



**Sermon Series:** Lessons in Prayer from the Bible's Leading Characters

**Sermon 4:** Learning Prayer from the Master

**Date:** July 3, 2016

**Scripture:** Matthew 14:23, Luke 16:12-13, Matthew 26:36 and 39

### **MONDAY July 4, 2016 Mark 1:29-39**

As he worked miracles in His early ministry, Jesus was constantly surrounded by people who needed his help. He purposely rose "very early in the morning" to be alone with God, knowing that soon "everyone" would be looking for Him. He kept control of his schedule, so he could fulfill his mission throughout Galilee.

- If Jesus (God's son) needed to be alone with God, it must be vital for us, with our cell phones always going off! Consider how your talks with friends change when you are one-on-one. What benefits do you see in solitary worship compared to community worship? Do you pray alone? If so, how do your prayers change in that setting?
- One of the biggest struggles people report with personal prayer is keeping their minds from wandering. If this is your struggle, try writing out your prayer and reading it aloud. As you read it, open your heart and imagination to sense God's presence with you.

### **TUESDAY July 5, 2016 Mark 6:45-56**

We all have days that require us to step away and refocus. Jesus had them, too. He had just fed 5,000 people miraculously, and was about to walk out to the disciples on the Sea of Galilee and calm a storm. What did he do in between? He "went up on a mountainside to pray." Prayer seemed to be the most renewing "break" activity in Jesus' life.

- When are the best times for you to find a solitary place? Where are you most likely to remain undisturbed? Is there a time of day that you are most alert and focused? All of these questions can help make your time with God more fruitful. Intentionally consider these questions as you plan your alone time with God this week.
- Though this mountainside likely wasn't the place where Jesus usually prayed, when his inner and outer situation called for prayer, he found a place. How can you be ready for time with God when that moment suddenly appears during a hectic day? Try carrying a pocket New Testament with you, or downloading the Bible onto your phone.

### **WEDNESDAY July 6, 2016 Matthew 6:5-13**

Jesus clearly did not regard prayer as "magic," a matter of reciting the proper formula in order to get what we want. Quite the opposite—he said, "Your Father knows what you need before you ask him." So he didn't mean the Lord's Prayer as a fixed formula. It was, rather, a model of a simple, straightforward prayer, aligning us with God and God's purpose.

- Jesus spoke of pagans who "think they will be heard because of their many words." The prayer he taught was very short. On the other hand, the psalms we read last week were Hebrew poems, neither short nor simple. Can you offer God either a simple prayer or a more extensive or elaborate one, depending on your situation and your need? How do you respond to the idea that there is no one "right" way to pray?
- Pray the Lord's Prayer, phrase by phrase. Meditate on what each phrase tells you about God and what your inner response tells you about yourself.

### **THURSDAY July 7, 2016 Luke 11:1-13**

Clearly the disciples believed that something they valued about Jesus came from his praying. They wanted to learn from him, because they wanted to be more like him. Verses 9 and 10 seem to say that we'll receive anything we ask for in prayer. Verse 13 may offer one key to grasping Jesus' meaning: God will always give the Holy Spirit to anyone who asks

- Sadly, some earthly parents either neglect their children's needs, or actively give them things that are bad for them. The Bible often used the "How much more..." rhetorical device Jesus used in verse 13. It distinguished God's infinite love and generosity from our human frailty. In what ways did (or does) your earthly family reveal God's qualities? In what ways do you need God to be "more" for you than they were able to be?
- Take with you today a simple breath prayer that Jesus promised God will always answer. As you draw in breath, silently start the invitation: "Come to me..." As you exhale, finish the prayer: "Holy Spirit." Repeat at any point in the day where you need to.

### **FRIDAY July 8, 2016 Luke 18:9-14**

Luke said Jesus told this story "to some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everyone else." Plainly Jesus' main focus was on the Pharisee. As he learned to trust God's mercy, the tax collector could have prayed more confidently (see Hebrews 4:16: "Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence"). The Pharisee couldn't trust in God's mercy—it never crossed his mind that he needed any!

- Which of the two stances in this parable are you more often drawn to: looking down on everyone else, or coming to God with a deep sense of personal need for grace? How can God's love and grace help us maintain a healthy sense of spiritual need without sinking into a sense of contempt, either for others or for ourselves?
- An "examen" is a prayer for the end of the day to help us review the day through God's eyes. At the end of this day, talk to God about these two questions: when were you most aware of God today? When were you least aware of God today?

### **SATURDAY July 9, 2016 Mark 14:32-43**

This is Mark's account of Jesus' prayer struggle in Gethsemane. Rome meant for crucifixion to strike terror in the boldest human heart. Jesus shrank from the ordeal, asking God "Isn't there some other way?" But even before he said, "Not what I will, but what you will," there was a note of trust. Abba was an intimate Aramaic family word, one that conveyed the same trusting sense as our English words "daddy" or "papa."

- Jesus was in no cent and holy. Paul wrote that Jesus carried the spiritual burden of sin (alienation from God) in our place (2 Corinthians 5:21). So he shrank, not just from the physical pain of the cross, but from the spiritual ordeal he faced. What challenge are you facing that strikes a note of fear in your heart? Will you trust your heavenly abba, as Jesus did? Invite God's presence to be with you as you face this challenge.

**Family Activity Idea:** Write a prayer letter to God as a family. Begin with, "Dear God, Thank you for...", listing good things your family appreciates, and including praise to God. Continue with "We are sorry for...", and after listing those items, thank God for grace and forgiveness. Write "We pray for...", and list people in your family, church, neighborhood, or school. Pray for God's people all over the world. Share any real concerns or feelings with God that you wish. Have your children illustrate the prayer with pictures and symbols if they'd like. Read the finished prayer to God. End by saying "Amen" together. Post the prayer letter where all can see it. Encourage people to add to it as they wish. Review it regularly.