

# Prayer Is More Than Prayers

by Stewart Ruch

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*Stewart Ruch's sermon emphasizes that prayer is fundamentally about cultivating a friendship with God, which encompasses vision for His kingdom and freedom from sin.*

**Duration:** 26:13

**Scripture:** Exodus 33:11, Matthew 6:9-13, Luke 11:4, John 15:15, James 2:23

**Topics:** "Prayer"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of learning and growing in our relationship with God. He encourages the congregation to prioritize prayer and spending time with God, seeking a deeper friendship with Him. The speaker also challenges the audience to see the work of God in their everyday lives, not just in dramatic or extraordinary circumstances. He concludes by discussing the freedom from sin that comes through prayer and the need to extend forgiveness to others. Overall, the sermon emphasizes the importance of prayer, seeking God's kingdom, and living out the values of the kingdom in our daily lives.

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## Transcript

A couple weeks ago, I went on a bike ride with my three youngest boys, and we got out on the prairie path that runs through the West Chicago meadow. It's a beautiful meadow, marshland, and we had turned around and we were coming back toward home, and my two-year-old was having some issue in the burley, which is the rider there in the back of the bike that I had, and my two older boys were out ahead of us. So I stopped and got out to sort out whatever was going on for Beckett and mess with him back there and get him in a happy place, and I hear the boys about 20 feet ahead on the prairie path go, Daddy, we found a snake.

I was like, great. They're like, can you pick it up? I'm like, suburban children. Of course you can pick it up.

My boy picks snakes right up. Pick up the snake. It's great.

I'm messing right here. Are you sure, Daddy? I mean, it's a snake. I'm like, it's a snake.

It's a garter snake. That's all we ever see here. Pick it up.

So I picked up the snake and my six-year-old Nathanael had the snake and it's doing its thing, you know, and he looked up at the snake and it wasn't a green racer like what I usually see, and it wasn't a black

garter snake. It was brown and mottled. Got the snake.

Got the snake. Got the snake. It moves into position, moves its head up.

So we made our way away from that snake and got right home and Googled Illinois snakes, Illinois Department of Natural Resources. Nothing really came up. Poisonous Illinois snakes.

And indeed, Nathanael had in his hand a baby rattler. They are in DuPage County. Okay, here's what you need to remember.

The kind of father that God is, is exactly and diametrically opposed to the kind of father I was in that moment. All right. So I'm distracted.

I'm trying to help one of my kids over here. And overwhelmed. Well, my other kids are in trouble.

God doesn't get overwhelmed. God doesn't get distracted. He can actually handle all of his kids at one time.

As a matter of fact, he's looking out very carefully to make sure that if you ask for something, he doesn't give you a serpent and he doesn't poison you. But instead, what God does is he calls us into a friendship. Yes, a relationship, but a friendship with him.

And when Jesus wants to teach us about the nature of prayer and what it is, this prayer, he's very clear that while prayer includes prayers, prayer is far more than prayers. It starts. It has its foundation.

It has its origin in friendship with God. Prayer is coming into close companionship with a father who Jesus says is always looking out for you. It's always making sure that you don't get harmed when you ask for help.

As a matter of fact, it was called the Lord's Prayer, which is that section there. It was just read to us in Luke. It starts with the word father.

Jesus teaches not only does God want to look out for you, not only does he want to aid you. He wants to call you into a life with the Holy Spirit. That's a life in the kingdom of God.

He was to console you as a father and make sure you have what you need, but he wants to take you past the place of receiving what you need and give you a vision and a driver and a calling to see this life. Unlike anyone else who does not have the father and does not have the Holy Spirit and does not have the power of Jesus will ever see. He wants you to see things that no one else sees.

He wants you to come free from realities, emotional realities, painful realities, relational realities that would hold anyone else back. She wants you to be free from those realities. And the Lord's Prayer captures a shape that captures a dynamic.

I'm going to do less kind of drilling down into each of these phrases. They're all so rich. And I want to give you the shape of the Lord's Prayer to help teach us that prayer is more than prayers.

Prayer is number one friendship with God. This is what we see in the Lord's Prayer. Prayer is number two, a vision for the kingdom of God.

Prayer is number three, freedom from that which hinders us in living in the kingdom of God, which is sin. So it's an, it's just an F V F shape. Now to go through this shape, think about this shape, engage this shape.

You can use this shape for 10 minutes of prayer, engage in friendship and companionship with God, move to a seeing of the kingdom of God is in your life and how you're called to live the kingdom of God and then into freedom from your sin and the sin against you. Children, if you're five, six, seven, you could do an F V F. If you're new to the Christian faith or exploring, you can begin to try an F V F. If you've been a Christian for 40 years, you can live out friendship, vision and freedom. So let's look at this together.

What is the nature of friendship with God? Our first question. Well, it's a friendship. It's a companionship.

It's a profound kind of closeness with God. The metaphors that are used, the images that are used are being used to draw our heart very close to God. To have a sense that he, once again, he's never distracted or off his game or caught up in something else.

Or do you know that feeling when you come to somebody and you have so much just emotional need, you maybe the kind of person just comes right out and says it, or you just kind of hide it. But you're in a conversation with a friend and you're just hoping, hoping, hoping that they really are going to listen for longer than 10 minutes. They actually did go to 30 or 60 or even two hours of listening.

There's something going on in your life. And you know, that thing, when you walk out of that conversation, you think, man, I got 15 minutes and I needed 45. God's always got 45.

God's always got all day as a deep, profound father and friend. Friendship's a hard word, isn't it? I know it seems casual. It's just because we tend to dishonor friendship from time to time.

The friendship in the Bible is not casual. It's the closest communion that you can have. One of the key figures of the Old Testament, the Hebrew scriptures, is a man named Moses.

We're told that he talked with God face to face as with a friend. Another key figure, Abraham, is described by a New Testament leader as having been a friend with God. Jesus said, I have called you friends.

That defines friendship, not how we might think about it within a social media age. I have called you friends. I have drawn you close to me.

And it is in that close comradeship, that close companionship, that sense of constantly being with one another in one another's lives, that God says, pray, pray out of this friendship, pray out of this companionship. If we think the prayer is simply prayers, then our deal with prayer is how many minutes did I log today or three days ago or a week ago? Can we just name the fact that most of us feel ashamed about our prayer lives? Can we just? It's true. My guess is if I took a vote, most of you would say I'm not very good at prayer.

As a matter of fact, if you have a few minutes, I really prayed. I'd be ashamed. I told her a key leaders together a year ago, went around in the summer and said, Hey, how was your summer? What's every single one of us said? My prayer life's weak.

I'm embarrassed. My prayer life's weak. If we move prayer out of minutes logged into time spent with God, then we begin to understand that there is an expansiveness to the life of prayer.

There's a creativity with the life of prayer. We're going to think about prayer. If we think about time with friends and there's a richness, then there's a kind of way of changing it up so that with one of my very close friends, we text one another and that's a friendship connection or we get on the phone for ten minutes and just debrief our day or we spend a breakfast together or we spend an evening with our families together or the spring.

I just spent three days with a great friend. It's all different kinds of ways that we're connecting and I'm building the friendship, not logging the minutes. And that's what Jesus is teaching us.

And he says, Father, friendship, companionship. Not only is this a close companionship, but it is also a student's relationship. When we come into prayer, we have to understand from the very beginning that we're always saying, as the disciples said, teach us to prayer.

Disciple equals student. That's what the word means. So we are constantly students of prayer.

What does that mean? That means we'll never feel great about our prayer lives. We'll never feel like, oh, I finally got it. Think of an area or a subject that you're interested in.

Do you ever feel like you have finally completely mastered electrical engineering? Or romantic literature of the 19th century? Or Russian? No, you never master anything completely. If you're a true student, you're never going to master prayer. You're always going to go.

I wish I was there and I'm here. Accept it. Live into it.

You're a student. You're supposed to be there. As a matter of fact, what that means is that you're always on a journey of discovery.

You're always learning God. That's prayer, learning God, learning life with God, learning how to stand with Jesus, calling out to the Father for the gift of the Holy Spirit. You're going to spend the rest of your lives learning how to do that.

We're going to spend the rest of our lives together here at resurrection, learning how to pray as a community. Praise the Lord. What did you get graded for just showing up? I always wished my attendance record was my GPA.

I was just great at being there. What if it worked that way? Just showing up, being present to God, the Father, who is your friend. He might be present to you.

If you start that way, you're going to want more. Ten minutes will not be enough. You start rearranging your days.

I want more time with my friend, the Father. Rearrange your month. How can I get a half day of four hours of prayer to do friendship with God, vision of the kingdom, and freedom from sin? How can I get four hours? You start to work that way.

You get drawn in by this friendship with God, and it takes on a life, the God life, the life of God in us and around us of its own. A lot of us stop there. Spiritually speaking, we kind of stop with saying our father and we don't go really any farther in our actual prayer lives or Christian lives.

But then we're given three very unsettling words. And here's the challenge I have as a preacher right now. Most of you know these words really well.

Most of you said I'm a lot here at church or if you don't have a church background, I've even had people that are completely unchurched say the one thing I knew when I came to res was that our father prayer. You've prayed your kingdom come and I've prayed your kingdom come and I've prayed it and I haven't shaken when I prayed it. I've prayed it and I haven't lost my breath when I prayed it.

I prayed it. My heart haven't accelerated when I prayed it because we pray your kingdom come. We're asking God to profoundly unsettle us, to shake us.

To pray your kingdom come is to pray a vision prayer at the heart of the Lord's prayer is a prayer for seeing. That's what vision is. It's asking God to show us, to reveal to us, to allow us to seal in our personal lives, the profundity of the kingdom of God breaking into this world.

It's asking God to say, I want to live as someone who sees the kingdom, who follows the kingdom, who sells everything that I have so they can give all that I am to the kingdom of God. Those who become seers of the kingdom and those who pray your kingdom come. Well, those who can't hear the music think the dancer is mad.

And if many of you don't hear the music of the kingdom, they don't see the beauty of the kingdom. If you're not viewed as somewhat imbalanced from time to time, perhaps you're not praying your kingdom come. If you're not viewed as worldly irresponsible because you've been so caught up in being kingdom responsive, perhaps you're not really praying your kingdom come.

Remember Lucy? She's a figure in C.S. Lewis's Chronicles of Narnia. The book is Prince Caspian. They're on a journey.

They're trying to get somewhere. She's with her sister and her brothers and a dwarf named Trumpkin. And she's at the edge of a precipice trying to figure out if we go this way or this way.

And Aslan, who's the king of Narnia, a lion shows up. She sees Aslan way over there. And he beckons to her to come.

And she looks to her sister and her brother. She's like, see Aslan? He says, go this direction. They look at her and they say, we don't see any lion.

There's no Aslan here. Lucy, what are you talking about? No, no, no. He's right there.

He's he's saying, come this way. I can see him. I can see the king.

I can see Aslan. We've got to go that way. We don't go that way.

We'll be sorry if we go that way. We'll be sorry. Look at that way.

And it was a way full of brambles and challenges and ridges. And they convinced her. No, no, no, no, no.

Lucy, come over here. Come over here. By clarifying way, come by convenient way, come by comforting way, come over here.

This is the way that we're going to go. And Lucy is drawn away from what she saw in the kingdom of God because she was viewed as being imbalanced and seeing things that no one else could see. Lord has mercy on us.

We get drawn away from the kingdom vision that he's given us. And there's a convenience vision that we decide we'll go with anyway. You see what happens in the kingdom of God breaks in.

It looks like the key is in a few chapters later in the book of Luke, a man who was far from God, he meets Jesus. He's so caught up in Jesus in the kingdom of God. He said, I'm going to give away half that I own and anyone that I cheated.

I returned what I took from them fourfold. It looks like an American businessman, a friend of mine, when he travels to Arabic speaking countries, takes with him soccer balls. His coworkers are Muslim.

He doesn't always have a chance to share about Jesus. He sometimes does, but every time he goes, he goes to soccer balls in hand as gifts to open hearts and to open doors. And he says, you know what? My business trips are mission trips on which I do business because he sees the kingdom of God.

The kingdom of God looks like my six year old and my nine year old son seeing a little thing that their sisters wanted for a long time that cost \$10. They pulled their money in a matter of minutes. They had bought this gift for their sister.

Generosity, magnanimity, acting like the kingdom of God is real and the money doesn't matter to bless somebody else. That's what the kingdom of God looks like when it breaks in. And when you pray your kingdom come at the heart of your prayer life is what is my personal vision of the kingdom of God.

Augustine said this prayer. Your kingdom come is a personal. This is a personal prayer.

This is a very clear vision. We get the kingdom vision, the sanctuary transformation, sick of the Lord, the lost, the least. Here's what I worry about.

I think it's so clear sometimes that you think that vision is your only vision. It's your vision. If you're part of our res band of kingdom travelers, it's your vision.

But you've got to have a clear personal kingdom vision business trips for mission trips. Constant generosity, raising children. I don't know what it is, but when you pray your kingdom come, there should be specifics attached to that prayer and people attached to that prayer.

Here's what happens when you pray that prayer and you're living in the kingdom of God. Then and only then does the next line make sense. Look at that with me there.

Verse three, give us each day our daily bread. That prayer is part of the vision prayer. It's a pro dash vision prayer.

It's a provision prayer. Pro means for, or, or, or, or in the plate, you know, in front of what you're doing is if you're out there living for the kingdom of God and you're out there on the edge and you're trying to follow Aslan where he's leading it, and if everyone else is going, I don't see him when you live out there, then you start going, okay, I'm out here. I'm way out here.

And somebody's got to help me. I've got to have daily bread. I've got to have God's strength.

I've got to have God's power. I have to have God's provision that if you live out for a vision and you find yourself in constant need, those two prayers go together. Your kingdom come give us today, our daily bread.

Andrew Murray was a thinker on prayer in the 20th century, early 20th century. He said to pray this is to pray very simply. I have to take hold of God's strength.

That's pro vision. That's the daily bread. Yes, it's holy communion, a daily bread.

Yes, it's spiritual strengthening. Yes, it may be material provision. Pray that prayer, though, when you're caught up in the kingdom of God, that's when you pray that prayer really helps to see someone who sees the kingdom.

And there are those who can mentor us from afar or close up. You want to be around men and women. Children have an incredible gift to see the kingdom, and you want to learn from them.

The first time I ever met someone who had really seen the kingdom of God and was living it was my sophomore year at Wheaton College, a school just five minutes east of here. A man named Floyd McClung came to give teachings. He was a missionary in Amsterdam and Holland at that time, and he told the story about how they had been given a house actually in the countryside of Holland to do ministry in.

And then one day God spoke to him and spoke to his family to move from this countryside into the inner city of Amsterdam, the red light district where prostitutes and pimps were doing their work. He moved his whole family in right next door to a brothel and began to minister the kingdom of God. Now, the details of that were stirring and dramatic, but it wasn't that that caught me, quite honestly.

I listened to that and thought, wow, I doubt I'll ever do that. I might. I doubt it.

What caught me, though, was that he had seen the kingdom of God. He had seen God's work in in the midst of Amsterdam, and then he had stepped into it personally and had taken up his life. And everything he did was defined by that work of the kingdom of God.

And that scene that he had was the first time that I had ever seen somebody who had a scene like that. And I would not be the same ever again. And the resurrection would be called to have a scene as well.

And I would be called to see the work of God, not in Amsterdam. As hard as that must have been, honestly, in some ways, at least you had some interesting drama. I was called to see it here in Wheaton in the suburbs.

It's kind of hard to see the kingdom of God here. Sometimes you all do what I'm saying. I just get I just get kind of happy, just kind of happy with a convenient, kind of comfortable suburban methodizing.

Excuse me. You know, Starbucks. We stopped seeing the kingdom of God come here now in your life, from your heart.

Jesus concludes this teaching on prayer with the call to freedom. It's a freedom from sin. We're taught to pray a confessional prayer, forgive us our sins in verse four.

We ourselves forgive everyone who is indebted to only. I want to spend a little bit of time teaching on this. Just a moment.

I'll lead us not to temptation. There's a longer prayer in a book called Matthew. It's more expanded.

It's the same idea and the same shape. It's just longer and more extended in the book of Matthew. That also finishes with the phrase, deliver us from evil.

Let's deal with sin. But let me just say a little bit about this. It is right to pray for protection and freedom from fear.

I want to talk about freedom from sin, but I want you to know it's right to pray for freedom from fear, to pray for protection, especially of your spiritual life and those who are close to you, their spiritual lives, to pray for the countries and to pray for their protection. That's a good, right and holy thing to do. I think sometimes we think that's perhaps too self-serving.

I think biblically we have an argument to pray for that. The first and foremost in this call to freedom is the call to pray for freedom from sin. We talk a lot about confession of sin here at resurrection and taught a lot on that.

There is that confession is also that freedom of forgiving others their debt against us. And what Jesus teaches on that here at the end is because unless we get freedom from unforgiveness, we fill our souls with that energy. We fill our souls with constant conversation about the one who has offended us.

If you've been deeply offended by someone, someone has sinned against you. Don't you know kind of how it goes, right? Your first thought is how dare they. And your second thought is they owe me for what they've done.

And then it begins to kind of take over your inner conversation. And you find that you're always talking with them one way or another, where you're writing out all that you want to say to them and you awaken in the morning. And the first thing in your mind is, oh man, how did that person do that to me? And the last thing you think before you go to bed is how did they do that to me? And it just begins to like, take up all this energy and all this expanse within your soul.

And you're just walking around thinking mostly about who has offended you and not about friendship with God and not about a vision for the kingdom and not about asking for your daily bread, because you're just thinking about how you've been offended. And he just says, you've got to get free from that. If you want to be a man or woman of prayer, if you want to live in friendship with me, I who have forgiven you everything, you must now imitate me and forgive those who have sinned against you.

Forgiveness of another who has sinned against you is unilateral. It does not go both ways necessarily. When it goes both ways and somebody sins against you and you forgive them and they ask for forgiveness, then you get reconciliation.

It's a beautiful thing. It's a Christian thing. It's taught throughout the Bible, but you cannot always wait to get that reconciliation moment when someone has offended you.

You may have to unilaterally forgive first and then pray and wait that reconciliation can occur. I thought reconciliation and forgiving someone else was the exact same thing for years. So someone deeply offended me.

I waited five years for them to finally see what they'd done. And they really had offended me. Many around me said they offended me.

It was kind of clear they defended me. I waited five years. I can't forgive them until they ask for forgiveness.

Is that what you thought? I mean, did he wait to forgive me until I asked him for forgiveness or while I was still a sinner, did Christ die for me? And when all my words, I can actually get free from this and not wait on them. I can actually forgive someone who's offended me and create all kinds of new space in my soul for friendship with God and living by a vision. It just happened two weeks ago.

Someone in another state deeply offended me. Complicated situation. Pretty stunning email.

And I realized, man, I could hold this and lose days of time with God. Days of prayer. I could just unilaterally forgive.

Pray that one day we'll have reconciliation but unilaterally forgive them. They probably don't even know what they're doing. Take this shape, brothers and sisters.

It's a gift that Jesus gave us. He taught us how to pray. Friendship with God.

A personal vision of the kingdom and freedom from sin. In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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