



Prayerful Disciples

Prayer is at the heart of discipleship. Prayer is at the heart of our relationship with God. The readings for today lift up God's nature of love and compassion; they assure us of God's readiness to hear and attend to our prayers. As we pray we know God more fully, and as we know God more fully we pray confidently and with persistence.

Focus Scripture: Luke 11:1–13

Religious teachers in the time of Jesus, perhaps including John the Baptist, taught formulaic prayers to their followers. In this passage Jesus also teaches his followers a model prayer. Christians have come to know this prayer as The Lord's Prayer, Jesus' Prayer, or The Prayer Jesus Taught. The version of this prayer in Luke is shorter than the version in Matthew; some scholars believe Luke's rendition to be an earlier version of the prayer. This account forms the "third panel of the triptych" of Jesus' teaching about living as disciples, which started with The Good Samaritan and the visit to Martha and Mary.

The first two statements in the prayer establish its foundation and orientation. God is addressed and described as *holy* or *hallowed*, that is, "set apart from the world." The words of prayer then proclaim a great hope: that God's way of being and God's de-

sire will be present in the world. The third, fourth, and fifth statements ask God to provide for three basic needs – sustaining of the world by the provision of food, restoration of individuals and communities by forgiveness, and protection of the world. We can imagine that if these three things are fully achieved, then God's reign will have come indeed.

Jesus sets this prayer in context by describing further to whom we are praying. Jesus employs two striking images to underline the certainty of God's response to our prayer. The first image is of a neighbour who refuses to provide hospitality. This would have seemed absurd to the story's first hearers because of hospitality customs in first-century Middle Eastern cultures. Hospitality was a social requirement, and often essential to sustaining health and wholeness for one another in community. The bizarre image of a parent who gives a child snakes and scorpions assumes that even the least suitable of parents will provide basic care for a child.

The message to the disciples and to all hearers of this text, including us, is that God is good. God will always hear and respond – not because we are worthy, not because we have the right formula, but because it is in God's nature to be generous and loving.

God's nature of love and compassion always emerges, even at bleak moments such as the time described in **Hosea 1:2–10**. This is a time when the people of Israel treat God abominably, when the prophet utters a devastating word from God, "you are not my people." Even at such a time all is not lost. God's love and compassion break forth, promising that the people will be called "children of the living God."

The writer of **Psalm 85** is confident that righteousness and peace are at the very heart of God; God's favour and pardon will prevail. The psalmist knows the answer to the question "will you be angry forever?" It is a resounding no.

Like the other passages for today, **Colossians 2:6–15, (16–19)** places the substance of our relationship with God squarely in the nature of God, not in the rituals we observe or the prayers we pray. Our relationship with God is possible not because of what we do but because of who God is and what God has done for us.

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Our understanding of the nature of God informs our life of prayer. We believe that God is loving, compassionate, reliable, and responsive, as these passages assert. How then shall we pray?