“Lord, teach us to pray.” The disciples might not have been the sharpest tools in the shed, but they had figured something out. When Jesus went off by himself and prayed, he was having intimate conversation with God Almighty, the Ruler of the Universe, the High King of Heaven. They wanted a piece of that action. “Lord, teach us to pray.”

They wanted to tap into the pipeline that connected them with the greatest power source ever imagined. If they had access to God, the ability to communicate directly with God, there was no telling how they might change the world. This would be the greatest discovery ever.

Put a story like this in the hands of Stephen Spielberg and he might have the makings of another Indiana Jones adventure, *The Search for the Throne of Grace*. To reach the throne of grace, to talk directly with God, Indy would have to get into that fun little airplane so we could mark his progress on a map as he flies around. There would have to be bad guys blocking access every step of the way. Indy was always battling the Nazis, but in this installment we could have the bad guys be Romans and Philistines and even the devil himself. There would be spears and swords and poisonous darts and a wide chasm that requires faith as you step out into the vast void and just when you thought you had cleared every obstacle there would be snakes…Indy hates snakes…. But make it all the way and you could approach the throne of grace. “Lord, teach us to pray.” And Jesus handed them an Indiana Jones action figure and said, “Go for it.”

Put a story like this in the hands of Dan Brown and who knows what convoluted and fantastic tale he would put together for Robert Langdon to uncover. *The Da Vinci Code* would look like child’s play compared to the mental gymnastics required to uncover the access code to the throne of grace. Langdon would have to unravel a Fibonacci sequence of numbers that reveals an anagram which would lead to a keystone beneath an obelisk containing references to a passage that hid a cryptex engraved with the mysterious Italian word *Aringarosa* (the word means red herring, which might as well mean wild goose chase). Do all this within 24 hours and you too could have access to the throne of grace. “Lord, teach us to pray.” And Jesus handed them an ancient box containing mysterious clues and said, “Go for it.”
It seems like anything of value becomes a heavily guarded secret kept mysteriously away from the hands of common people. Knights Templar and sacred priests hold these secrets close and pass them down for generations and their discovery could destroy the world of faith. If the Holy Grail, the Shroud of Turin, the Ark of the Covenant and so much more have been hidden away and kept secret, how much more the throne of grace where a human could talk directly to God.

What if it did not take an Indiana Jones to risk life and limb to approach the throne of grace? What if Robert Langdon did not have to know every obscure chart and code and historical oddity to approach the throne of grace? What if the door was unlocked and the handle turned with ease? What if Jesus himself opened the door and revealed the throne of grace and said, “Come in. It’s all yours”?

The disciples ask, “Lord, teach us to pray.” The disciples see Jesus approaching this throne of grace at all times in all situations. The disciples want to know how they can approach the throne of grace. “Lord, teach us to pray.” Disciples through the ages have asked. In response to the request, “Lord, teach us to pray”, Jesus said, “When you pray, say:

*Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen”*

The prayer is 65 words, including the Amen at the end. In Luke it is only 33 words. Matthew has 52 words. We have come to know it in a slightly extended form. And I do mean slightly. Young children memorize it quickly. The longest word is temptation, and that is only three syllables. Jesus does not put any strings or conditions or dire warnings on the prayer. He just gives it to the disciples. They asked him to teach them to pray, so he taught them.

Jesus teaches the disciples a prayer that is simple to learn and simple to say. The prayer gives the disciples access to the throne of grace. Yet we should not underestimate the importance of the prayer Jesus teaches. Although Jesus gives access to the throne of grace, access that truly is easy, the access is not without a cost, indeed a great cost.

Jesus teaches disciples to call God, “Our Father.” Jesus is the second person in the trinity. The trinity is the revelation that the one God exists as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It is natural for Jesus to call God Father. But what in the world does it mean when he teaches us, his disciples, to call God our Father? That lesson is not fully available to us in Luke 11. However, when we look back on the work of Christ, we see that in Jesus Christ God was opening the door for human beings to become children of the living God. We become children of the living God through adoption, not through natural right or natural birth.
That adoption is made real in baptism. Going under the waters of baptism we die to our old self. But it is not just we who die. It is Christ who died first. So we die with Christ. In dying with Christ we discover he did more than die. He was raised again. In the same way we, when we rise from the waters of baptism experience a new birth. We become a new creation. We are born again. Now we live as children of the Heavenly Father.

Paul writes in Roman 8, “…you received the Spirit of adoption. And by the Spirit we cry, ‘Abba, Father.’” So Jesus gives access to the throne. It is an access bought at the price of his own blood. Before we had access to throne we were separated from God. It was sin that separated us from God. The barrier of sin was overcome and access to the throne of grace was granted because God overcame sin through the death of Jesus Christ. God presented Jesus Christ as a sacrifice of atonement. (Romans 3:25)

Hebrews explores the redemptive work of Jesus Christ through the image of the great high priest. Jesus, the great high priest, offered his own life as a sacrifice of atonement for human sin. It is because of the atoning work of Jesus Christ, our great high priest, that the writer of Hebrews gave us those beautiful words, “Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.” (Hebrews 4:16)

“Lord, teach us to pray.” Jesus teaches his disciples to approach the throne of grace with confidence, not with fear or uncertainty or shame or doubt. “When you pray, say, ‘Our Father...’” We have access because we have been adopted. We come to God and call him a name of intimacy, a name of trust, a name of confidence. We call God our Father. Or as Paul, not exactly a sentimental guy put it, we call God, “Abba.” Some say that means Daddy. There is no Fibonacci sequence, cryptex or anagram here. In a beautiful revelation that is direct and forthright, we have a Heavenly Father, a throne of grace, and a God whose children are encouraged to trust.

With the door to the throne of grace thrown wide open, Jesus teaches us a prayer that is simple to learn and simple to say. Nevertheless, when you pray the Lord’s Prayer, you realize it is not simple to practice. This simple prayer is missing a simple word. The word that is missing is the word me. Not one of the 33 words in Luke 11, or the 52 words in Matthew 6, or the 65 words in the Lord’s Prayer as we have it today, is the word me. This prayer is not about me. It is not about my issues and my hopes and my concerns...at least not in the way that I am tempted to make prayer be about me.
This prayer is about God. This prayer is about the name of God being hallowed, made holy, reverenced, worshiped, adored, exalted, lifted high, and praised. This prayer is about the kingdom of God and the will of God. Jesus gave us a wonderful image of the kingdom of God when he announced his ministry by saying, “The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.” (Luke 4:18,19) The Year of the Lord is a phrase associated with a time when every single person is gifted with the inalienable right of belonging. The Year of the Lord’s favor fits the Lord’s Prayer perfectly. Every child will one day know they belong to God, and they will call out to God, “Abba, Father.” One day all God’s beloved children will be returned to home and welcomed into the safety of God’s loving arms. In a broken and disfigured world we set aside the word me and we pray “Thy kingdom come and thy will be done…on earth as it is in heaven.”

When we do pray about needs we pray for all with needs. Yes, we pray for daily bread. But when we pray for daily bread we pray for our daily bread. That prayer for daily bread sets us right back into Exodus 16 where God gave enough bread for each person in the community. We pray that in our community, in our world, that each one will have enough. We pray that as the body needs food the soul needs forgiveness. We cannot be healthy and whole if our relationships are broken and shattered. “Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.” Notice that the prayer holds out the real possibility that we will forgive our debtors. The forgiveness of God works a miracle in us. We who have been forgiven so graciously, whose sin has been atoned at such a great cost, become a people who do practice forgiveness.

Though this prayer is simple it is not naïve. Certainly as adopted children the Spirit begins to work in us so that we pray for all to have daily bread and we pray that we might practice forgiveness. At the same time, knowing how fragile and frail we are, so we also pray, “Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.” With childlike trust in God our Father we openly and honestly face the fact that we are weak and frail and prone to wander. So we pray, “Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.”

This prayer is so simple and direct we can learn this prayer. This prayer is so simple and direct we can say this prayer. What remains to be seen is whether we will practice this prayer? I am not really sure what it means to practice this prayer. You can pray it in less than a minute. But when you practice it, you might find it takes you a lot longer. You might find yourself stopping at the word Father and reflecting on the grace of God that would adopt a sinner such as me. Say in heaven and your heart might break at the beautiful thoughts of tears being dried and sorrows being erased and loved ones being united. Pray for the kingdom and will of God to come and be done and you might find yourself reaching out and bringing the broken bits and pieces of this world to that throne of grace, praying for an end to wars and healing
from disease and for love to replace the hatred and violence that is so prevalent. Ask for daily bread, for daily needs and every loved one you know might come to mind as they all have needs…and strangers and aliens might start to become more important as that word our grabs hold of your heart. Pray about forgiving others and you might leave your gift at the altar to go find someone whom you just need to patch things up with. And if praying about temptation and evil doesn’t bring a million things to mind, either God has graciously sheltered you or you are turning a blind eye to the wickedness that surrounds you, and me, the sin that so easily entangles.

I am not really sure what it means to practice this prayer. We might only find out what it means to practice this prayer by actually practicing this prayer, by trying it out, by sitting with it often, by sitting with it and giving it our full attention, by sitting with it and wrestling and seeking and asking and being silent and giving some groans one minute and some shouts of praise the next.

I do know this. When you pray this prayer you are not alone. That same book of Hebrews that invites us to approach the throne of grace with confidence also tells us something about Jesus Christ. The same Jesus Christ who gave his life for us is doing something for us right now. Jesus is in heaven, but he is not resting. In Hebrews 7:25 we read that even now Jesus is interceding for us. He is praying on our behalf. I don’t know exactly what it means to practice this prayer. But when you go to practice it, you find Jesus is right there, making intercession for us, for you and for me.

That is the beauty of the Lord’s Prayer. The throne of grace is right here. The throne of grace is right here and we are invited to approach it. We are not sure how to pray so we ask, “Lord, teach us to pray.” And he does. Jesus does. Jesus bows down at the throne of grace. Jesus bows down on behalf of all God’s children. Jesus bows down and prays for God’s name to be hallowed, for God’s kingdom to come and for God’s will to be done, for all God’s children to have daily bread and experience forgiveness and be kept from temptation. Jesus Christ lives to make intercession.

“Lord, teach us to pray.” With his knees bent and his heart lifted up, he says, “When you pray, say:

Our Father, who art in heaven…”