



Unit .23

Session .03

Jesus Teaches About Prayer

Scripture



**Luke 11:1-4,
9-13; 18:1-8**

1 He was praying in a certain place, and when he finished, one of his disciples said to him, “Lord, teach us to pray, just as John also taught his disciples.” **2** He said to them, “Whenever you pray, say, Father, your name be honored as holy. Your kingdom come. **3** Give us each day our daily bread. **4** And forgive us our sins, for we ourselves also forgive everyone in debt to us. And do not bring us into temptation.” ... **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, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened. **11** What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead of a fish? **12** Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? **13** If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children,

how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him?” ... **1** Now he told them a parable on the need for them to pray always and not give up. **2** “There was a judge in a certain town who didn’t fear God or respect people. **3** And a widow in that town kept coming to him, saying, ‘Give me justice against my adversary.’ **4** “For a while he was unwilling, but later he said to himself, ‘Even though I don’t fear God or respect people, **5** yet because this widow keeps pestering me, I will give her justice, so that she doesn’t wear me out by her persistent coming.’” **6** Then the Lord said, “Listen to what the unjust judge says. **7** Will not God grant justice to his elect who cry out to him day and night? Will he delay helping them? **8** I tell you that he will swiftly grant them justice. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?”

Intro Options



Main Point:
Jesus taught His disciples to pray with faith, persistence, and dependence on God.

Option 1

It's amazing to watch a toddler's explosion of language. They go from aimless, haphazard babbling to a few simple words to full sentences seemingly overnight. From "ball" to "my ball" to "I want that ball, please." From wordless crying to very articulate demands. From limited communication skills to holding entire conversations. Just like that, they begin to take part in the day-to-day communication that we so often take for granted.

Prayer is like that. We humans start out with a very limited vocabulary when it comes to entering into conversation with the Godhead. We don't know much about God at first, but as we read His word and are indwelt by the power of the Holy Spirit, we start to understand more and more. With that understanding comes better communication skills, and we show that skill through prayer.

- **How has your prayer life deepened over the years? If it hasn't deepened, why not?**

Like children, we have to learn the purpose of getting better with our communication, and we have to trust the process and the hiccups along the way. But as we master this language, we grow closer and closer to the God who is teaching us through the act of prayer.

Option 2

When Jesus came on the scene, there had been no such message in quite a long time. The Jews were experiencing oppression at the hands of the Roman empire, and the last time they'd heard from God was through the prophet Malachi over 400 years before, and His message wasn't exactly encouraging—"I have loved you, yet you have profaned My altar, you've stolen from Me, you've been adulterous!" The Jews knew from experience that these charges were accompanied by harsh consequences, and this time was no exception. As time passed, God's people came to realize they were suffering perhaps the worst punishment imaginable—for hundreds of years, they'd received no word from the Lord, and they probably wondered, have we finally gone too far? Has God forsaken us?

God's people longed for a real connection with God. They wanted to be freed from Roman oppression. They wanted to hear from Him. Deep down, we all do, because we were created for a relationship with God. Jesus had in a very real way the things they wanted—a genuine connection with God. So His disciples followed this great Teacher, and they asked, will you teach us to connect with God?

- **What's a spiritual quality or discipline you've seen in someone else that you desire to do as well?**

TEACHING PLAN

Read Luke 11:1-4.



When Jesus taught His disciples how to pray, the first thing He told them to do is to recall God's glory. His kingdom and His will are foremost on Jesus' mind, and they should be foremost on all of ours. Without a firm belief in the fact that God sustains everything—from the breath we just took to whatever requests we might have in mind—our prayers are of little value.

Jesus reminds us to acknowledge the glory of God, not because it is dependent upon our acknowledgment, but because our prayers rely wholly upon His glory. Before we ask God a single thing, we need to be aware that He is already the giver of everything. His kingdom is coming, and His purposes will be done (Matt. 6:10).

The purposes of God's kingdom remain sure whether we pray for it or not. This prayer is more of a reminder for us. We pause to remember that God has a purpose for His creation and that we are part of His master plan. We pause to remind ourselves to be submissive to whatever part He has given us. We pause to remind ourselves that “our God is in heaven and does whatever he pleases” (Ps. 115:3). We pause to orient ourselves around God and to remind ourselves that our prayers are an instrument in His hand for the glory of His kingdom.

▪ How can you remind yourself of God's glory when you pray?

When we pray to God, we can pray for our daily bread because our daily bread is His concern. He cares how we will be fed, how we will be clothed, and how we will survive from day to day. He takes great interest in our physical needs.

Jesus reminds us that not only are our bodily needs God's concern but also our spiritual needs. He reminds us to pray for our deepest need: the forgiveness of the sin that separates us from God. Then He reminds us to pray that we might grow more and more like our forgiving God as we forgive the sins of others. In these two simple requests—bread and forgiveness—Jesus captures our physical and spiritual needs and reminds us to rely on the God who sustains us in both of them.

▪ When have you seen God uniquely meet your physical and/or spiritual needs?

99 Essential Doctrines (p. 56, DDG)

Prayer and Providence

If God is in control and already knows the future, why pray? The Bible teaches that although God has a plan for this world that He promises to fulfill, prayer is often the means God uses to accomplish His divine purpose. Even though God knows the end result, the means that lead to that end result will be accomplished through prayer. In this sense, it is true that “prayer changes things,” and it is also true that God uses prayer to change our hearts so that our will comes into conformity with His.

COMMENTARY

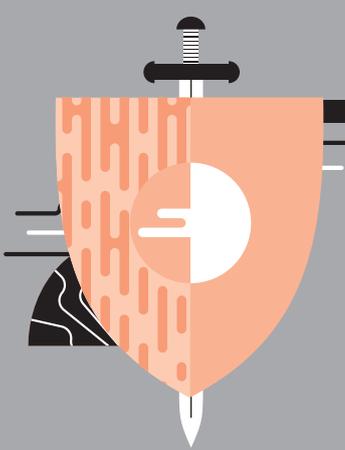
Main Point:
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Luke 11

11-4. Jesus' prayer is the most familiar prayer in the world—what we call the Lord's Prayer. It is a model prayer which Jesus used as an outline for teaching His followers. These are the ideas we should focus on in our prayers:

- **Praise:** God is holy, and although it doesn't have to be the first thing we do when we pray, we are called to make a priority of recognizing and expressing the worth of God's name and character.
- **Purposes:** God's kingdom is present wherever Jesus reigns. We are to pray that sin and its consequences would be abolished, and instead that people would live in submission to Jesus and according to His purposes. Further, we are to be active in bringing these things about.
- **Provision:** Many times, we think we have the things we need because we work for them. But the truth is we depend on God for everything, even the simplest things. Everything in the universe belongs to God, and we have only what He chooses to give us, and we are called to continually express our dependence on Him.
- **Pardon:** We've all sinned. In fact, because we will struggle with the flesh as long as we're in this life, we continue to sin. When we do, we're responsible to ask God for forgiveness—not just generally, but for every specific sin. When we confess and turn away, God is kind to offer forgiveness for sins both big and small, and we're called to forgive in the same way.
- **Protection:** We're caught up in a spiritual battle, and the souls of all people—including our own—are on the line. Because our flesh is weak and tempted toward sin, we need God's strength and protection against the forces of evil which are set on our destruction.

In Defense *(p. 58, DDG)*



Prayer is the act of our going to God in worship, confession of sin, thanksgiving, and in expressing dependence upon Him. However, Scripture teaches that God is so holy, He cannot even look upon sin (Hab. 1:13). Further, if we accept sin in our lives instead of continually turning away, the Lord doesn't even hear our prayers (Ps. 66:18). In fact, in order to approach God, He requires that we are perfect—and none of us are. But Jesus is! As Jesus celebrated the experiences of His disciples, He recognized that God's purposes were being realized, and His natural response was to offer praise and thanks to God. Jesus has a relationship with the Father the way God intended for all people. For those who trust in Jesus, we have the privilege of approaching God, not just once a year like the earthly high priests, but any time we choose. Jesus did everything necessary for us to come to God. Let's never neglect this privilege.

TEACHING PLAN

Read Luke 11:9-13.



In this passage, Jesus told His disciples that they should ask, seek, and knock. In other words, prayer is not passive, wishful thinking, but implies activity and initiative. Prayer, then, makes us active participants in the plan that God has for us, not just bystanders. Through prayer, we make our desires known, speaking up and asking in faith.

When we shrink back from going before the throne in prayer, we rob ourselves of participating in God's glorious plan of providing for us. We spiritually sit in the back row mindlessly scrolling our phones when we have been offered a front-row seat. Our prayers play an active role in helping us view God as the giver of all good gifts. We need to take advantage of this beautiful opportunity to obey Him.

▪ Have you ever found yourself hesitating to ask God for something?

When Jesus taught his disciples to pray, he taught them to address God as Father. The address is not an incidental afterthought, but an encouragement to see God as just that: Father and Sustainer. Jesus does not paint a picture here of a divine Being who sits in heaven unwilling to hear the cries of our heart. Instead, he shows us a loving Father who delights to give us good things.

Not all of us having loving earthly fathers. Sadly, some of us can imagine a dad who would give his son a snake instead of a fish, or a scorpion instead of an egg. But even those who are far off from God can recognize that this type of man is the unfortunate exception. Even a man of the most questionable character is capable of showing love to his children. How much more so the God of the universe—our Father in heaven! He made Adam with His own hands and sustains the sons of Adam and daughters of Eve with so much loving care. He sent His only begotten Son to die on the cross for us and to spare us a deserved separation from Him for all eternity.

▪ What are some additional reminders in Scripture that teach us that God is good and cares for His people?

Read Luke 18:1-8.



This story is not just about the unprotected and undervalued members of society, though it is one small aspect of the story Jesus told. It is instead about the fact that our persistence in going to God in prayer has the ability to teach us something about the God we serve. In Jesus' tale, the judge is an unrighteous man who does not naturally care for the widow who should be under his care. It is her persistence that sways him to do the right thing. 

Jesus compared this unrighteous judge to His Father in heaven, the ultimately righteous Judge, and the contrast is sharp. God is not waiting to be convinced to help us; He stands ready and willing to help us. Our persistence, then, is not something that controls the outcome—God is already willing to help His children. Rather, our persistence continually puts our hearts in a posture of prayerful waiting.

▪ How would you assess the persistence of your own prayer life?

not persistent

seldom persistent

somewhat persistent

notably persistent



COMMENTARY

Main Point:
Jesus taught His disciples to pray with faith, persistence, and dependence on God.

Luke 11

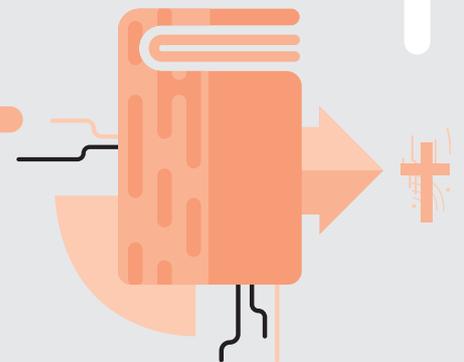
9-13. “Jesus’ model of prayer emphasizes simplicity in approaching God as our loving and providing Father. This is buttressed by a series of encouraging images of God’s heart towards us. If we ask and seek and knock we will receive gifts from our Father, based not on our goodness or effort but on his nature as a loving Father. This revelation of who God is for us in Christ is a warm invitation to cast our cares on him (1 Pet. 5:7), seeking him with confidence, not fear (Heb. 4:16). The God-honoring response to this revelation is worship and rejoicing in his gift.”¹

Luke 18

1-8. The widow is an unlikely hero for Jesus’ narrative. In near eastern culture, the widow was far from a heroine: “The loss of a husband in ancient Israel was normally a social and economic tragedy. In a generally patriarchal culture, the death of a husband usually meant a type of cultural death as well. Although the denotation of widow referred to a woman whose husband had died, because of the social context the word quickly acquired the connotation of a person living a marginal existence in extreme poverty ... Her crisis was aggravated if she had no able-bodied children to help her work the land of her dead spouse. To provide for her children, to maintain the estate, and to continue payments on debts accrued by her husband imposed severe burdens. Since she was in an extremely vulnerable economic position, she became the prime target of exploitation. The fact that she was classed with the landless stranger and Levite indicates that she was often unable to keep her husband’s land.”²

(p. 57, DDG) Christ Connection

Jesus taught us to pray with dependence on God, recognizing our physical and spiritual needs which only He can supply; faith in God, knowing He is our good and loving Father; and with persistence to God, remembering He is just. It is through the death and resurrection of Jesus that we have access to the Father so that we can pray in faith.



Our Mission

God's Story has always been designed to connect with our story. It is because of His Story that our stories make sense, have meaning, and carry on into eternity. Use the questions below to help think through how His Story connects with your own. Suggested answers to these questions can be found on the right-hand side of the page for leaders.

Head



How can prayer help prepare our hearts to respond when God answers our requests with a “no?”

Why might God's response of a “no” be an incredible act of His mercy and grace?

Heart



What are some important things that should be on our prayer list each day?

How encouraging is it to know that the Holy Spirit intercedes on behalf of believers?

Hands



How has your prayer life been challenged by this session?

What are some things you can do this week to have a more disciplined and vibrant prayer life?

Main Point: Jesus taught His disciples to pray with faith, persistence, and dependence on God.



Head

We live in a time when Christians are wary of “name it and claim it” preachers who teach that anything that we ask will be given to us, treating prayer like a magic trick. We know that sometimes the answer to even our most earnest prayers is “no.” And we trust that our God knows better than we do whenever that “no” is uttered.

Just because God might say no does not mean that we shouldn’t ask. We ask boldly not because we can make God do whatever we want, but instead because He delights to show us His will through our prayers. He will always give an answer—even if it’s not the answer that we want to hear. He will open the door. Because we trust Him, we know that He will open it to His gracious gifts, even if those gifts are not what we imagined when we first had asked.



Heart

Jesus isn’t asking us to treat God like a vending machine. In fact, Jesus hints that we should pray for a specific gift: the Holy Spirit. We may not always know what we should pray for. Even though we have a Father in heaven who delights to answer our prayers, we have frail human hearts that don’t always know the right things to pray for. But the Third Person of the Godhead, the Holy Spirit, intercedes for us with “unspoken groanings” (Rom. 8:26).

The Spirit, who has access to the very mind of God (1 Cor. 2:12-13), has been promised to us by Jesus Christ. All we have to do is ask. Through that conversation—that asking, that praying, that Spirit-leading—our prayers begin to align more and more with God’s will, transforming us more and more to His likeness.



Hands

Our reliance on God to supply our needs is one of the ways that we can glorify Him, and prayer increases that reliance as we learn to use the practice in obedience to Him. It is not a tool to twist His arm or to make Him move the way we want Him to. God’s timing is swift by His standards, even if it is not swift by our own. Prayer is about moving our hearts closer to His will, not inching His will closer to our liking.