

Today, as we continue our FAITH ENGAGE series, I want us to consider the Christian discipline of prayer – our ongoing conversation with God. Let's begin by saying together that prayer that our Lord Jesus us to pray – we typically call it “The Lord's Prayer.” I'm thinking that most of you know it by memory in some form, but so we can all say it together, it will be on the screen. We find it in the Bible in its most complete version from Matthew 5, verses 9 to 14.

THE LORD'S PRAYER (Matthew 6:9-14)

Our Father who is in heaven, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors. And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever, Amen.

Now the other place that this prayer is taught is in Luke 11:1-13. And this is a passage that has always caught my attention. It is that place where one of Jesus' disciples sees Him praying and asks Him, “Lord, teach us to pray.” Jesus didn't initiate this teaching moment – the disciple did, showing that he was very much wanting to follow Jesus' example of prayer. It also showed the disciple's humility in admitting that prayer was a weakness in his own life, and he needed and wanted instruction. I identify with that unnamed disciple – Lord, teach me to pray. I want my prayer life to grow and be all that you would want it to be.

But then, I notice that the disciple's prayer was “teach US to pray.” And I further notice that as Jesus went on to teach them what we call “The Lord's Prayer,” many plural pronouns are used: “Our Father, who is in heaven” “give us this day our daily bread,” “forgive us our debts,” lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.” And I realize that Jesus is teaching about prayer together as a body – not just about individual prayer. Jesus wants us to learn to pray together as a body with more purpose and power.

Francis Chan is a noted Christian speaker and pastor from the Los Angeles area. And I want us to listen to his thoughts on prayer, in a 15 minute video. This is from a video series that your pastors Tyler and myself have been watching in our weekly meetings together. And we both felt this one on prayer was particularly powerful. Hopefully, this will stimulate your thoughts along the lines of how we can pray more purposefully and powerfully as a church body.

VIDEO SHOWN Here are most of Francis Chan's comments from the video:

Have you ever prayed and then experienced an undeniably supernatural response? Where you go, “Okay, I know someone up there heard me, because that couldn't have been coincidence.” Have you ever done that? You've just prayed for something so specific, and the answer blows your mind, and there's no one that can tell you that no one was listening,

because you saw it, you experienced it. And once you experience that, there's nothing like it in life. It's an amazing feeling. You understand why that early church devoted themselves to prayer.

If you're given a mission that really is impossible ... I mean, you're telling this small group of people .. Jesus commands this small group of people, "I want you to get this message to the ends of the earth." They have to be looking at each other, going, "How in the world do we do that? Okay, God, you're going to have to do this for us." And so they devoted themselves to prayer.

When I look at the way they prayed, I see it as pretty different from the way I was taught to pray. Don't just go and start talking. Come silently, Come slowly. Be careful." And see, these are the things that no one ever told me. They didn't say, "Hey, be careful what you say to God. Don't make all these empty promises." And yet, you have in Ecclesiastes 5 saying, "You better be careful what you say, otherwise God will destroy the work of your hands if you make these promises you don't keep."

As I studied Scripture more and more, I realized very few people taught me how to pray in church, and very few people warned me, and they didn't even explain to me that God doesn't always listen. As I look at the way the disciples prayed back then, and as I look at the way Jesus taught us to pray, I realize it's a lot different from what I was taught. Prayer to them was really different. They asked for things that were different from what I typically asked for. And so the last few years have been a process of really just understanding prayer again.

The Lord's Prayer was just this thing we memorized, and we said it, and no one knew what we were talking about, and I think, I still don't know what those words mean. Is that really what God intended? We have to check ourselves, and go, "Am I concerned about the things of God?" Because so often when we pray, it's just about ourselves. I've made a lot of mistakes in prayer.

What if you got together with a group of people, and you knew that this group of people ... they all loved God, they all feared Him, and they really were living for God's kingdom and for His mission. And imagine if you came collectively with people that you've sacrificed with, you've sacrificed for. This is a family, and you come united and you all pray together and say, "Our Father ... You've seen our lives. You know that we care about Your kingdom. We want Your kingdom here. We want You to change us. We want You to change the people around us." Can you imagine praying with that type of unity?"

See, when we pray like that, and we really mean it, I really believe that's when we'll see the supernatural, just like the apostles did. And when we see those types of answers, prayer will no longer be a ritual, or a time of transition, a way to end a service, or a way to bless a meal. But it will be a way of life. It will be something we're committed to. Because we love to see God work, and therefore, we're going to love to pray. **END OF VIDEO**

In the Luke 11 passage, after teaching them "The Lord's Prayer," He goes on to teach them two important lessons about prayer.

Luke 11: 5-13 Then he said to them, "Suppose one of you has a friend, and he goes to him at midnight and says, 'Friend, lend me three loaves of bread, because a friend of mine on a journey has come to me, and I have nothing to set before him.' "Then the one inside answers, 'Don't bother me. The door is already locked, and my children are with me in bed. I can't get up and give you anything.' I tell you, though he will not get up and give him the bread because he is his friend, yet because of the man's boldness he will get up and give him as much as he needs.

“So I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened. “Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!”

The first of these two lessons is taught in a story that begins with “suppose ...” This is to get us to think. And He tells a rather humorous and somewhat unlikely story about a man who at midnight becomes desperate for bread to give his guests. And because of his bold persistence, he finally gets what he wants from his sleepy friend. Certainly Jesus is not suggesting that this is how we are to beg God for our needs. But it gets the point across that if a friend will get up to give bread at midnight to a persistent asker, how much more will our gracious Heavenly Father give freely what is needed to His beloved children.

The second of the two lessons is taught by using examples of an earthly father and his son. A good father would never give an evil gift to his son, like a snake or scorpion, even if the son asked for it. Rather, a good father would only give good gifts to his son. We are to learn that the same in greater measure is true of our Heavenly Father. He will only give us those gifts that are good for us.

What two great lessons about prayer to learn! (1) That God freely wants to give to us in our need. And (2) that no matter what we ask of Him, He will only give us good gifts that will benefit us. God wants to give to His children!

This glorious truth takes us to another fascinating passage about prayer – the Upper Room Discourse in John, particularly chapters 15 and 16. Hear the following:

John 15:7 If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.

John 15:16 You did not choose Me but I chose you, and appointed you that you would go and bear fruit, and that your fruit would remain, so that whatever you ask of the Father in My name He may give to you.

John 16:23-24 Truly, truly, I say to you, if you ask the Father for anything in My name, He will give it to you. Until now you have asked for nothing in My name; ask and you will receive, so that your joy may be made full.

The key to this amazing revelation is that we are to ask in the name of Jesus. It is these passages that have caused many Christians to faithfully conclude their prayers with “in Jesus’ name.” As Francis Chan pointed out in the video, these words were never meant to be a “magic” phrase that was tacked on to the end of our prayer to assure conformity with God’s will and assurance that our prayer would be answered. Rather, it is meant to convey that we are to ask in prayer knowing as best as we can that we are asking what Jesus Himself would want for us.

TAKE NOTE! - God wants to answer our prayers. But He wants us to learn to pray those things that Jesus cares about. This is what will bring both answers and supernatural power to our prayers as we pray together.

Couple this truth with another great passage on prayer, found in 1 John 5:13-14 (my favorite Biblical passage on prayer):

1 John 5:14-15 This is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests which we have asked from Him.

Let's summarize what we've learned:

God has taught us a model prayer that is about how we are to prayer TOGETHER
God wants to give us what we truly need, and will only give GOOD GIFTS
God want us to learn to pray for what Jesus would pray – “IN HIS NAME”
God promises to both hear and answer when we ask ACCORDING TO HIS WILL

So as we pray together - what are some of the GOOD GIFTS that we know GOD WANTS TO GIVE that are ACCORDING TO HIS WILL?

A few Biblical prayers might give us a good understanding:

Ephesians 3:14 For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; and that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God.

Colossians 1:9-12 ...we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might, for the attaining of all steadfastness and patience, joyously giving thanks to the Father...

Other prayers for our church body that are certainly God's will:

- ✓ That husbands and wives better love one another and submit to one another
- ✓ That families draw closer together in love and respect, with children honoring their parents and parents nurturing their children in the Lord
- ✓ That each love one another as we grow in forgiveness, encouragement and service
- ✓ That we become a soul-winning church, growing in our zeal for sharing the gospel

Now let's close sharing and praying other such prayer – asking that the supernatural power of God come upon us as we in unity call upon His name!