
VIDEO LECTURE MODULE: THE LORD'S PRAYER

LECTURE 1: INTRODUCTION: BIBLICAL FOUNDATION AND COURSE OUTLINE

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The John Knox Institute
of Higher Education

Entrusting our Reformed Inheritance to the Church Worldwide

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Module

THE LORD'S PRAYER

Dr. Gerald R. Procee

Presented in 14 Lectures called
THE BEAUTY OF PRAYER

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Lecture 1

INTRODUCTION: BIBLICAL FOUNDATION AND COURSE OUTLINE

Welcome to the series on the beauty of prayer. We wish in 14 lectures to meditate upon various aspects of prayer. We hope this will be a blessing to you, and we welcome you to follow along. In this first lecture, we wish to view an introduction and consider the biblical foundation of prayer. We also wish to give an outline of the following lectures.

Prayer, that is a most glorious and a most blessed, tender topic. It's a most thrilling matter because in prayer you speak to God, and God invites you even to speak to Him. God is in Heaven, and yet He can be so close to a person. The Bible teaches us that there is a living communion possible between the Almighty, Everlasting God and a weak human being, and that takes place in the way of prayer. That's such a miracle that the everlasting God Who dwells in inaccessible light and has all power in Heaven and upon earth—He is holy. He's majestic. He is all-powerful, glorious. He does not need anybody.—He is yet willing to enter into a living communion with corrupt mortal man.

Who of us has access to a king? Who of us can speak to a president? But, it is possible for us to speak to the King of kings and the Lord of lords, and this is a miracle, a rich privilege. It is grace. Because who are we? We are fallen creatures. We rebelled against God in Paradise. We have sinned against God by transgressing all of God's commandments, and therefore men deserve to be cast away forever into outer darkness. Yet, we see the miracle of God's grace as John tells us in chapter three verse 16 of his gospel, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

"Everlasting life", what does that actually mean? That means that you know God, that you love Him, that you live with Him, and everlasting life starts here already on earth. Here, in this life, people learn to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. God's Holy Spirit fills them, and they start to live for and with the Lord Jesus. They walk in a new and godly life with the Lord. In this life, a person experiences peace of mind.

Then, a person is delivered from worries. He can rest upon the Almighty Arm of his Beloved. He rests upon God Almighty. God has become his Shepherd, and he will have no wants. That person may rest and trust in the loving care of God. He is purchased by the Lord Jesus Christ by His blood. He is indwelt by the Holy Spirit. Heaven is his home. And now on earth, he is called to listen to the Word of God and to be led by that Word and by God's Holy Spirit. And he is called to live in a life of communion with God; that is a life of prayer.

But, too often, also God's children are tempted to neglect this personal prayer. Then, they can be too much focused upon this life and upon the difficulties of this life. At times, also, God's children, they can resemble a caterpillar who crawls over the dust of the earth, while they're called to be like a butterfly that flies up into the

sky and rejoices in the sunlight and in the beauty of nature. So, a child of God is called to fly up unto the Lord in prayer and to realize and enjoy the beauty that God has and that God gives. It is sheer grace that we may call upon God. It's a miracle that's recorded by Isaiah 57 verse 15, that the Lord God dwells in the high places, and yet He looks down upon the poor and the needy ones who tremble at His Word.

In prayer, a weak human being may be connected to the Almighty and great, glorious God. A personal relationship is experienced through the working of His Holy Spirit. So, when God's Spirit leads us in a life of communion with the Lord, He teaches us various lessons. One of the first lessons God's Spirit teaches a sinner is to have deep awe and reverence for the Lord. Then, that person receives an impression of the glory and majesty of God, and one sees that God must receive glory, and praise, and adoration. At the same time, the Holy Spirit Who has enlightened the eyes causes that person to see himself as a weak, sinful human being. He is full of corruption. Then, this corrupt sinner bows in adoration for this great God Who is so highly exalted. Then, one begs to be cleansed and washed in the blood of Christ, and even more to be led by God's Holy Spirit in a life of dedication and devotion to this good-doing, glorious God.

Then, it is experienced what King Solomon prayed in First Kings eight verse 23, "LORD, God of Israel, there is no God like thee, in Heaven above, or on earth beneath, who keepest covenant and mercy with thy servants that walk before thee with all their heart." Then, a person learns to adore God for Who God is, not even so much for what God gives, but for Who He is.

Adoration, that is the highest form of prayer. It will come to full fruition in glory in Heaven. There, the Lord will receive all praise and adoration. Now on earth, prayer, supplications, those form the key to unlock the storehouse of God, because God can give so much more than we expect. He can work miracles. Strength can be renewed. Tears can be wiped away. In prayer, battles are fought and won. Struggles take place, and the way of the Lord is clearly seen. By means of prayer, people receive wisdom and know what to do in the midst of difficult questions and issues of daily life. It's through prayer that you receive light upon a certain path in life you have to go through. It's through prayer that you receive love and joy in the Lord, and a well-grounded hope.

So, the foremost task of a child of God in this life is to pray. Prayer is the occupation of a Christian. That's what the German reformer, Martin Luther, taught, that just like a cobbler mends shoes and just like a tailor fixes clothes, so a Christian prays. It is his trade. The Lord renews sinners that they become as prophets, kings, and priests. A child of God becomes as a king because he bravely fights against the Devil and sin, and hereafter shall reign with Christ in glory. God's children also become prophets in the sense that they understand God's Word, and proclaim God's Word, and are witnesses of the Lord Jesus. They become priests because they give themselves as a living sacrifice to the Lord, and their whole life is devoted to the Lord, and they give themselves to prayer.

So, we can say the life of a Christian is characterized by prayer. Without true prayer, there is no spiritual life. A formal prayer of some words thoughtlessly recited, that's not really prayer. When prayer is only formal, or when prayer is completely lacking, this betrays the absence of spiritual life. When there are no yearnings after the Lord and no longings for God's grace, and when thirsting for the Lord is absent, and one does not feel a need for confession of sin and [has] no desire to adore and worship God, then you may conclude that such a person is not a Christian, and that is shown by his lack of prayer.

In Scripture, we find that God's children were men and women of prayer. We read about Abraham, how he prayed, how Job prayed for his friends, how Moses interceded for the people, and many more examples can be given. The early church engaged in prayer. When Peter was locked up in prison, the church at Jerusalem was continually in prayer for him. We see of Isaac that he went out into the fields to pray. Daniel prayed three times a day with open windows in the direction of Jerusalem. David would arise in the middle of the night to worship the Lord. Paul and Silas would worship and praise the Lord even while they were in prison with their backs all bloodied by the terrible scourgings they had gone through.

Even the Lord Jesus was characterized by prayer, while He had no sin to confess, while He had all power. He could command the evil spirits. He commanded the wind and the waves, and they obeyed him. He could deliver people from all their sicknesses. He was all-powerful, and yet He needed prayer. He needed to withdraw Himself from the sinful atmosphere of this world and to seek communion with His Father in prayer. So, you read several times in the gospels, and we hope to see them later on in these lectures, how the Lord Jesus went alone to pray.

The most eminent people of God were, above all, men and women of prayer. It is in prayer that one experiences his own weakness. When one is alone before God and pours out his heart unto the Lord, then he becomes aware that he needs God to help him. In prayer, a sinner is uncovered to his own misery, and that misery is that we by nature have lost contact with God. We love ourselves instead of God. That's our misery, and that's what the Lord uncovers [to] you.

In your personal prayer, you start to see who you really are, and so you humble yourself. You abhor your sinful inclinations. You moan about your personal sins. You don't do that so much in front of people, but you do that especially in front of God. In that way, communion with the Lord is nurtured, and the love of God is poured out into the heart, and the blood of Christ is shown to be effective to facilitate a living communion with God.

It is in that posture of personal prayer that one learns to rejoice in God. There's a deep-felt love to God that flows from the heart. That's how God's Spirit teaches us. Then, that place where you pray becomes a sacred spot. Where you are alone with God becomes a precious place for you. It is there that the flood gates of Heaven are opened and that the Lord comes down, and you learn to rejoice in the saving grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is there that you anticipate the future glorious life with God. There you realize "that all things must work together for good to those who love God and who are called according to his purpose," Romans eight verse 28. It is this glorious and most tender matter that we wish to study in the forthcoming lectures.

There's much to be said about the topic of prayer, and we must limit ourselves. But at the outset, let it be said that nothing is so invigorating for personal spiritual wellbeing than a life of prayer. It's the heartbeat of the life of faith that makes it so precious. In prayer, you are led by God's Spirit. And in heaven, the Lord Jesus prays also along with you, bringing your prayers to God.

The Lord gives us such rich encouragements to pray. God hears prayer. Listen to what the Lord Jesus says in Matthew six verse six, "But when you pray, enter into your closet. And when you have shut your door, pray to your Father, which is in secret, and your Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly." And in Matthew seven verses 7 through 11, we read the encouraging words, "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: for every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh, findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened."

The Lord Jesus encouraged His disciples in John 14 verse 13 and 14, "And whatsoever you shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you shall ask anything in my name, I will do it." And the next chapter, John 15 verse seven, "If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what you will, and it shall be done unto you." And the Apostle Paul encourages his people to be praying always (I Thessalonians 5:17). And James encourages us in James one verse five, "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him."

So, there you see how the Lord encourages us to expect all we stand in need of, and the Lord can even give before we pray. Isaiah 65 verse 24, "It shall come to pass, that before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear." Much distress and problems in life can be related to a lack of prayer. Neglect of prayer leads to lukewarm churches, and when those who are called after God's name become captivated by the pleasures of the world, by the pride of life and the lust of the flesh, then prayer will be neglected and the result will be misery and distress.

That's how King Hezekiah assessed the spiritual setting of the people of Judah in Second Chronicles 29 verses six and eight: "Our fathers have trespassed and done that which was evil in the eyes of the LORD our God, and have forsaken Him, and have turned away their faces from the habitation of the LORD, and turned their backs. Wherefore the wrath of the LORD was upon Judah and Jerusalem, and He hath delivered them to trouble, to astonishment, and to hissing, as ye see with your eyes." That's all because of a neglect of prayer, neglect of seeking God, that miseries come to pass because we are cutting ourselves off from the source of every blessing.

Prayer is a means to receive grace, but prayer is also an aim. It should be the aim of God's people here in life to cultivate prayer, that they should lead a life of prayer. Faith means to trust and hope upon the living God. Faith is the means through which prayer ascends to heaven. Romans 10 verse 14, "How shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed?" So, faith is necessary. It's through this faith that God is glorified. When God the Holy Spirit opens the lips of a sinner and teaches those to pray who before were silent to God, this is glorifying to God. It is most quickening and livening for spiritual life.

So, the Lord Jesus has given elaborate instruction on prayer. Especially after the disciples came to Him and heard how He was praying so tenderly, so beautifully, they asked Him, "Teach us to pray." The disciples had never heard anyone praying like that. They were accustomed to the formal prayers of the Pharisees, the hypocritical prayers. But the way the Lord Jesus prayed, it was tender, loving, familiar. Moved by this, they asked the Lord Jesus to teach them to pray, and so the Lord Jesus gave them a model for prayer. That's what is called the Lord's Prayer.

We read this in Matthew six, "Our Father which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy 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 lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen" (verses 9–13). This is what we refer to as the Lord's Prayer, but it's not necessarily given as a form prayer that we should just copy and recite. No, it's given to us as a format along which to pray, as a model for prayer. We find here actually a well-balanced blueprint for how to organize our personal prayers.

So, in these series of lectures, we hope to consider the various aspects of this prayer, of this model, how to pray. We see the address of God as Father in heaven, and that's given to stir up the right frame of mind in prayer: childlike reverence, an expectation. Father, that speaks of love, and He is in heaven. He is all power. After that, we see in this model for prayer the first three petitions, and they all begin with "Thy." They are focused upon God. God is in focus: God's name, God's kingdom, God's will.

So, when we say God's kingdom, "thy kingdom come," this concerns the preservation and the increase of the church and the destruction of all that would oppose God's kingdom and the advancement of Christ's dominion in every sphere of life. So, in this prayer, the focus is first upon God's name, "Thy name be hallowed." God must receive all glory; and then, "thy kingdom must come," the extension of thy kingdom, that the church would grow and prosper here on earth. Then, "thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven," and that's a prayer that people would learn to do the will of God, that they would learn to deny themselves and take up their cross and follow the Lord Jesus, doing His will.

Subsequently, the Lord Jesus teaches us that we may also ask God for our daily bread and our daily needs. We may lay these needs before the Lord, realizing that He will be a continual source of all supplies and that we should be content and have a trusting attitude. Then, the Lord Jesus also teaches us to ask for forgiveness of all our sins because we must confess our daily sins before the Lord. And then, if God forgives our sins, then the Lord Jesus shows us that we should be willing to forgive the sins of others. If we are not able or willing to forgive the small debt of others toward us, then God will not forgive us our great debt.

God's children still live here in this world full of temptation, have hearts inclined to wickedness. The Devil assaults God's children, and therefore we must daily pray that we will be not led into temptation, but be delivered from the power of the Devil. So, we are dependent upon God's care that He will not lead us into temptation. Then the Lord Jesus also gives us a pleading ground in prayer, and that is what we call the foundation of prayer, a pleading ground, something you may plead upon, a basis for your prayer, and that is that His kingdom will come and that God has all power to deliver, that He does all things to His glory. And so, it ends, "thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever." Then, prayer is concluded by that little word, "Amen." Amen. Yet, there's so much contained in that little word "Amen" when it is spoken by faith. We also hope to consider in one of these lectures this little word, "Amen," which has so much grace and power in it.

So, following this model for prayer, we will become aware that prayer is actually very exciting and encouraging. For God's children do not speak to a distant and remote God, but to a God who is close to us. He knows us, and He lets us realize that He knows us and that He cares for us; and that awareness of God's care happens especially in personal prayer. So, beside these various petitions of the Lord's Prayer that we hope to consider, there are also certain practical matters related to prayer. We wish to consider them also in some subsequent lectures. Questions such as, when should we pray or with whom should we pray, and how should we pray with our families? Also, for instance, what are the contents of prayer? In other words, what is the format according to which we should pray? How should we pray? Do we pray to the Father, or to the Son, or to the Holy Ghost? Or can we also pray directly to the Lord Jesus, and how should we say this?

Many of those who follow these lectures hope to become pastors, or maybe you are already a pastor, and therefore it's useful to consider the prayer life of a pastor. Every pastor should be a man of prayer, and that is what

we hope to discuss in a subsequent lecture. There are also various difficulties related to prayer because prayer takes energy. Prayer is struggling. Prayer is not easy. Many of us are under time restrictions. How do we find time to pray? At times, it can also be difficult to vocalize our needs, to express our desires in words. There can also be moments that we think our prayers are useless, that God is not answering them, and that can be very disheartening. Therefore, it's important how we are to view that matter of what we call 'unanswered prayer.'

Besides that, we also have to pay attention to the necessity of persevering in prayer, not to give up because the evil one will shoot his arrows at the prayer life of a Christian. He does not want the Christian to pray. He is afraid of prayer. He does not know how God would answer these prayers, and so the Devil seeks to undermine personal prayer. So, we hope to consider also in one of the following lectures the hindrances to prayer.

Then, the final lecture will deal with the blessings of prayer. The result of intense prayer is that one will be exercised to godliness. Then, one receives assurance of salvation. One experiences living communion with God in prayer. God's love flows through the heart. In order to gain these blessings, it is important to know a life of continual ardent prayer. One needs to discipline himself in this practice. So, we need to pray always, and we should not give up. In this way, you will see much fruit in your life, and that's all received in the way of prayer. So, shall we start off with these lectures? It's actually a journey along which we will look at the various aspects of prayer, and we hope that we will be invigorated and encouraged, and that we will learn about prayer, and that we will see how the treasures of God are unlocked through personal prayer. Thank you.