

Teach Us to Pray

This article on Luke 11:1 is edited by John Lin from the Ligonier Ministries

One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he finished, one of his disciples said to him, “Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples.” Luke 11:1

When we ponder the life and ministry of Jesus, we should not lose sight of the awesome privilege His disciples enjoyed as first-hand witnesses of His person and power. Unlike us, they were able to see with their own eyes miracles like the changing of water into wine at Cana (John 2:1-12), the resurrection of Lazarus (John 11:1–44) and His resurrected body before He ascended into heaven (John 20 and 21).

However, when the disciples had the chance to ask Jesus to instruct them in a particular subject, they did not ask Him to tell them how to perform miracles. Rather, as today’s passage indicates, they asked Him to teach them how to pray (Luke 11:1). Jesus would routinely retire from the crowd and spend hours in prayer, because He was strengthened by communing with His Father (Luke 6:12). Evidently, His followers saw a direct link between Christ’s prayer life and His teaching, character, and power. They also discovered a similar connection between John the Baptist’s devotion to prayer and his ministry. Therefore, it is no surprise they asked for instruction in this area as sanctification and ministry are both empowered by prayer.

Besides today’s passage on the Lord’s Prayer, it is also important for us to examine Matthew 6:5-6 and look at Jesus’ instructions on public prayer. These verses are primarily concerned to warn us against hypocrisy in our devotion to God. Many in Jesus’ day loved to pray lengthy, elaborate prayers in public for the purposes of showing their devotion. This was unacceptable, not because public prayer is evil, but because their hearts did not match this practice.

God is not pleased with us when we pretend to be more committed to Him than we really are. He will reject any public prayer that is offered with the intent to put our own devotion on display.

Jesus emphasizes that prayer should reflect a certain private intimacy between the believer and God in Matthew 6:5–6. There is something so intimate about prayer that we should long to pray in private long before we do so in public. It is good to pray in public, but our prayers should always be genuine prayers before God Almighty. Refrain from praying in public if you are not communing with Him in private.