



Learning from the Master A Tutorial on Prayer from Jesus

Shawn Shannon, Retired Campus Minister, University of Mary Hardin-Baylor, Belton, TX

An apprentice is someone who intentionally and strategically learns from others whose knowledge, experience, skills, and practices are beyond theirs. If you are familiar with Spanish, you may know that “aprender” means “to learn.” This is the root meaning of “apprentice.” A disciple is a follower of a teacher or a leader, similar to an apprentice. A disciple of Jesus has entered into apprenticeship with Him where Jesus teaches them and they learn from Him.

Learning from others requires some sort of contact with someone who knows more than you do about something you wish or need to know, do, or be. This typically happens in two ways.

- Direct learning happens when you ask how someone does something; you hear their response; you try to follow their example.
- Indirect learning involves observing what someone does and then imitating the process or procedure they model.

If you are interested in learning to pray, you can learn from the Master Teacher by exploring how He taught about and practiced prayer. Fortunately, the gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John share many instances of Jesus teaching about and engaging in prayer.

The disciples had many opportunities to learn from Jesus. They witnessed Him teach crowds, heal a centurion’s servant and a bleeding woman, raise a widow’s son and a synagogue ruler’s daughter from the dead, respond to questions about His identity, forgive a sinful woman, proclaim the kingdom, expand the definition of family, calm a storm, free a demon-possessed man from bondage, have hard talks with His followers, mobilize others to go ahead of them, and predict His death (Luke 6:17-10:42). Who but Jesus had ever done such things? Who but Jesus could do them? Maybe you would like to be able to do raise the dead, calm a storm, heal diseases, deliver someone from demons. Yet no one asked Jesus to show them how to do these things.

However, when they observed Jesus praying, then they asked Him to show them how they could do what He was doing: “Lord, teach us to pray.” Jesus responded, “When you pray, say:

- Father, hallowed be your name.
- Your kingdom come.
- Give us each day our daily bread, and forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone who is indebted to us.
- And lead us not into temptation.” (Luke 11:1-4)

Matthew 6:9-13 also records what we have come to call the Lord’s Prayer. This prayer is a great starting place for the content and direction of our prayers. It contains six petitions, three that concern God (His name being regarded as holy, His Kingdom coming, His will being done), and three addressing the needs of the pray-ers



(give what is needed for this day, do not lead us into temptation, deliver us from evil). These six areas of prayer cover our basic needs and concerns.

Since disciples followed their Teacher's example as closely as possible, we can assume that the disciples memorized this prayer and prayed it from that time forward. Perhaps it guided their prayers during the rest of Jesus' earthly ministry, through the turbulence of the crucifixion and the resurrection and into the formative days of the young Church. We do well to learn it by heart, pray it often, and follow its pattern of requests related to God, ourselves, and others.

And there is more Jesus teaches and models related to prayer:

Jesus assumed that we will pray (Matthew 6:5: "When you pray..."). He directed us to pray (Luke 18:1: "...they ought always to pray and not lose heart.").

Jesus urged His hearers to pray persistently, to keep at it (Luke 18:1-8). He cautioned them not to pray in order to be seen by others, but to pray in hidden connection with the Father (Matthew 6:5-6). He encouraged them to trust the goodness and responsiveness of God (Luke 11:11-13).

Jesus modeled praying in solitude (alone in the early morning, Mark 1:35; in desolate places, Luke 5:16), and praying with crowds (blessing the food before serving thousands, Matthew 14:19 and 15:35, 36), and in places of great difficulty (from the cross, Matthew 27:45-50; Mark 15:33-37; Luke 23:32-47). He prayed for others (little children, Matthew 19:13, His disciples, John 17), and with others (in the garden of Gethsemane, Matthew 20:36-46, Mark 14:32-42, Luke 22:39-46). He prayed in multiple settings and situations.

If you are feeling the need or nudge toward prayer, assume that Jesus is drawing you to pray, and simply begin to pray! Emilie Griffin observed,

"There is a moment between intending to pray and actually praying that is as dark and silent as any moment in our lives. It is the split second between thinking about prayer and really praying. For some of us, this split second may last for decades."

"It seems, then, that the greatest obstacle to prayer is the simple matter of beginning, the simple exertion of the will, the starting, the acting, the doing. How easy it is, and yet—between us and the possibility of prayer there seems to be a great gulf fixed: an abyss of our own making that separates us from God." (Clinging: The Experience of Prayer)

Here are some possible next steps. Select one to practice this week.

- Ask Jesus to teach you to pray. Read one of the gospels, noticing how/when/where/what Jesus prays, and imitate His example.
- Jesus' prayer book was the Psalms. Read through the book of Psalms and underline 1) what speaks for you, and 2) what speaks to you. The point is to pray them, not primarily to read them.
- Write out your prayers. Start by addressing God in the manner that is natural for you. And write a prayer letter. This is for God's eyes only, so freely be open and honest.



Resources for Church and
Campus Collegiate Ministries

As a disciple/apprentice of Jesus, enjoy the closeness with God that grows from praying as He did.
Ask. Listen. Begin.

Resources:

Prayer: Finding the Heart's True Home, Richard J. Foster

A Guidebook to Prayer: Twenty-four Ways to Walk with God, MaryKate Morse

Search Lifeway.com for "How to Pray"