



Links Players

Teach Us To Pray - Lesson 1: The Larger Perspective

Now Jesus was praying in a certain place, and when he finished, one of his disciples said to him, “Lord, teach us to pray.... (Luke 11:1, ESV)

One ongoing debate in golf is whether putting is an art or science. I once observed a disagreement between two players after one of them had missed a six-foot putt. He yanked it back, putted it again, and made it.

The debate ensued — had he made it on the second try because he had more data (i.e., how much it broke) or because he was more relaxed (i.e., feel)? Perhaps, I argued, it is both. I am reasonably sure I didn’t convince either one, but it at least stopped the annoying yackety-yak.

One thing is for certain—our ability to accurately read greens is immensely important if we are to be a good putter. Any reasonably good putter knows to go through the mental check list (intuitive for seasoned players): Is it uphill or downhill? Does it break right or left? Is it against or with the grain? Is it fast or slow?

Reading scripture is not altogether unlike reading greens. To do it well, one must ask basic questions: For example, what is the genre? Is it literal prose or largely apocalyptic (e.g., Ephesians versus Revelation)?

One often overlooked category in reading greens and reading scripture is the “larger context.” No doubt, when watching the Masters, you have heard the commentator say, “it breaks toward Rae’s Creek.” That is not something you can see while kneeling behind the ball. That requires knowing the larger context. Similarly, when reading scripture, it is immensely helpful to know the larger context.

When we look at the immediate context, we discover some massively important truths about the One to whom we pray. For example, unlike our earthly fathers, God is good and desires to give his children good gifts (Luke 11: 11-13), unlike pagan ideas of his nature, God is our Father! (Luke 11: 2, 13), unlike Scrooge, God is generous! (Luke 11:13), and in contrast to a reluctant friend, God is eager to give! (Luke 11:

5-10). Most importantly, God desires to give us himself in the person, power, and purity of the Holy Spirit (Luke 11:13).

Knowing whom we address in prayer is unspeakably important, if for no other reason than it shapes how we approach him, or if we approach him at all. In addition, when we pray as he taught us, we can be confident that he hears and answers. Of course, the opposite is true too.

If we consider Matthew’s account, we discover that we are also taught how not to pray: 1) don’t pray like pagans who intend to manipulate God with many words, and 2) don’t pray like religious hypocrites who merely want to be seen by others.

What is clear in Matthew, is clear everywhere — God rewards those who pray according to his will and refuses to acknowledge those who choose to pray according to their will.

Prayer – Jesus, teach us to pray!

READING - Matthew 6: 5-15; Hebrews 11: 6; Luke 11:1-13.

OPENING QUESTIONS: Are you a good putter? Is putting largely a matter of science or art (feel)? How critical is it to read the green correctly?

1. In Matthew’s account, what two ways are we instructed not to pray? Should we expect answered prayer if we disregard these instructions? Look at verses 5-8.

2. In **Hebrews 11: 6**, we see two fundamental requirements for drawing near to God in prayer. What are they?

3. In **Luke 11: 1-13**, what do we learn about God’s character that would encourage us to go deeper in
