



THREE

How to Pray, by Rod Cosgrove, Lead Pastor

If you could boil down the essence of life to one single thing, one critical thing that makes it all go, what do you think most people would say that it is? Is it good eating or healthy living? Is it having a long life? Is it gaining money and possessions? We often say, "Variety is the spice of life" – is it that? Or is it something like, "Do what you love, and love what you do"?

In the latter part of Luke 9, Jesus knew the final phase of his ministry was about to begin and so the narrative says that he **"resolutely set out for Jerusalem."** During this journey, some of his most impactful encounters are recorded, along with many of his most significant teachings. One day, after being questioned on what he viewed to be the Most Important Commandment as well as his response via the Story of the Good Samaritan, Jesus came to a village where a woman named Martha welcomed him into her home. You may remember the story...

Luke 10:39-42

Her sister, Mary, sat at the Lord's feet, listening to what Jesus taught. Martha was distracted by the big dinner she was preparing. She came to Jesus and said, "Lord, doesn't it seem unfair to you that my sister just sits here while I do all the work? Tell her to come and help me."

But the Lord said to her, "My dear Martha, you are worried and upset over all these details! There is only one thing worth being concerned about. Mary has discovered it, and it will not be taken away from her."

You can just see it all happening: Martha is buzzing around while Mary is just sitting there. Martha's the hostess; she wants to offer a nice meal and is working hard to get it on the table, but Mary is driving her nuts. Shoot, she would drive me nuts, just sitting around and chatting when there's work to be done. "Jesus, tell her to get to work!" Martha says. Jesus won't, but it does lead him to say something significant: **"There is only one thing worth being concerned about."** Some of your translations may say it a bit more pointedly, **"Only one thing is necessary."**

What is the One Thing Necessary?

When reading the Bible, chronology matters at certain times more than others. Quite literally, what happens after what, and what does it mean that *this* happened after *that*? Well, right after this encounter between Jesus, Martha and Mary, another short but very important conversation is recorded between Jesus and his disciples:

Luke 11:1

Once Jesus was in a certain place praying. As he finished, one of his disciples came to him and said, "Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples."

Connecting with his Heavenly Father was obviously a centrality in Jesus' life and as he disciplined these men, they observed him regularly escaping not only the crowds of people, but also away from them, searching out private places to pray.

Mark 1:35

Before daybreak the next morning, Jesus got up and went out to an isolated place to pray.

This is what Jesus did. They saw him doing this regularly. It seemed to be about relationship with God. And they could see that it had a giant impact on his life and ministry. Morning after morning and other times as well, he escaped to private places to pray. So you know they wondered: "this seems to be very necessary to him..."

Lord, how do you pray?

It's just a little question, but it has rippled throughout mankind again and again, first because of the significance of the topic – they're literally asking God's Son how to pray...to God! – but it was also a giant question because of its scope: *Everyone has the same question!* Think about it: Across the board, all Christians want to know how to pray. We want GOD. We know prayer is key to that. So, we are curious about it, jealous of others who seem good at it, and we question our own ability for it. We wonder how it's really to be done.

We want to pray the way Jesus prayed...

The narrative tells us that he answered them. Again, that may seem so strange: the God of the Universe-Incarnate – THE LORD – took on this tiny-sized but very significant question and answered them as follows:

Luke 11:2-4

Jesus said, "This is how you should pray:

"Father, may your name be kept holy.

May your Kingdom come soon.

Give us each day the food we need,

and forgive us our sins,

as we forgive those who sin against us.

And don't let us yield to temptation."

Did you notice Jesus' answer? He basically said, go for it...learn to do by doing...and this is HOW. Notice that he did NOT say, "This is WHAT you should pray," as though he was laying out words they needed to memorize and say every week when they went to church. Instead, Jesus assumed they WOULD pray and emphasized HOW they'd do it, not so much WHAT they'd say. Even the Matthew variant of the same event confirms the essence of this point, with Jesus answering, "Pray LIKE this."

So you see, there's really only a little bit of technique to it...

HOW: Call God "Father." He is close; he is personal, and we are invited to relate to him as such. But he is also "holy" and his name is holy. He is separate; he is different: "Father, I/we honor you, worship you; you are special...help us not to use you too casually."

HOW: Invite and request that God's eternal reign be established, in this world, in your lives: "Lord, have your way in our lives, at work, in our home, in this situation, in this relationship."

HOW: Express your dependence upon the Lord's provision: "I/we need you to provide for me/us, God. Give us our daily bread."

HOW: Ask forgiveness. "Forgive me...help me to forgive others."

HOW: Ask for victory over sin: "Help me, Father, life is hard; I'm tempted to give in. Don't let the devil or my sinful ways win."

So...to the question the disciples asked, the same question that we all ask, the Lord Jesus gave a very simple answer, and it basically means this:

Life Truth: To seek God, pray.

He is the One Thing Necessary...the Pearl of Great Price...and this is how you find him. Don't get fixated on particular doctrines and methods, many of which have thin biblical precedent at best. Instead, if you want to pray as Jesus prayed, get to working on the themes, attitudes and actions Jesus instructed and demonstrated. Learn to be fed by God through His Word as your daily bread and persist in the conversation. Don't put your prayer energies into trying to figure out magic words, specific postures or special locations. Stop thinking that everyone else is more gifted at it than you. The ones who seem better at it have probably mostly sought the Lord more persistently or they've been doing it longer. But if you want to learn how to pray, get to praying and figure it out...and true connection with God will come.

DISCUSSION: How to Pray

1. Suppose someone came up to you and said, "There is only one thing worth being concerned about," or "Only one thing is necessary." If they then followed that up by asking you what you thought that was, what might you say?
2. In your thinking, or as you see it, what is prayer?
3. How much experience do you have praying? Would you say a lot or a little? How do you view your practice, as in, do you wish you did something different than the way or frequency that you usually pray?
4. We can of course pray at any time and in lots of different ways, but we can see that morning after morning in particular, Jesus escaped to private places to pray. What's your best time to pray and what's your favorite "way"?

5. Considering the popular and so-called "Lord's Prayer," Pastor Rod contends that Jesus lays out more "how's" than "what's":

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Which of these is your favorite? Which do you find easiest to pray...hardest to pray? How does this compel you to grow in your relationship with Jesus?

6. "To seek God, pray." What do you think about this statement? In what ways does it invite you to a place of growth, a place of development?