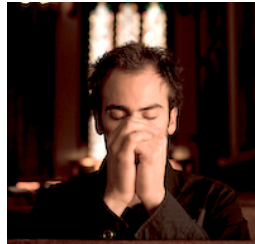


Learning to Pray from the Praying Jesus

Steve Burchett

“Steeeeeve, come in here! It’s time to praaayyy!”

I heard those words from Pastor Floyd Baker often during the summer I served as his church’s youth pastor. I couldn’t go to the office without his invitation to the throne of grace. He never prayed briefly, though there was no sense of vain repetition. I still don’t know how Pastor Baker, at his older age, could stay down on his knees so long. I was always in physical agony by the end of our prayer meeting! It was a great example for a young pastor.



Jesus is another man who has so much to teach us about prayer. Throughout the gospels, there are either statements about Jesus’ prayer life, or His actual prayers. But since Jesus was fully God, why did He need to pray? Though He has always remained fully divine, when he came to earth he also became fully man. He did not forfeit His deity, but He did set aside His God-rights to live as a perfect man. But how does a perfect man live? In total dependence on His heavenly Father and in the power of the Holy Spirit (cf. Acts 10:37-38). Therefore, His prayers were genuine and absolutely necessary, because he was an actual human being.

How does this relate to us? Jesus, as the perfect human, is our example. I’m not denying that our wide-open access to the Father is through the redemptive work of Christ on the cross. With that foundational understanding, though, we are wise to look to the life of Christ as our model for what it means to live in the power of the Spirit—which is seamlessly connected to a robust prayer life.

Luke’s gospel especially emphasizes the praying Jesus. For your own study, here is a list of the places in Luke where there is either a statement about Jesus praying or His actual prayers, and in one reference Jesus Himself mentions that He prayed: 3:21-22; 5:16; 6:12; 9:18, 28-29; 12:21-24; 11:1; 22:31-32; 22:39-46; 23:34, 46.

I want to highlight only one of the verses in Luke where Jesus’ prayer life is mentioned—Luke 5:16. Four questions about this verse will help us gain insight into the prayer life of Jesus, and consequently help us to pray. These questions could be used for the other verses/passages listed above as well.

What is the context of Luke 5:16?

In the preceding verses, Jesus cleansed a leper and told him not to tell others what had happened to him. Instead, “‘Go and show yourself to the priest, and make an offering for your cleansing, as Moses commanded, for a proof to them.’ But now even more the report about him went abroad, and great crowds gathered to hear him and to be healed of their infirmities” (Luke 5:14-15). Immediately after stating the increasing popularity of Jesus, Luke 5:16 says, “But he would withdraw to desolate places to pray.”

What do we learn from Luke 5:16 about the method of prayer?

Jesus prayed by himself in a remote setting. This was a common practice, because the verse talks about “places” that He would find in order to speak to His Father. Some translations even insert the word “often” to make that very point: “But Jesus Himself would *often* slip away to the wilderness and pray” (NASB).

What do we learn from Luke 5:16 about the man Jesus Christ?

Jesus did not let pressing ministry needs (5:15) keep Him from getting alone to pray. We could even deduce that it was the press of the ministry that drove Him to private prayer. At all times, He lived His life in submission to His Father, which required regular communion with Him in desolate places.

What lessons can we draw from this verse for our lives?

First, the responsibilities and stresses of life must not keep us from regular, uninterrupted times of prayer. Hanging on our refrigerator is a cartoon in which a dad and two children are standing in the doorway to the kitchen. The caption says, “Hey hon, when you have a second we all need something at the exact same time” (*andertoons.com*). What wife and mom can’t relate? Whether you are a wife and mom, or a single man trying to survive at work, life can be complicated and overwhelmingly busy, severely reducing time spent in prayer. Learn from Jesus: prayer is often the priority over pressing demands.

Second, prayer brings power from God for life and ministry. Jesus knew this. Do you think you need less power from God than Him? Don’t ever believe that you will be the man or the woman the Lord saved you to be by relying on your talent or personality. How arrogant! You need the Lord. But perhaps you believe you are too weak or average or limited for God to use. Actually, He *delights* to use people just like you who rely on Him through prayer.