

Daily Devotionals: With Jesus and His Wisdom | March 6, 2022

Day 1

This week, we're going to explore a teaching from Jesus on prayer. We're going to dig into what Jesus thought about it, practiced it, and how important it was to his earthly ministry.

Think of a hero of yours. Maybe it's someone famous or someone you know. What was it that made him or her your hero? Now, imagine the opportunity to spend an extended period of time with that person, learning to do the thing that made them your hero. Perhaps you'd want to learn composing from Mozart, painting from Van Gogh, cooking from Bobby Flay, shooting from John Wayne, or preaching from Dan Hamel.

Regardless of who you'd pick or what you'd ask them to teach you, odds are that it would be the thing they do best, the thing that drew you to them the most. Keep that in mind as you read this:

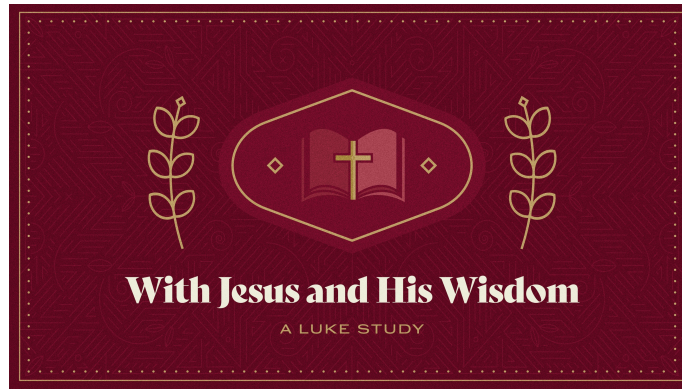
One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he finished, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples." (Luke 11:1)

Did you know that's the only time recorded in Scripture that the disciples asked Jesus to teach them something? Obviously, when you spend every day with Jesus for three years, you're going to learn stuff every day. But still, we don't have written proof that they asked how to heal people, preach, turn water to wine, multiply food, tell stories, love outcasts, or raise someone from the dead. *So, what was it about his prayer life that made them so hungry to learn how to do the same?*

Think about that question. Write out a few creative ideas about what it might have been. How did he speak to God? What was his posture and the expression on his face? How did he interact with them afterward? Ask God to help you see what might have been.

I would argue that the disciples had no idea what they were really asking. They most likely wanted to know some characteristics of prayer: model prayers that they could recite, like Jewish students would receive from their rabbis.

So how does Jesus answer their question? Like the good rabbi he was, he taught them a model of prayer—that same model that is very familiar to us today. But then, he took them on a ride, going way past characteristics of prayer to the very heart of God and the true character of prayer. Read Luke 11:1-13 if you're interested in the rest of his teaching.

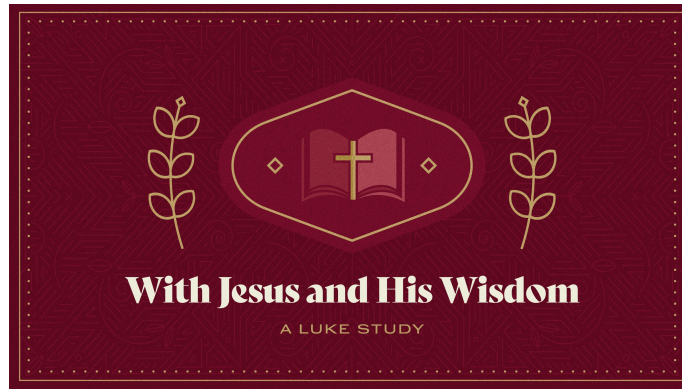


Let our prayer this week be this: “Jesus we may not know the full depth of this question and what you might reveal to us, but would you teach us to pray?” And after you’ve asked, believe that he will teach you—in a real and personal way—the true character of prayer and why it is the best way for us to follow him in our world today.

Questions for reflection

What have you discovered in scripture about Jesus’ devotion to prayer that draws you in or inspires you? What is it that intimidates you or makes you nervous?

Can you ask Jesus the disciples’ question today? Is there anything getting in your way from asking him to teach you to pray? Share those hesitations, concerns, or barriers with him.



Day 2

Today, we're going to look at Jesus' teaching on the persistent widow and how it applies today. And we'll compare it to another story Jesus told about prayer, the one we referenced yesterday from Luke 11.

First, read the story from Luke 18:1-8.

Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up. 2 He said: "In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared what people thought. 3 And there was a widow in that town who kept coming to him with the plea, 'Grant me justice against my adversary.'

4 "For some time he refused. But finally he said to himself, 'Even though I don't fear God or care what people think, 5 yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she won't eventually come and attack me!'"

6 And the Lord said, "Listen to what the unjust judge says. 7 And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? 8 I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?"

Review verse 1. Why was Jesus telling them this parable? Is that reason still applicable today? How does it apply to you?

Have you ever thought of God as a judge, unwilling or reluctant to hear your prayers?

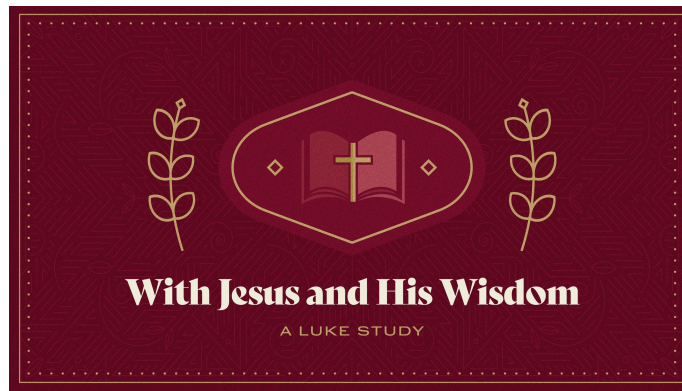
Now, read Luke 11:5-8.

5 Then Jesus said to them, "Suppose you have a friend, and you go to him at midnight and say, 'Friend, lend me three loaves of bread; 6 a friend of mine on a journey has come to me, and I have no food to offer him.' 7 And suppose the one inside answers, 'Don't bother me. The door is already locked, and my children and I are in bed. I can't get up and give you anything.' 8 I tell you, even though he will not get up and give you the bread because of friendship, yet because of your shameless audacity he will surely get up and give you as much as you need.

How are the stories similar? How are they different?

What do they teach you about...

...persistence when you pray?



...boldness when you pray?

...the role faith plays when you pray?

After both stories, Jesus continued to teach about prayer. Read Luke 18:9-14 and Luke 11:9-13. In both cases, Jesus expands the character of prayer. After the persistent widow, he commends the patience of the repentant tax collector. After the persistent neighbor, he refers to our generosity—our ability to give good things to people we love.

When taken together, we can start to see a more complete picture of Jesus' take on prayer. It requires a lot from us (continual praying, humility), but it promises so much more from God (good gifts, the Holy Spirit).

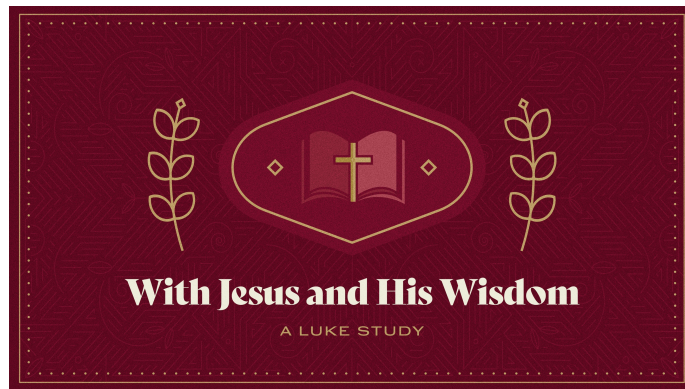
It might be easy to assume that once we get those things “under control,” we’ll get the answers we want to our prayers. And conversely, to assume that if we don’t get those answers, we must be doing something wrong. But let’s look at one more example from Jesus. And while you read it, keep this quote from 19th century Anglican archbishop and author, Richard C. Trench in mind: *“Prayer is not getting man’s will done in heaven, but getting God’s will done on earth. It is not overcoming God’s reluctance but laying hold of God’s willingness.”*

Read Matthew 26:36-42.

Humility, persistence, trust...they all exist in Jesus' prayer the night before he was crucified. Yet, on the surface, his prayer wasn't answered. The cup of sacrifice did not pass from him; he had to conform his own desires to what God the Father said was best. Jesus knew God was willing to save all humanity, and his prayers allowed him to lay hold of that willingness.

Questions for reflection

1. Have you ever wondered if you were doing prayer wrong? Has it felt like your prayers just ‘bounced off the ceiling?’ How does Jesus’ teaching change your perspective? How does his prayer in the garden change your perspective?
2. Both stories imply a relationship between the one asks and the one they’re asking. What does it mean for you that your prayer life is an overflow of your relationship? Thank God for the reality of that relationship.



Day 3

We've been looking into characteristics of prayer—how we can approach prayer—and promises from God in prayer. Today, we're going to look at the prayer habits of Jesus, and we'll look at other teachings about how to pray.

Before you begin, take a moment to be still and quiet, focus on your breathing in order to be fully present while you read these.

Luke 6:12

One of those days Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray and spent the night praying to God.

Matthew 14:23

After he had dismissed them, he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray. Later that night, he was there alone...

John 17:1

After Jesus said this, he looked toward heaven and prayed: "Father, the hour has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you."

John 6:11

Jesus then took the loaves, gave thanks, and distributed to those who were seated as much as they wanted. He did the same with the fish.

Luke 23:46

Jesus called out with a loud voice, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." When he had said this, he breathed his last.

John 11:41-42

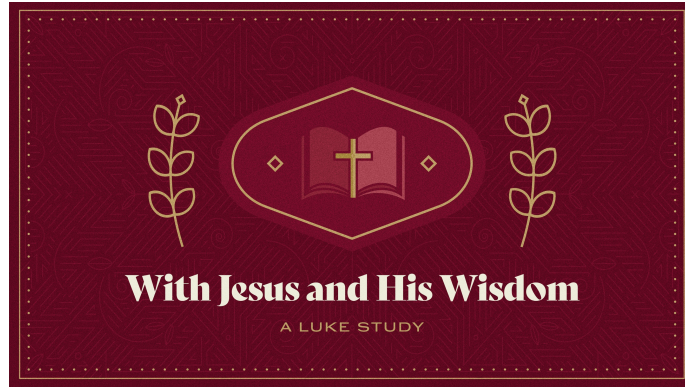
So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, "Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me."

John 6:38

For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me.

Which of these verses resonates most with you? Why?

How do you notice Jesus speaking with his father? How do you notice him listening to his father?



What prayer habits did Jesus have? How did they affect his ministry? Are there any of his habits you sense an invitation to try?

In these verses, circle the characteristics of prayer and underline the promises (They may not all contain both).

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

Philippians 4:6

Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God, and the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

1 John 5:14

This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us.

John 15:7

If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.

Psalms 145:18

The Lord is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth.

1 Timothy 2:1-2

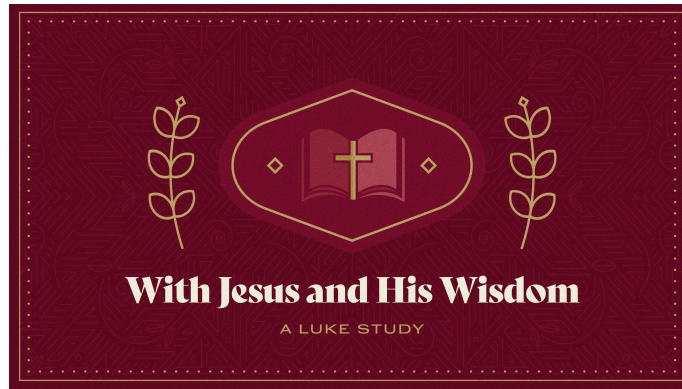
I urge, then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for all people—for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness.

Questions for reflection

Which one of these verses resonates most with you? Why?

How would prayer change for you if you employed some of these characteristics?

How could the promises change your prayer habits?



Day 4

Today, let's work on our own experience with prayer in two areas, our approach or thoughts about prayer and our actual experience of prayer.

First, let's reflect on what your approach to prayer has been.

As you reflect on these questions, take time to ask God to reveal these things to you in his mercy and kindness.

What have you learned about prayer in the past? Have your assumptions or impressions changed since learning from this parable? If so, how?

If you grew up in a church, what was your church's approach to prayer? What habits have you grown from that tradition? How have they been a gift for you? How have they been a barrier?

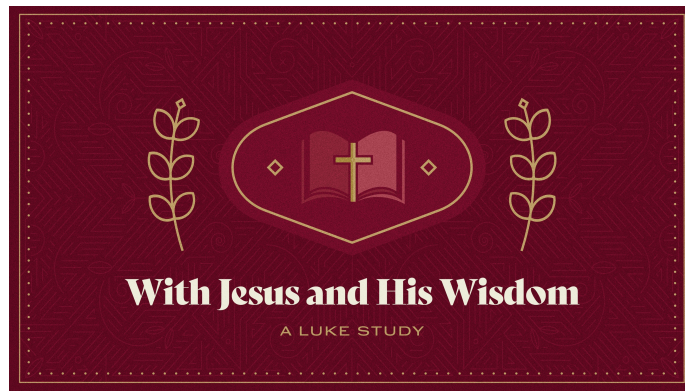
It's obvious from the way Jesus sought his father and relied on prayer to do ministry that prayer was two-way communication with God. Is this how you've approached prayer or have you approached it more as one-way communication? How might God be inviting you to change your approach?

Now, let's look at your past experiences with prayer.

Remember times you've asked God for something when he answered how you want. Remember when he didn't answer how you want.

What did you learn about him in each scenario? How does that line up with what you know of God? What might he want to change in you?

On day 2, we read a quote from Richard C. Trench, "Prayer is not getting man's will done in heaven, but getting God's will done on earth." Have your prayers tended to lean one way or the other? In what news ways might God be inviting you to pray for his will to be done on earth? How would that change your prayer?



Day 5 – Application

To finish our week on prayer, we invite you pray. Use this guided exercise to stay centered and be present to God when you pray. Try to make this a regular rhythm, not just a one-time activity for this week’s devotions. This guide is from practictheway.org/pray.

Before you do it, here’s two quick exercises to get started:

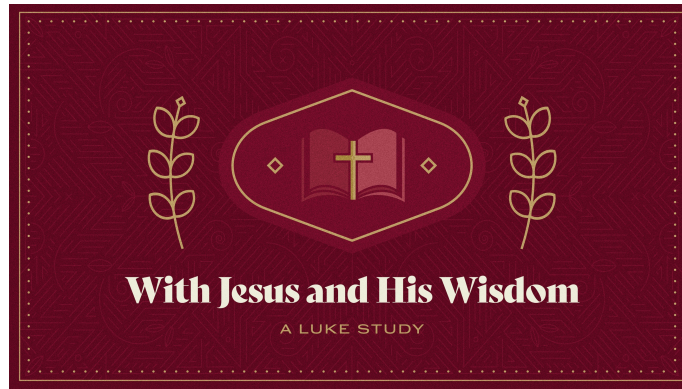
Exercise 1:

- Get out your calendar or journal and set a time and place to pray that is quiet and distraction free. For most, the mornings are a good time. But you might prefer an afternoon walk or evening
- Set a modest goal - daily is ideal, but if that’s too much, shoot for three times a week, for 10-15 minutes, or something that feels a little challenging, but doable.
- Write down 1-3 prayers of people or situations to be praying for. Put the name or subject of the prayer, then write out a few bullet points of Scriptures, dreams, or requests you have. Remember, be specific!

Exercise 2:

If you have a hard time with distraction, here’s a little breathing exercise you can begin with, before you start into the Lord’s prayer:

- Take long, deep, slow breaths (if you want, count 4 seconds in, 4 seconds wait, 4 seconds out, repeat). Inhale through your nose, exhale through your mouth.
- Start to pay attention to your breathing. Just “watch” your breath go in and out.
- Release the constant chatter in your mind. Let each thought go as quickly as it comes, and just focus on your breathing.
- Your mind will seize this opportunity to run wild with thoughts, feelings, memories, to do’s, and all manner of distractions. That’s okay. Don’t judge yourself, feel bad, give up, or worry. When you notice your mind start to wander, just recenter with a quick prayer word, like, “Father...” or “Jesus, have mercy” or “Holy Spirit,” and come back to your breathing.
- In the beginning, just 1-2 minutes of this is a huge win, and 10 minutes is a home run. When you feel like you’re ready, move from breathing to praying.



Once you're ready do this practice, either on your own or as a community

1. Put away your phone or any other distractions, and get into a comfortable, but alert position.
2. Invite the Holy Spirit to come...
3. Pray through the Lord's prayer, like this...

“Our Father...”

Take a moment and think about the idea of God as your Father, with good intentions toward you. If you want, imagine God in your mind's eye. Picture his face. Make eye contact with him.

“In heaven...”

Take a moment to think about the idea that God is all around you. As you breathe in and out, imagine yourself breathing in and out more of the Holy Spirit.

“Hallowed by your name...”

Spend a few minutes just sitting with the Father in joyful, grateful worship. You might want to sit in silence for a few moments. Or sing a chorus. Or rattle off a list of things you're grateful for. Or praise God with specific things you love about him.

If you are in a group, encourage people to make their expressions of praise and gratitude out loud, one at a time. (E.g. “Father, thank you for your kindness.” “Father, thank you for loving me.”)

“Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven...”

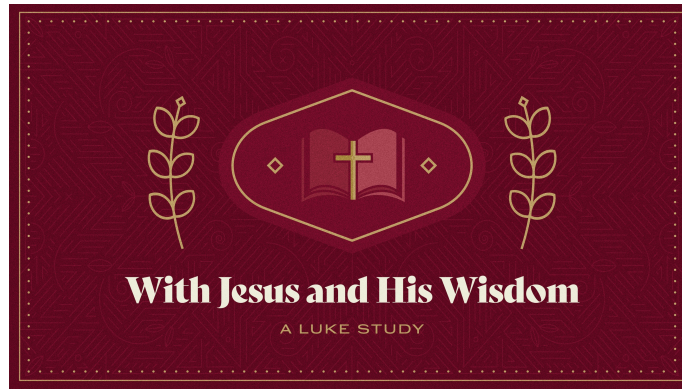
Spend a few minutes asking for God's will to be done in your city/church/community/life. Think of specific things to pray for.

Give to God specific things in your life that you're wrestling with control over. A simple prayer of, “Your will be done in _____,” is a great place to start.

“Give us each day our daily bread...”

Spend a few minutes praying for specific needs and wants in your life or that of your community (this is a great time to pray through your “prayer list”!).

This is also a great time to pray over specific people in your community who need something: a job, healing, wisdom to make a decision, etc.



If you are in a group, consider splitting into groups of 2-3 and having each person share one area of need in their life. After each person has shared, pray for one another, asking God to meet that need.

“Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors...”

Spend a few minutes in quiet asking God for forgiveness for specific areas in your life and releasing others to forgiveness.

“And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.”

Spend a few minutes praying against temptation (the word can also be translated trouble) in your life.

- Pray against specific sins.
- Pray against any kind of evil - spiritual evil (demonic), human evil, natural evil, etc.
- Pray against bad things in your life or community, and for God’s blessing - the divine flow of good things into your life and community.

“For yours is the kingdom, power, and glory forever.”

Close in a prayer of celebration and gratitude to the Father for hearing you.