



Tower of Strength

**“The name of the Lord is a strong tower
The righteous runs into it and is safe.”**

—Proverbs 18:10

When Jesus Prayed

I cannot think of any occasion when the disciples of Jesus asked for His specific instruction except this one: “Lord, teach us to pray” (Luke 11:1). They didn’t ask Him to show them how to baptize people, they didn’t ask Him to show them how to perform miracles, they didn’t ask Him to show them how to deal with disputes in the church. They asked Him to show them how to pray. They, like all of us, wished to have a closer relationship with God through the avenue of prayer.

Jesus taught them through a model prayer:

When you pray, say:

“Father, hallowed be Your name.

Your kingdom come.

Give us each day our daily bread.

And forgive us our sins,

For we ourselves also forgive everyone who is
indebted to us.

And lead us not into temptation.”

I think we can agree that this is less than we might have expected. It reminds me of the great soccer coach Johan Cruyff, whose players at the beginning

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of a season asked him what was the super-special key to victory, and he deadpanned, “score one more goal than the other team.” Well, duh.

Jesus’ prayer is likewise understated, but for the purpose of instruction. Jesus did not provide them secret divine code words to unlock the portals of heaven, He did not provide them set formulaic expressions, nor did He go on and on for thirty minutes (though, He did pray at length other times). His prayer was brief; just 37 words in English. His prayer was couched in simple language. It gave God due praise, and it touched upon such basic things as daily bread, forgiveness, and help with temptation.

Indeed, this would have stood in stark contrast to what the disciples were used to hearing in the synagogue. I simply do not have the space to describe the sections of the three daily Jewish prayers, much less reprint the words (if you are interested, see www.Hebrew4Christians.com/prayers/Daily_Prayers/daily_prayers.html or www.jewsforJesus.org/publications/issues/vo4-n06/pray). They were usually voiced by a cantor who was a professional. They included prayers recited upon entering the synagogue, prayers to God’s exalted name, blessings upon the Torah, four or five “warm-up” prayers, the call to prayer, several recitations and prayers, more prayers during the Torah reading, and additional prayers upon getting up and leaving the synagogue.

And if we’re talking about prayers at home, they often included a blessing upon getting out of bed, a blessing upon bathing, a blessing upon putting on clothes, a blessing upon putting on a prayer shawl, a blessing to overcome evil, an evening blessing, and so on. Listen to a video of Jewish men praying at the Western Wall, and I think you’ll get the idea. It’s no wonder that the disciples sensed something different, something more profound, in the way that John and Jesus prayed.

Jesus simply talked to His Father in heaven, and invited us to do the same. Good prayer is simple communication, as Paul would later say, “be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God” (Phil. 4:6). This, to the God who “knows what you need before you ask” (Matt. 6:8), and yet wants us to ask anyway, so we may draw closer to Him.

Times Jesus Prayed

It is also instructive to see the occasions that drove Jesus to prayer. Sure, there were some major events that He prayed about. He prayed, perhaps most famously, in the Garden of Gethsemane, as the shadow of the cross loomed before Him, in Luke 22:40–41,

When He arrived at the place, He said to them, “Pray that you may not enter into temptation.” And He withdrew from them about a stone’s throw, and He knelt down and began to pray.

He prayed with such intensity that His sweat fell as drops of blood!

But, there were other times, less frightening, though still very important, when Jesus paused to pray. At the very beginning of His public ministry, we find Him praying.

Now when all the people were baptized, Jesus was also baptized, and while He was praying, heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended upon Him in bodily form like a dove, and a voice came out of heaven, “You are My beloved Son, in You I am well-pleased.” When He began His ministry, Jesus Himself was about thirty years of age (Luke 3:21–23).

Again, when Jesus selected twelve from among His disciples to serve as Apostles of the faith, we find Him praying.

It was at this time that He went off to the mountain to pray, and He spent the whole night in prayer to God. And when day came, He called His disciples to Him and chose twelve of them, whom He also named as Apostles (Luke 6:12–13).

These are a momentous occasions—when one is baptized into Christ, when a new ministry begins, when a child is born, when a meeting house is built, when a member is sick, when a member is wayward, when elders and deacons are chosen—when it would be fitting to join together in focused, determined prayer.

And, there were times when Jesus prayed when it seems like there was nothing urgent on His plate. These prayers may be the most instructive of all, and the ones that shame us the most. For there was no man who has ever lived closer to the Father than Jesus, and yet He still prayed constantly. There was no man who needed prayer less (if we may state it that way) and yet resorted to prayer more. Surely this tells us that we need to speak to our Heavenly Father more often than we do. Luke 5:15–16 records,

The news about Him was spreading even farther, and large crowds were gathering to hear Him and to be healed of their sicknesses, but Jesus Himself would often slip away to the wilderness and pray.

A teacher of mine once pointed out that Jesus spent the days in the marketplace, and the nights on the mountain. Jesus was overwhelmed with caring for so many people, that He *needed* that time to commune with His heavenly Father (not to veg out in front of the TV, but pray). Luke 9:18 says that after the feeding of the 5,000, Jesus found time to go and be “praying alone.” Luke 9:28–29 says that after a lot of teaching work, “He took along Peter and John and James and went up on the mountain to pray.” Luke 22:39 tells us that when Jesus went up to the Mount of Olives to pray, this was “His custom.” In other words, every time Jesus was in Bethany and Jerusalem, the Mount of Olives was one of His favorite places to retreat to, for meditation and prayer.

Sometimes we think we are too busy to pray. Perhaps it is in those moments that we are too busy *not* to pray. —*John Guzzetta*

Quote of the Week:

“Without a mission to evangelize, the Christian tends to either lose his way, or just merge into the spiritual fog around him. In either case, the child of God loses his real identity. He may be content for a while to sit in services and listen. But for the thinking believer, this will never be enough. There must be actual living and working for Christ.”

—*Jack Exum*