

Seeking God Through Prayer (Luke 11:1-13)

Sunday, February 20, 2022

Outreach Pastor Sam Creagar

11 One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he finished, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples."

2 He said to them, "When you pray, say:

"Father, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come. 3 Give us each day our daily bread. 4 Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us. And lead us not into temptation."

5 Then Jesus said to them, "Suppose you have a friend, and you go to him at midnight and say, 'Friend, lend me three loaves of bread; 6 a friend of mine on a journey has come to me, and I have no food to offer him.' 7 And suppose the one inside answers, 'Don't bother me. The door is already locked, and my children and I are in bed. I can't get up and give you anything.' 8 I tell you, even though he will not get up and give you the bread because of friendship, yet because of your shameless audacity he will surely get up and give you as much as you need.

9 "So I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. 10 For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.

11 "Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? 12 Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? 13 If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"

Luke 11 (NIV)

Over the past few weeks, we have challenged you all to consider three very important commitments:

Decide THAT you will seek God.

Decide HOW you will seek God

Decide WHY you will seek God

Deciding THAT you will seek God and WHY you will seek God are deeply personal decisions to make. We believe that nothing is more important in this life than saying "yes" to God's love and invitation to follow him. And we know that every day we are presented with new challenges and difficult circumstances that lead us to consider, "why should I seek God in relation to this issue, or this relationship, or this opportunity?" What does it even mean or look like to work out the "WHY" of seeking God?

In an effort to help you discern WHY you will seek God, we've committed the last few weeks to considering HOW you might seek God. We've looked at seeking God in The Word and seen the importance of refining our wisdom by the truth found in the pages of our Bibles. Last week Pastor Steve challenged us to consider seeking God through the practice of fasting, which can be an effective and satisfying way of seeking out and growing closer to God.

Today, we will consider **HOW to seek God...through prayer.**

Of all the practices we've talked about over the last few weeks, prayer might be the one people have the most experience or familiarity with, even if they don't consider themselves particularly religious. Year after year research firms report that many adult Americans (usually more than 50%) say they pray to something or someone at least once a day, while less than 25% report they don't really pray at all¹.

Prayers can be short or VERY long; they can be rigidly recited or flexibly relaxed; they can be said out loud or kept in silence; lifted up in the privacy of a prayer room or whispered over a snack in the break room at the office.

As Christians, we believe prayer is something intimate and sacred. It is a privilege to be able to speak to God and be assured that listens – and not only that he listens, but that he is delighted to hear from us and has a desire to answer our prayers with provision and blessing.

Still, even with assurances like this, it's still pretty normal to wonder, “okay...I get that I can pray...but what should my prayers be like? How am I supposed to talk to God?”

Jesus offers some very practical answers to that exact question in our passage this morning.

In Luke 11:1-13, Jesus provides his disciples with some guidance on the basics of prayer. He gives them a framework for what the content of their prayers might look like. We'll see that in vv1-4.

But he doesn't stop there. He also reminds them that prayer is not just about WHAT we say. Jesus teaches us that our prayers go beyond content, and that we must pay attention to the faith and confidence behind our prayers because of WHO we offer those prayers to.

Jesus teaches that we ought to ***pray with purpose, and with shameless boldness before God, our Father, who loves us.***

First, let's take a look at the idea that we ought to ***pray with purpose.***

Our passage begins with a disciple asking Jesus for a very good thing – “*teach us to pray.*” All four gospel writers make it very clear Jesus prayed, and he prayed *a lot*. He'd pray before doing miracles. He'd pray in the middle of his sermons. He'd pray while surrounded by crowds. He'd pray in quiet, lonely places. So one of the disciples correctly identifies that Jesus seems to have this prayer thing figured out, and asks for some lessons.

Jesus clearly approves, because he jumps right in and says “alright, here's what you're going to do: first, you're going to start out by addressing God as FATHER...”

And that invitation, to speak to God as FATHER, impacts everything about what we are doing when we pray.

*By giving his followers permission to pray to God as Father, Jesus is telling you that everything you say and ask for and confess within your prayer is offered up to the God who **cares about you.***

¹ <https://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/frequency-of-prayer/>

You cannot miss the importance of this address. If God is a Father to us – not an earthly father whose best days are still mixed up with failure and sin and shortcomings, but a PERFECT and GOOD and LOVING Father – then we don't have to impress him with our prayers. We don't have to convince him to listen to us. Our words are not magic incantations of power that cajole God into action. That God is a Father means we are having an intimate conversation with someone who wants to hear from us. Who wants us to seek him. We pray to the Father who loves us and wants to help when we call.

Nothing in the prayer that follows requires eloquence. There is no need for superior intelligence or cleverly worded requests. You bring yourself, bring your faith (strong or weak as it is), and trust that when you say "Father", His reply back will be "yes, my son?" or "yes, my daughter?" "I am here, and I am listening."

I know that the relationship of a "father" is a difficult one for many and not always associated with happy or safe memories. If that is the case for you, I'd encourage you to look through the Bible and see how God describes himself as a Father. If you want help with a study like that come find me, or let one of the pastors know. Because God tells us He is a Father of tremendous love and faithfulness. I wouldn't want you to miss out on the profound beauty of being able to call out to him in this way.

The elements of the prayer that comes after our invitation to address God as Father are a guide, a framework, a template for what sort of things might be good to include in our prayers.

This is important: I do not believe that Jesus is trying to teach us a rigid, rote-memory prayer that must be recited exactly as it is written in order for it to be effective or be heard by God.

For one thing, the words we have here are just a little bit different from the "Lord's Prayer" we find recorded in the Book of Matthew. Additionally, we can find all sorts of prayers from Jesus, his disciples, and the later apostles and members of the early Christian Church that don't look exactly like this prayer in the Gospel of Luke. And the Apostle Paul even tells us that sometimes we won't know what to pray at all, but can trust the Holy Spirit to step in and speak on our behalf. All of that is okay – there is no need to panic. (Those of you who are strict rule followers, take some deep breaths, I promise there is nothing but good news and grace to be had in this flexibility regarding what could be said in prayer)

I think what we Jesus was trying to teach us is that when we pray, it is good to remember two pillars, or maybe guardrails, of prayer:

- (1) It is good begin our prayers with praise for our Father and align ourselves with His interests first;
- (2) Then, once our hearts are centered and settled on God, we can bring forth our own needs, petitions, provisions, and confessions.

2 *'Father, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come...'*

Luke 11 (NIV)

So we are instructed to begin our prayers by declaring that God, and His Name, to be “hallowed”. God is Holy, set apart, incomprehensibly glorious and worthy, oh so worthy, of being praised. We begin by humbling ourselves before the Lord of Glory, the Greatest Being in the Universe, the unrivaled and incomparable God.

This gets us in the right state of mind. Whether we come to God in prayer full of joy or weeping with sorrow, or even on just an ordinary day where things are pretty much okay, we acknowledge that in prayer we approach the throne of God and speak to him with a balance of childlike wonder and deep, soul-penetrating reverence.

And while it is true (and good!) that we often pray in order to bring our needs before God, it is always good to slow down and remember His purposes before our own. “*Your kingdom come...*”, that no matter what I may need today, my greatest need is to see the full reign of God drawing ever nearer to this world. When we pray “your kingdom come”, we pray for Jesus to return. We pray for the elimination and destruction of evil. We pray to see all that is good and beautiful and resurrected to flourish, forever.

I will freely confess to you all that far too often I speed through the beginning of my prayers. That I think little of the majesty of the One I speak to, and get too focused on getting my list of needs (or wants) out in the open and addressed as soon as possible. I make prayer a tool to get me mine, instead of an opportunity to talk closely and lovingly and purposefully with the Almighty. If we’re going to seek God through our prayers...we must make it our purpose to put God first.

I’d encourage all of you to consider: when you pray, do you take the time to remember and revere the One to whom you are praying?

Do you leave space to be blown away by the fact that God the Father – God of ALL Creation – listens to you as you speak?

Are you humble or assuming before Him? Do you pray for his interests, for his Kingdom, or only your own?

After we’ve set our minds and hearts into the right kind of attitude, Jesus tells us we should then let God know of our needs:

3 Give us each day our daily bread. 4 Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us. And lead us not into temptation.”

Luke 11 (NIV)

I don’t want to make too much or too little of these requests. But they are fairly straightforward:

- *Yes, we are to ask God for the provision of our daily needs.* This is not a demand for abundance. We’re not forwarding God our Amazon Wish List. With this request we remind ourselves that all we have is an extension of God’s gifts and grace. Our fundamental needs – physical, emotional, and spiritual – must every day be sustained by the goodness of our generous Father.
- *Yes, we MUST ask God for the forgiveness of our daily sins.* Not a day goes by that I do not need to seek forgiveness for the ways I have fallen short of faithfulness. I don’t do what I should, and I do what I shouldn’t, and I need the daily mercies of God and the power of Christ’s death on the cross to make me clean and set me right again.

- *Yes, in recognition and reflection of the forgiveness we receive from God, we must also forgive others who sin against us.* Not because doing so earns our own forgiveness, but because we are followers of Jesus. He does not hold our wrongs done to him against us. We must not hold the wrongs done to us against others. As we receive mercy, we share mercy too.
- *And yes, we need the blessing and strength of God to avoid future sins by being led away from temptation.* I do not believe this means there is a risk of God ever leading us into temptation. He is a Good Father, and does not wish to see fall into evil. Instead, this prayer admits that all too often as we choose our own paths we will charge, headlong into situations that lead to sin. So we cry out to God, please, open our eyes to see You leading us not to temptation, but to obedience and righteousness.

Again, I do not believe Jesus taught this with the intent that it be the exact or only way we pray. Instead, I think Jesus was helping us understand that we should, as best we can, pray with purpose. Don't fill your prayers with meaningless catchphrases or rambling. Bring your needs before God. Be your raw, vulnerable, insufficient self. This is not a time to try and fool God into thinking that you're mostly okay on your own, but if He could just spot you a blessing or two, that would be a big help.

Because here's the hard truth: you are NOT okay on your own. You need this daily communication with God. You need these words to matter. So don't go into prayer like it's a hobby or small talk or silly little ritual. ***Pray like you need it***, as if the breath in your lungs may fail if you don't use it to call to your Creator.

Pray with purpose.

But that's not all.

Jesus could have ended his lesson right there. But prayer is not just about content. It's also about having faithful confidence in the One we are praying to. To make this clear, Jesus tells a story.

He says, suppose someone shows up at your house in the middle of the night (and, it may be helpful to remember that for Jesus' original audience, hospitality was a critically important cultural value...your reputation was directly linked to your communal kindness) .

You welcome them and start to help them settle in, but then realize that you have no food to offer them! So you run across the street and (boom boom boom) knock on your neighbor's door. You say, "hey, I need to borrow some food, and I need it right now!" Your neighbor is understandably grumpy about being woken up and is reluctant to help. He's already settled in for the night with this family (in those days families would have likely all slept on the same mat together, and if they had animals they'd likely be in the room too). To get up he'd have to step all over everyone, push the cow to the side, rummage round the kitchen to see if extra bread had been baked that day, unlock the door in the dark, and by the time all that was done there's little doubt that all the children would awake. So the neighbor first replies with a bit of a lame excuse, "uh, sorry friend...the door is locked." But you're still out there, (boom boom boom) "hey, I really need this, I have other choice but to stand here and ask you for help."

I think it's an intentionally comedic story, but Jesus has an important point to make with it:

8 I tell you, even though he will not get up and give you the bread because of friendship, yet because of your shameless audacity he will surely get up and give you as much as you need. 9 “So I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. 10 For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.

Luke 11 (NIV)

This is a really amazing invitation from Jesus. He’s telling you it’s okay to pound on God’s door in your hour of need. Bring out your “shameless audacity” – your shameless boldness, and (boom boom boom) let Him know what is going on. Because God is not a grumpy neighbor who has to trip over goats and chickens and children just so he can shove a few loaves of day-old-bread into your hands. God is a Father who, without us even fully understanding that we needed to ask for it, sent Jesus His Son to live with us, walk among us, teach us, love us, die for us, and be resurrected in order to save us and satisfy our deepest needs for forgiveness and everlasting life. He has daily gifts for our basic needs, but he also has so much more:

11 “Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? 12 Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? 13 If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!”

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Here at the close of Jesus’ teaching on prayer, we return to the importance of WHO you are praying to, WHO you are seeking when you speak. If earthly fathers, sinful and flawed as we are, can figure out how to give good gifts to our children...then how much more will our perfect, flawless Father in Heaven give not just good gifts, but the GREATEST gift of the Holy Spirit?

Your deepest need, your greatest longing, is already in the generous hands of your Heavenly Father who waits on the other side of the door of your decision. I am not trying to spiritualize this passage to mean God isn’t interested in meeting your very real, very physical daily needs. He absolutely is, and we the Church are all a part of how that gets done. But there is one thing those who have cannot provide to those who have not. And that is the promise of forgiveness and salvation and everlasting life in the kingdom to come. The Good News of Jesus’s death and resurrection, which we will begin to think about and celebrate in just a few weeks, is there for all who seek and knock.

We pray with purpose, and with shameless boldness before God, our Father, who loves us.



That is my wife, Alison, and our beautiful, amazing, incredible little girl, Abigail (and yes her tiny adorable hands are clasped in prayer in this photo). She’s still working building her vocabulary, but that doesn’t stop her from letting me know what her needs are each and every day. Snacks...water...the Netflix cartoon “Trash Truck”.

And even though I am a sinful, flawed father, I still do my best to address every one of these needs, the moment I hear it, with a balance of giving her what she has asked for and being sure she’s truly getting what she needs.

Because I love her, more than I ever knew I'd be able to love someone. I look at that picture and I'm like, "yeah...I'm going to do all I can for you, always, my child."

And if that's how God looks at us...seeing us as His small, beautiful, amazing, incredible little girls and boys with all our needs and all our flaws and all our sins and stills says "yeah, I'm going to do all I can for you, always, my children"...then I get why he tells us to be shamelessly bold in our pounding on His door. I get why it's okay to trust him, to rely on Him, to boldly ask him for the satisfaction of our deepest needs. To seek Him out above all others.

Because, *we pray with purpose, and with shameless boldness before God, our Father, who loves us.*