

On a scale of 1 to 10, how would you rate your prayer life?

1 being: awful and almost non-existent, needs *a lot* of work. 10 being Jesus-like, not a lot of room for improvement. Think about your prayer life. Think about where you'd put it on that scale of 1 to 10.

Prayer, as the Bible defines it, is a believer talking to God.

Prayer is the incredible right and privilege we have to talk to the all-powerful, all-knowing, ever-present, eternal God and know that he is listening to us – like Abraham talking to God in that first Bible reading for today. We may not see him like Abraham did, but he's listening.

Prayer is not only a privilege for believers, God makes a pretty incredible promise when it comes to prayer – that our prayers actually have the power to direct the actions of our sovereign God - like those elders in that second Bible reading whose prayers had the power to move God to heal a sick person; like Elijah made the water cycle in Israel like a spigot outside his house that he could turn off and on with a prayer to his God.

Prayer is an incredible privilege Abraham reminds us, and James chimes in that prayer is powerful and effective.

So, on a scale of 1 to 10 how are you doing at utilizing this powerful privilege?

It is a good thing to ponder.

I think a lot of times when we talk and think about prayer we tend to focus on us – what we need to do to get better at utilizing the powerful privilege of prayer because there are a lot of ways we can be better at praying. I doubt anyone here is rating themselves a 10 on that scale. I would be surprised if any of us rated ourselves above a 7. Prayer is a think I think just about every Christian I've talked to wants to be better at.

The Bible gives lots of encouragement to get better at prayer.

We could begin the list of needed improvement with Abraham. We need to be more respectful in our prayers, realizing we are entering the throne room of God when we pray – a place we don't deserve to be. We need to be more persistent in our prayers, more bold in our prayers. That account is almost awkward to read because of how persistent and bold Abraham is.

James can help us make the list of needed improvement longer. When you get in trouble, when some unexpected stressor invades your life, is prayer your first response? When you get sick do you consider prayer to be an integral part of the healing process? Do you honestly believe that prayer is powerful and effective, or are you a man or woman of action? You are going to tackle life's problems yourself, and you may pray as an afterthought, or to cover all your bases, but you don't think of prayer as an actual solution to life's problems.

And that's just two short sections of the Bible that deal with prayer. The Bible has lots more encouragement to get better at prayer.

When we talk and think about prayer we tend to focus on us and the list of things we need to do better. That's good and proper. But do you want to know what I find interesting about Luke 11?

When Jesus' disciples asked him for a lesson on prayer he tackled the problem a little differently than we tend to. He didn't focus on them – on his disciples and some long list of things to improve. Instead, he focused his disciples on God.

When you dig in to Jesus' lesson on prayer he doesn't give a list of what his disciples needed to do better. He gives a list of attributes of God. We are going to focus on three attributes of God that Jesus' lesson on prayer circles around.

When the disciples wanted to learn about prayer instead of focusing on what the disciples needed to do, he focuses them on God's name – God's provision – God's forgiveness.

Do you want to learn about prayer from Jesus?

First, remember God's name.

“When you pray, say: ‘Father, hallowed be your name.’”

Hallowed, a word you probably never use outside of the Lord's Prayer. Hallowed is to treat as holy. Something holy is something you put up on a pedestal – this is a thing that is holy, it's set apart, it's better than all of the other stuff going on in my life. To hallow God's name is to take God and put in on the highest pedestal of your life. He transcends everything in your life. He is set apart. He's on a different playing field. He is better. He is more important. His name is holy.

And his name – that's not just letters on a page, his name is his reputation. Just like I can't say “Donald Trump” without you instantly thinking about what you know about our president and what you think about him because of what you know about him, God's name (the LORD) is everything we know about him, and what we think about him because of what we know about him.

And though, at first, hallowing God's name gives us one more thing to do, Jesus tells us exactly how we should think about God when it comes to prayer – the name with which we address God in prayer: Father.

Do you want to be better at prayer? Remember the name Jesus gave for our God in prayer: Father - Not vindictive and angry God, not distant and distracted deity, not moldable to my wishes idol, but Father. He is in charge of this world like a Father is in charge of his family. He loves this world like a Father loves his family.

And as he is going to make clear in his second reminder, earthly fathers often fail – if they are not absent all-together they use their authority for selfish gain, and their love is far from perfect – but God our Father has none of those short comings. He is the

perfect Father that none of us had or are, but all of us crave. He is the perfect Father who looks at this world with all of its troubles and he looks at you and all of your troubles and he says, “I’ve got this. I’ve got you,” which brings us to the second attribute of God to which Jesus draws our attention...

Remember God’s provision.

“Give us each day our daily bread,” is the Lord’s Prayer petition which Jesus unpacks in much of the rest of that section from Luke 11.

Do you have needs in your life? Are there things from your past that are still haunting you today? Do you have stressful stuff going on right now? Do you have worries about what the future holds? Remember your Father who says, “I’ve got this. As long as you are in my house (my world), as long as you are in my family I will provide for you.”

Jesus wants us to remember that we have a God who wants to provide for us, so if we need something, all we have to do is ask. Then Jesus sets up a crazy scenario to illustrate the point.

If I showed up at your door tonight, at midnight, and started ringing your doorbell. I kept pushing that doorbell until you answered the door in your pajamas, rubbing your eyes, confused, and probably a little concerned, then I say, “My parents are in town and we are a little short on milk. Do you have a gallon to spare?” You probably would be a little ticked off because I woke you in the middle of the night for a gallon of milk (“just wait till the morning and go to the store and buy some, or hit up the 24 hour Walmart if it’s such an emergency”), but I’m also betting that if I just stood there shamelessly asking you for a gallon of milk at midnight, most of you would probably give it to me. You might complain about it. You might give me a hard time about it later. But because I’m your pastor, we’ve got this relationship, because I was shamelessly crazy enough to wake you up in the middle of the night to ask for it, I bet most of you would give me some milk.

Now, if that is true with us, friends, how much more ready and willing is your Father in heaven to give you things if you ask him for them – which is the second thing Jesus wants you remember, we have a Father who provides for us.

“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; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.”

Do you want to get better at prayer? Remember that God is your Father who wants to provide for you. He not only wants to, as true God he is able to provide for you in ways that no one and nothing else can.

“But,” the natural question that anyone who has ever prayed for anything before wonders, “what about when I ask for something and he doesn’t give me what I ask for?” What about all those times when you ring God’s doorbell at midnight, stand there on his front stoop screaming for a gallon of milk and he doesn’t seem to answer the door at all, or he gives you a big ol’ jug of chunky, curdled, lemon milk instead? We all know that God doesn’t always give us exactly what we ask for when we pray.

Jesus wants us to remember that we have a Father who promises to provide for us and he’s going to provide what’s best for us. He uses another scenario to illustrate that point.

Like my sons, who wake up every morning with food on their minds (“I want breakfast” are often the first words out of the mouths of my 5 and 3 year olds). When they ask dad for breakfast I don’t drive them to the reptile hut at the Milwaukee Zoo and drop them in a random tank. If I, as Jesus reminds me, am evil, but still know how to give my kids what they need for daily life, I’m pretty sure that my God knows how to give me what I need for daily life. It may not always be exactly what I asked for, but it will never be something that causes eternal harm. It will always be something for my eternal good.

Do you want to get better at prayer? Remember God’s name. Remember that your Father loves to provide for you, to give you what you need when you ask for it. And thirdly, remember that you can trust that he will indeed give you what you need because he has already gone ahead and provided for your greatest need.

Remember God’s forgiveness.

“Forgive us our sins,” is the Lord’s Prayer petition which Jesus circles back around to at the very end of his lesson on prayer.

“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!”

Remember that God your Father says to you, “I’ve got this. I’ve got your life. As long as you are in my house I will provide for you when you ask. As long as you are in my house I will provide not only your earthly needs, but your spiritual needs. I will provide for you not only today, but for all eternity. I will forgive your sins. I will send you my Holy Spirit through the waters of baptism, through the bread and the wine, the body and blood of my Son, through the words of my Bible. And through my Holy Spirit I will remind you that I have provided for your eternity because your sins are forgiven.”

This is Jesus’ lesson on prayer – a lesson focused on God – his name, his providence, his forgiveness.

As good as it is for us to remember to pray more often, more boldly, more persistently, Jesus knows the best way for us to grow in our appreciation for the powerful privilege of prayer is to draw our eyes away from our failures and our to-do lists, and fix our gaze on our Father in heaven.

This is the core of a good and fruitful prayer life, Jesus says. Remember who your God is, and respond accordingly. Remember he is your Father. Remember his ability and promise to give you each day your daily bread. Remember best of all his forgiveness. Respond accordingly. Ask, seek, knock on your Father's door. He's really good at what he does.

Amen.