
VIDEO LECTURE MODULE: THE LORD'S PRAYER

LECTURE 11: PRACTICAL ISSUES REGARDING PRAYER

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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 11

PRACTICAL ISSUES REGARDING PRAYER

Welcome to lecture number 11, in the series on the Beauty of Prayer. In the previous lectures, we have considered the various aspects of the Lord's Prayer. And now in these final lectures, we hope to consider some aspects of prayer, some practical issues regarding prayer. And that's what we wish to start off with in this lecture.

So, prayer is very sensitive. Prayer is difficult. Prayer that costs effort. It takes self-denial. It takes time, but prayer makes Christian life so beautiful, for then you are in contact with God Himself, and that brings us then to the question, to Whom must we pray? Well, we understand that; the Lord Jesus taught us, "Our Father, which art in heaven," and we read in Scriptures so often that people call upon the Lord, upon God. Yes, we are to pray only to God because He made us. We are dependent upon Him. Many people do not want to pray to God. They want to be independent of God, then they want to use their body, their mind, their talents, the gifts that God gives them, they want to use that for themselves. And they don't pray to God. This is all rebellion against Him.

Then man wants to be independent of God, but the reality is we are fully dependent upon God. God is the Maker of us, our bodies. He has created our soul, has given us our mind, intelligence. And so therefore, we must also give account of what we have done with our bodies, with our minds and how we have cared for our soul. We must give an account of what we've done with our money, with our time; and that account must be given to God.

Do you know what it means to have unconditional surrender to God? That everything in your life maybe laid down before him. I hope you may know this, this surrender to God. That's what prayer actually is: surrender to God. That's why we fold our hands, confessing we cannot help ourselves. Our hands cannot help us. We close our eyes. We don't want to have any disturbing factors. We need God to help us. We pray to God.

We also know that God is the Triune God. God the Father is the source of all things. He is the Maker of heaven and Earth. He has devised the plan of salvation. He is the Judge of heaven and Earth. We are accountable to Him, and we know that God the Son is the Mediator, the Mediator of God the Father so that God the Son was the Mediator in creation. Everything was made through Him. And He is also the Mediator of salvation. And He is also the One to Whom God the Father has given the power to judge heaven and Earth, to judge all creatures, to judge what is given to Him, the Lord Jesus, the Son of God. And the Holy Spirit is the power of God.

So, creation took place through the power of the Holy Spirit. He gives life. And salvation is received through the power of the Holy Spirit, Who applies God's Word to our heart. And so, people are convicted on the Day of Judgment that they will forever perish by the accusing power of God's Spirit. You see, God the Father is the Source, and God the Son is the Mediator, and God the Spirit is the Power through Whom the Triune God works.

And these three divine persons are equal. They are all God. So, the Bible tell us, one God, Three Persons. Every person is fully God, and yet there's only one God, not three Gods.

God is so highly elevated [that] we cannot understand Him. Also, the Trinity is something beyond us. In eternity, the Triune God loved One Another, the Three Divine Persons. And then, when we are referring to prayer, people wonder, "Can we pray to God the Father and God the Son and God the Holy Spirit? Who are we actually praying to, when we pray to the Triune God?" Well, you are praying to, as you say, the Triune God; you're praying to the Lord. But we may also address our prayers to the Father. You may also pray to the Son. We find it so often in the Scripture, in the New Testament. You may also pray to God the Holy Spirit because He is also God, but we must realize that God, the Holy Spirit sheds light upon the Son, the Lord Jesus. And that the Lord Jesus is a Mediator to reconcile sinners to God the Father. Ultimately, it is that God the Father, our Maker against Whom we rebelled, that we would be reconciled to Him, God the Father. So that God would be All in All.

The Son opened a fresh, new and living way to the Father. And the Spirit takes it out of Christ. What does it take? Salvation. Merited salvation. And He applies it to us. And then a sinner becomes convicted of his sin. He becomes the desirous for the Lord. And so, we see the various works within the Trinity. And so, we may pray to these three Divine Persons, but keep in mind the various positions of the Three Divine Persons.

You don't find so often in Scripture that people pray to God the Holy Spirit. We do, but that's because the Spirit sheds light upon Christ. He works in the background. He does not shed light upon Himself. He points away from Himself to the Lord Jesus. He delights in the fact that sinners are united to Christ and so reconciled to God.

Another practical issue regarding prayer is the format of prayer. How should we pray? We are to be organized in our prayers. There are various aspects of prayer that we should distinguish. Scripture teaches us that we must adore God. He must receive praise and adoration. He is God. We must also get thanksgiving to God, that we're giving Him humble thanks for the tokens of His grace and the many benefits He affords us. Important in prayer is that we would also confess our sins; and that we would also lay our supplications, our needs before the Lord; and that we would also intercede, that is pray, for others in their needs.

These are actually the various aspects of prayer, the format of prayer. So, we can say that prayer includes the following: adoration, thanksgiving, confession, supplication and intercession. Then some people wonder, "What use is it if we pray? If God has already ordained everything that is going to happen because He is the Sovereign Lord? He has already ordained everything. He has decreed who would be saved. He governs all events. Why then should we pray?" Because the Lord wants us to pray. And we must realize He grants the petitions of His children. He incorporates the prayers of His people in His sovereign plan. He carries out His council according to their prayers. That's why He delights in the prayers of His people, and He hears them most graciously. And that's why the Apostle Paul wants people to pray for him and [why] he also prayed much for other people. Although he knew very well that God has an eternal council and that He will carry that out, Paul [also] knew that God makes use of the prayers of His people.

So, prayer is very useful and necessary. With whom should we pray? Should you do that alone or with others? Well, in the first place we should do that [is] when we are alone, personal prayer. But it's very important to pray together with others. If you are married, that you would pray together with your spouse. If you have a family, that you would pray together with your family. And as churches, as we gather, then we are also called to unite in prayer because the Lord hears prayer. And so, it's very good to come together as a group of believers to pray in church.

We read, for instance in 2 Chronicles 7:14, "If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land." So, you have here the example: if people come together confessing their sins, that the Lord will hear their petitions. So, praying with others is important, but most important is personal prayer, when we are alone before God. Because the Lord Jesus tells us in Matthew 6:6, "But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father who is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly." We are to pray in the closet. It's an inner room. In those days, it was a storage room. The houses in the days of the Lord Jesus would often only have one room, but there would be a little storage room. More like a large closet. And that's where you should go into, the Lord Jesus says. And you shut the door behind you, and there you should pray all alone, where nobody sees you except the Lord.

And that life of prayer alone before God is so very blessed. There you'll discover Who God is for a poor lost sinner. There God's Word will uncover you to your sin and iniquity. There depths are laid open within you of which you yourself are not even aware they were present. There, the inner motivation of your deeds becomes clear to you. It's in the inner chamber where the grace of Christ is applied to the heart, where you discover peace with God. There, the Lord Jesus shows His great sinners love to the soul. There, you learn to see the crucified Savior as altogether lovely. There, alone before God, you learn to give up all resistance to Christ and there, you understand what it means that your heart melts under the love of God. There, you taste delights and pleasures in God, which are beyond comparison. It's a fruitful life, that life in the inner chamber. It is there the fruits of faith are grown and nurtured, fruits of gentleness, of long-suffering, of patience, humility, love and care and graciousness and compassion. These are fruits that the Lord gives as a result of prayer alone in your closet.

And the Lord wants us to close the door behind us to be alone with Him. You read in Scripture too, that Isaac went out to meditate in the field at the eventide, Genesis 24:63. And the Lord Jesus went up into a mountain to pray (Matthew 14:23). He did that throughout the night. And we read in Mark 1:35 that, "In the morning, a great while before day, he went out, and departed into a solitary place, and there prayed." We read in the book of Acts that Peter went up onto the roof of the house to pray (Acts 10:9). You see, when you're alone before God, your prayers will be different. You love your wife. You have no secrets for her, but still when you are together with her, your prayers are different. Because in your personal prayer the Lord opens your heart. And there you receive strength in personal struggles.

But nevertheless, prayer in marriage is also very important. To seek one another as husband and wife in prayer, that you together may lay down your needs before the Lord just like Isaac and Rebekah together entreated the Lord. And just like Zechariah and Elizabeth were a godly couple, what a blessing [it is] to pray together. As a husband and a wife, we need to love one another. It's only when you love one another that you can also pray together.

Likewise, it's also very beneficial to pray together as a family. Family worship, that's very important when we speak of prayer because the first people you will pray with are the members of your family. We find that also in Scripture. Abraham, he conducted worship services together with his family and all his servants. Isaac and Jacob did the same. And David did also the same; he says in Psalm 101:2, "I will behave myself wisely in a perfect way. I will walk within my house with a perfect heart." He sought the Lord together with his family.

And when should we do that? Because life is busy. The members of the family have their obligations and duties. We should try to pray together as a family at meal time. Then, the father of the house can lead in prayer, and we should do that at set times; especially then when we eat together, then we start the meal by asking a blessing upon the Lord, and we should also conclude the meal with Scripture reading and prayer. Also, when there are guests in our home, they should be present and be included in our prayers. And we should not only pray for a blessing upon our food but ask for forgiveness for our sins, thank the Lord for His many blessings given upon this day. And so, commending the various needs of the members of the family before the Lord in prayer, that's a rich blessing to be so together as a family.

It's a very old custom, an old Christian custom that we do it this way. We read of it in the New Testament already. Paul for instance, in the storm on the ship, they hadn't eaten for days and he sits down and he starts to eat bread, but first he gives thanks to the Lord, prayer. In the early church, Christians were slandered and many evil, wicked things, lies, were told about them. For instance, they had terrible feasts and were actually gluttons, but then there was a theologian, Tertullian, and he wrote in truth, "We do not sit down at our table before we have first sought our God in prayer. And we eat together as those who realize that we should still be able to serve our God during the night. We conclude our meals with prayers and thanksgivings, and therefore we do not give ourselves up to a foolish lifestyle. We conduct daily, regular spiritual exercises in our homes." And those spiritual exercises, they will be prayer but also reading of God's Word. Already, in those days, there were many copies of God's Word distributed, handwritten among God's people.

We read it also in the gospels that the Lord Jesus sat down to eat, and He first prayed when He ate with the 5,000 men in Matthew 14. And likewise, we see that at other occasions, prayer was offered. The Lord Jesus asked for a blessing, and He also gave a prayer of thanksgiving. And so we, as a family should conduct ourselves in this manner. Often this also gives us opportunity, not only for Scripture reading but after a meal that we can sing various Psalms or spiritual hymns. And then we can ask a blessing of God upon the daily work we do, remembering

each individual member of our home. Now, what a blessing is such communal prayer in a family, where the whole family life is embedded in this life of prayer.

We see these matters also revealed in Scripture. We already mentioned Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and we know from the five books of Moses that the fathers in Israel were called to instruct their families. And Paul exhorts the men in 1 Timothy 2:8, "I will therefore that men pray every where, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting." When Paul says "everywhere," he especially means their own homes. That's where they are called to pray.

So, the fathers in the family or the leaders of the family are called to lead in prayer. Actually, every family should be something of a little church, and every home should be a house of prayer. And now, we're speaking not of personal prayer, but of prayer within the setting of a family, praying with our family, with our friends.

We find this also in Acts 12:12, "Where many were gathered together for prayer." Family prayer will be something done within a home. Many reasons can be given to promote this family prayer. Why should we conduct family prayer? Because God has promised to hear prayer. God hears prayer. He is the living God. They who call upon the name of the Lord, they will be heard, Psalm 34:15, "The eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous, and his ears are open unto their cry." And in Matthew 18:19, "Again I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on Earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them by my Father, which is in heaven."

So, we even read of Queen Esther, who came together with her maidens in her living quarters and they called upon God for deliverance (Esther 4:16). We read of Job, who repeatedly sanctified his children through sacrifices and prayer (Job 1:5). When there is open mutual prayer, quarrels and disagreements in the family will die away; and much comfort will be experienced in the way of family prayer when there are days of grief and sorrow.

Many people have wondered whether it is allowed to read a form of prayer, a prayer that someone else has written and that we read in our devotions with our families. We answer that this is certainly allowed. It can be that leaders of a family find it difficult to formulate prayers, and so they may make use of prayers written by other godly men. But we must realize that there can be certain needs within a family that are not verbalized in such a standard prayer. And so, we should still modify such a prayer to include the needs of our family. And also using a form prayer at certain locations can avoid that those who lead in prayer would always be using the same terms, words and phraseology; because those who lead in prayer must be careful that they don't always use the same words, and so a form prayer, or even preparing yourself in advance by reading for yourself a form prayer, that can help you when you are called to engage in public prayer. So, it can be useful to read them for yourself.

Another important matter is the fact that we should teach our children to pray. We do that by being an example to them. But also, instructing them that they themselves should pray, that they should realize that they are sinful people, that they need a new heart, that they need to be born again, and that the Lord Jesus has paid the price for sin. And so, we should teach our children to pray for the work of God's Holy Spirit in our hearts and show our children that we may lay all our needs before Him, teach them that they should not live for this world but for heaven, and show them that the share of grace and riches in Christ [is] far more important than the riches of the world. Show them and warn them how evil sin is and the terrible consequences of sin. Tell them that God is ready to hear them. It's important for children at a young age that they realize these matters. And at first, we should pray together with them. And then later on, lead them that that they would pray on their own, and showing them that they should also pray for others around them. Show them that this is the most important thing in life and that there are no needs too small for the Lord, and there are no needs too great for the Lord, so that a child learns to unburden itself before the Lord.

And so, teach children also to pray for the well-being of the church. Teach them to pray for the persecuted children of God, those who are imprisoned and who suffer for the sake of the Lord Jesus. Teach also your children that they should give thanks to the Lord for His many undeserved blessings. When they have been in personal need, distress or sickness, they should lay in their prayers, thanksgiving before the Lord. They should not forget His undeserved mercies to them.

We find a clear example of family prayer in the person of Joshua. Joshua is an example for every God-fearing husband and father. He was resolved not only to serve the Lord but even if all others would not serve the Lord, he and his family would serve the Lord (Joshua 24:15). Joshua made this decision. And we read about it in Joshua 24:2. When he made this decision, he was more than a hundred years old probably and he had remarkable zeal. And the

influence of this man of God was so strong that for several generations, the people indeed worshipped the Lord. Joshua 24:31, “And Israel served the Lord all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders that over lived Joshua, and which had known all the works of the LORD, that he had done for Israel.”

You see, the impact of personal prayer can be strong and great for generations to come. And so, prayer will be a blessing for your family. When you pray, you may expect a blessing of God upon your family. The Lord is able to convert your children, and that’s why [you should] pray, also in their presence, for their conversion. Pray then, pray to God that they will be kept from the temptations of the world. He can cause your children to prosper and to grow up “like olive plants around your table,” Psalm 128, for the Lord hears prayer.

And then finally, some people wonder about the posture in prayer. In which physical manner should we pray? We mentioned already, we close our eyes and fold our hands. But really, the way we should pray is not really prescribed in Scripture. We read of some people kneeling during prayer. Paul kneeled with the Elders of Ephesus when they prayed. But we read of King Solomon, he stood before the whole gathering of the people, and he called upon the name of the Lord, 1 Kings 8:22. The Lord Jesus separated Himself from His disciples and kneeled down in prayer (Luke 22:41). But we read of standing in prayer in Mark 11: 25 and John 11:41. That’s a sign of devotion and humility. That’s what we should keep in mind: humility and devotion.

And so, we honor the Lord with our words, but also with our posture. But the core issue is our heart: how is our heart disposed. It can be very difficult for certain people to kneel. They can have pain in their knees. It can be tiresome to stand for a longer period of time in prayer. Therefore, let everyone be convinced in his own conscience how he or she should pray, as long as we do this with the heart. And so far, then some practical issues regarding prayer. Thank you.