, "I want some of that!" It was compelling!

And I'm pretty confident that I'm right on this one, as the disciple asks Jesus to teach them how to pray. What a great request! I think this is a request that Jesus still loves to answer!

Leonard Ravenhill did open-air preaching in England during World War II when the bombs were dropping, and became a well-known revival preacher and author. Back in the 1980's our East Texas church invited him to speak one Sunday morning and evening, but what I remember most was his opening prayer. He had prayed for all of 10 seconds before the tears were rolling down my cheeks. It was evident that this man knew a holy God, and knew him intimately. I could have walked out of the service after only hearing his prayer, and been spiritually fed for a week.

If Leonard Ravenhill had that kind of effect on me as I listened to him pray, fellow sinner that he was, what must it have been like for the 12 disciples to hear Jesus pray for over three years?

Biblical prayer inspires and compels others. But how about you? Are your prayers inspiring your spouse or children to grow in prayer, to get to know God more intimately? Grandparents, when you pray for your grandkids, do they fidget and play, or do they listen and feel their souls warmed? Students, are your prayers marked with passion, or a predictable list of casual requests that leave the world unchanged? May God help us all—and He will!

If we would use the Bible to shape our praying, we will also discover that biblical prayer follows a model. Look at the first half of verse 2: **And he said to them, “When you pray, say:** Jesus is telling his disciples to use these specific words when they pray, He is being quite literal. “When you pray, say these words I’m about to tell you.” It’s helpful to know that John the Baptist and Jewish rabbis taught their disciples distinct prayers that gave their community a sense of shared identity.² The Lord’s prayer was a distinctly Christian prayer.

In contrast, in Matthew’s version of the Lord’s Prayer³, Jesus instructed his listeners to “pray then *like this*”, which has more the idea of a pattern or example. It’s like Jesus is saying, “If you pray in these general categories, you will be doing well.” I think it’s fair to say given these two examples that the Lord’s Prayer is meant to be a model for us in how we pray as Christ followers.

The other thing that is important to note is that all the pronouns in Luke 11 are plural: “us” is used, not “me”, “our” is used, not “my”. In other words, the Lord’s Prayer is to be prayed with others, it was designed by Jesus to be a corporate prayer. Some of us would think of this as liturgy, of praying together as a body. It’s not that we can’t pray the Lord’s prayer by ourselves, but Jesus’ primary goal was to help his followers identify and connect with one another in prayer and intercession by sharing a specific prayer together. That can feel really counter-cultural for us if we’re highly individualistic in our approach to the spiritual disciplines and the Christian life.

Jesus begins his prayer with **“Father, hallowed be your name.”** Referring to God as Father has some Old Testament precedent, but Jesus opened up this idea in a fresh new way. Some Jews in Jesus day, for example, used “Father” in prayer, but usually added the phrase “in heaven” or something similar, which tended to emphasize their distance from God.⁴ Jesus however is presenting God not as distant and unapproachable, but as a caring father figure. But this term of intimacy does not negate respect. Believers are to **hallow**, or keep holy, God’s name and reputation. He is loving and near, but he is also set apart and uncommon, and reverence is due him. Acknowledging God’s holiness is a form of praise, which is always fitting for us as we enter the presence of the Most High King. As the psalmist put it in Ps. 100:4: “Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise!”

Jesus continues. Every king has a kingdom, so Jesus tell us to pray **“your kingdom come”**. This has a two-fold meaning. First of all, we are to actively seek God’s kingdom “now” as we live

missionally, or as we say it here at Christ Community: “connecting people to life-defining relationships in Christ.” But there is a “not yet” sense of this petition as well. We are to pray for the consummation of the kingdom of God that takes place when Jesus returns. I need to pray more for that--Maranatha!

Jesus then instructs his disciples to pray “**give us each day our daily bread**”. Our heavenly Father desires that his children *daily* depend upon him and trust him. The average person in Jesus time often did live day to day or meal to meal with regards to food. But even in our abundant Western lifestyle complete with refrigerators, freezers, and fast food restaurants, Jesus tells us to ask him for what we need. We are not to assume that our food is a given, or that we provide it for ourselves. And don’t miss another point inherent in this request: Jesus, who is fully God, fully man, understands how we are made. It’s okay and good to ask our Father to meet our basic, physical needs. He doesn’t just care about the spiritual. The apostle John captured this truth well in 3 Jn. 2 when he prayed for his friend Gaius: “Dear friend, I pray that you may enjoy good health and that all may go well with you, even as your soul is getting along well.”

Jesus next request for his disciples to pray together is “**forgive us our sins**.” This is not a reference to God forgiving us of our sins at our moment of salvation, but the idea of God forgiving us on a regular basis as we live imperfectly and daily confess our sins to him. Jesus connects this request to “**for we ourselves forgive everyone who is indebted to us**”. This does not mean that we earn forgiveness by forgiving others, since forgiveness is a gift of grace that God extends to those who trust in Him. Instead, Jesus is pointing out that which is fitting and should be expected: if a holy God forgives us our sins, it is only right that we would extend the same grace to others and forgive them.

Jesus concludes our model prayer with the oft-misunderstood request, “**Lead us not into temptation**”. We know from James 1:13⁵ that God does not tempt us, so what is Jesus saying here? This is a statement of our desperate need for God to protect us spiritually. Just as we need God to meet our basic physical needs, we need his help to “keep us out of the arena” of temptation. Praying this prayer indicates that we understand our own great weakness, and that left alone to ourselves and our sin nature, we will consistently choose the path to sin. We need our strong Father’s help to avoid temptation, and when He does allow it to come our way, we need his help to quickly flee from it.

If you would use the Bible to shape your praying, use this prayer that Jesus taught us. Pray it literally, word for word; at other times use it as an outline to guide your requests. Pray it alone sometimes, that’s good; but pray it aloud with others more and more.

But Jesus has another important lesson for us in his school of prayer. He tells us in verses 5-10 that Biblical prayer is shamelessly persistent.

Jesus tells a parable that makes more sense if we understand a couple of cultural differences. First of all, in Jesus’ day hospitality was a really big deal. To not have food on hand to feed your

guest was socially unacceptable no matter what the hour. Also, many homes in that day were one room homes. In our day of HGTV we would call them tiny houses, back then they were just called houses. Everyone would share the same bed, kids and all, so to roll out of bed and tend to someone's need could indeed wake up the whole family.

Having explained that, let's look again at the point of the story in verse 8. Jesus said **"I tell you, though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, yet because of his impudence he will rise and give him whatever he needs."** The word "impudence" in the ESV literally means "shamelessness", and carries with it the idea of cocky boldness, of putting someone out. The man gets what he needs not because of his friendship, but because of his shameless and bold request, even to the point of being willing to awaken his neighbor and his entire family. Biblical prayer has nerve!

Imagine that you are at a restaurant and you don't get your food served when everyone else does. If you're the kind of person who says nothing, or says very little about it to the wait staff, then there's a good chance that you are going to go hungry. Your fear of putting them out—and not being assertive and bold—will cause you to not receive all that you had hoped for.

There's a lesson here for all of us when it comes to prayer. Be reverent when coming to God with your request, but don't be timid. Be bold! Wrestle with God in prayer, let him do his needed work in your heart. Walter Wink describes prayer "more like haggling in an oriental bazaar than our polite monologues"⁶. Prayer is not for the passive!

On top of boldness, there is also the idea of persistence here. Jesus says in verse 9 **"And I tell you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you."** All three verbs are continuous tense: we are to keep asking, keep seeking, and keep knocking. It may seem like God is sleeping and indifferent to our need, but it is in the persevering that we often discover how committed God is to his promises.

Friends, does this describe you in prayer? Commentator Leon Morris said it well: "The lesson is clear. We must not play at prayer, but must show persistence if we do not receive the answer immediately...If we do not want what we are asking for enough to be persistent, we do not want it very much. It is not such tepid prayer that is answered."⁷

Bible-shaped prayer is not just praying the right words, humble and reverent as they may be. It also brings with it an attitude, a confidence that causes us to pray shamelessly and persistently.

Then in verses 11-13 Jesus teaches us that Biblical prayer is based on the Father's goodness. Jesus makes a comparison between earthly fathers, and his heavenly Father. He asks, **"What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will instead of a fish give him a serpent, or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion?"** Of course, we know the answer: no father would do that!

Then Jesus drives home one of the most powerful statements on prayer in all of the Bible: **If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!**" This is called an argument from "lesser to greater". If we earthly fathers give good gifts to our kids, even though we are evil; how much more will our perfect, loving and all-wise heavenly Father give good gifts to those who ask! Lesser to greater!

It is interesting to note the difference in Matthew's (5) ending to this verse compared to Luke's. Matthew uses the phrase "**give good things to those who ask him!**" Luke, however, chose to use the more specific "**give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!**" It's not surprising, since Luke makes much of the Holy Spirit in both his gospel and in the book of Acts. But how is it significant?

All throughout this Lucan passage on prayer Jesus keeps bringing his disciples back to their complete dependence on him. And the same is true for us today. If we would live lives marked by approaching God with confidence, reverent worship, seeking God's kingdom, forgiving others, avoiding temptation, and praying boldly and persistently, we need the Holy Spirit's help. And God can give us no better gift than Himself! What proof of God's goodness! Since Jesus' ascension, the Holy Spirit in one very real sense has become our Perfect Gift. He alone can empower us to live lives pleasing to God.

And just as we are to pray each day for our physical bread, we are to pray daily as the church to be filled with the Holy Spirit, as Paul commanded in Ephesians 5:18.⁸ We like to ask the question here at Christ Community: is the Spirit flowing through me?⁹ Hopefully each of us would answer "yes"! If we daily ask our Father for Him, he will gladly fill us to overflow and in so doing communicate God's love to us. The Holy Spirit will be good on his promise to bring to our mind the Scriptures, and we will know his voice.

The Bible informs and shapes our praying when we follow it as a model, when we pray with shameless persistence, and when we are confident in our Father's goodness.

Let's close our time by looking at three possible applications for our prayer lives. Since we've been using the idea of the school of prayer, the three applications will form the acrostic GED.

First of all, learn to evaluate your prayer life in light of the **gospel**. The gospel tells us that there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ. Brothers and sisters, Satan would love nothing more than for us to feel defeated and condemned in our prayer lives. But the gospel tells us that Jesus was perfect for us, including perfect in prayer, and that his right record is credited to our account when we place our trust in Christ. Growing in prayer is not about you simply trying harder in our own strength, nor is it about gaining God's approval. But it is about a growing gratitude in our lives for what Christ has done for us, and that motivates us to want to grow in our relationship with him. It makes us want to say again and again, "Lord, teach us to pray."

Secondly, hone in on the **examples** of other men and women who prayed in the Scriptures, or who pray the Scriptures. John White wrote an excellent book on this topic called “Daring to Draw Near.”¹⁰ He wrote about Hannah longing tearfully for a son, David confessing his sin with Bathsheba, and Paul’s prayers for the churches, among others. In addition to the narratives and epistles, use the Psalms to learn how to pray. After all, that’s what they are—the recorded prayers of God’s people that were set to music. In Eugene Peterson’s introduction to the Psalms in *The Message*, he wrote of how we find in the psalms “honest, elemental, rough language—not cultured or genteel.” He talked about prayer being an opportunity to “get things out in the open.” Wherever you are at in life, you can find a psalm that will express your heart and give words to your aching, longing, or joy. Pray the Scriptures!

As you seek out examples to follow, also look among the living! Perhaps you have noticed that someone in your Connection Group, Trek or Yada, or youth group is well advanced in the School of Prayer. Listen in on their prayers. Sit down with them over a cup of coffee or pop and use it as a tutoring session. They probably have some great counsel and resources to pass on to you.

Thirdly, make sure your quiet time with the Lord is a **dialogue**, not a monologue. Part of the joy that parents experience when their children begin to speak is that they can have conversation, they can fully connect. In the same way, converse with God. Let God speak to you from the Scriptures, listen intently to him. Some of you are much more advanced than I am in this area, I need to learn from you. Listen well by rightly interpreting the Scriptures, then respond in prayer, and talk to him about what he has shared with you. Ask him to help you know how to apply the passage to your life, or how to pray it for others. This will help you avoid ruts and stagnancy in prayer, since another person is actively involved. And keep the dialogue going! We need set aside alone times with the Lord, just like with good friends; but we also need to abide in prayer, to be listening and breathing out short prayers throughout our day. **G-E-D**: gospel, examples, and dialogue.

So would you join me today in the school of prayer? With the Bible as our primary textbook? It’s a class that we never graduate from, but if we stay enrolled it will become a source of great joy for us and others that God has placed in our sphere of influence. If you do enroll and continue on, I trust that this quote from O. Hallesby will one day be true of your life: “The longer you live a life of this kind [a life of prayer], the more answers to prayer you will experience. As white snowflakes fall quietly and thickly on a winter day, answers to prayer will settle down upon you at every step you take, even to your dying day. The story of your life will be the story of prayer and answers to prayer.”¹¹

Let’s pray: Lord’s prayer out-loud together...

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1. O. Hallesby, *Prayer* (Augsburg, 1931), 162.
 2. Darrell Bock, *The NIV Application Commentary, Luke* (Zondervan, 1996), 308
 3. Matthew 6:9, English Standard Version
 4. Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to Luke* (Inter-Varsity Press, 1974), 193

5. James 1:13: "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." (English Standard Version)
6. Walter Wink in John Ortberg, *The Life You've Always Wanted* (Zondervan, 1977), 95
7. Morris, *The Gospel According to Luke*, 195
8. Ephesians 5:18: "And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit" (English Standard Version). Both wine and the Holy Spirit have the ability to control a person!
9. "Is the Spirit flowing through me?" is one of our six "Life-Defining Measures"
10. John White, *Daring to Draw Near* (Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship, 1977)
11. Hallesby, *Prayer*, 173