

Luke 11:1-13—Discipleship Lessons in Prayer

Intro: We are looking at what disciples can learn about prayer today. That is at the heart of today's text. We can begin by asking "what is prayer?"

According to the Oxford Dictionary definition: "A solemn request for help or expression of thanks addressed to God or another deity."

Psalm 9:10 offers more help.

"And those who know your name put their trust in you, for you, O Lord, have not forsaken those who seek you."

- Prayer is looking to God (seeking/trusting) and believing that he will *respond*.
- Set in context, prayer is looking to God for help in loving our neighbor, and loving him with whole-hearted devotion (Lk 10:25-42).
- There is no one silver bullet to learning how to pray.

—*Prayer is learned. There are lessons*

Illustration: Think of prayer like learning an instrument. At first you may feel clumsy or awkward, but the more you stick to it, the more it is woven into the fabric of your thinking—in a sense, the more natural it becomes.

1. Learning from exemplary models (1a)

- Note how the passage begins: a disciple observed Jesus praying (v1).
- A general discipleship rule is that we grow as we look to godly examples to imitate.

Paul expected this in his church planting work:

(Phil 4:9)

⁹What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things..

(2 Thess 3:7,9)

⁷For you yourselves know how you ought to *imitate* us, because we were not idle when we were with you...to give you in ourselves an *example* to *imitate*.

- It's critical to see how example and imitation fit into our discipleship.

Illustration: When I was a seminary student and was looking for work, I interviewed for a youth pastor position at a church in downtown Louisville. As I interviewed with the youth search team, I became uneasy with how they responded to some issues. They said some things that lacked moral clarity. After the interview was over, the Sr. Pastor (who I would report to) pulled me aside and told me that his marriage had recently fallen apart.

Now it would have been the ideal job for me. It offered flexibility in my schedule. The job including housing and a salary, plus good experience for a resume. They called a few days later and offered me the job. But I turned it down. I knew that it was more than a job; I was committing to a church where *I would learn by example and imitation*. Even if unintentionally, I would have been disciplined by this pastor and the church members.

- Discipleship is never anything less than imitation—this is very true when it comes to prayer.

Last week Pastor Rob stressed the importance of being present increases the “Mary effect” of sitting at Jesus’ feet. But we also need to remember that when we are active in the church, we are learning how to pray. Active participation in church life does more for our praying than reading the latest book on prayer.

Loving Jesus is learning how to pray.

2. Learning from helpful instruction (1b-4)

- Imitation is one avenue of learning; instruction is another.
- That is what this disciple wants. “Lord, teach us to pray”
- Let’s not pass too quickly over the “us.”
- It’s not teach *me* to pray, but teach *us*.

Mature discipleship is not solely concerned with the me, but the us of discipleship.

Discipleship is about wanting others to grow along with you. Anything short of that is some ugly form of spiritual narcissism.

If we are committed to following Christ, what are we doing to shift the focus from *me* to *us*? Are we actively helping others follow Jesus?

- The instruction Jesus gives is an abbreviated form of the Lord’s prayer.
- It differs slightly from Matthew’s version (Mt 6)
- Jesus expects us to use the themes as a pattern, not repeat the words thoughtlessly.

The Lord’s Prayer:

- First, it’s staggering that we call on God as *Father*. It strikes a balance between authoritative rule & relational intimacy, control and closeness.

What do we pray for?

1) Seeking God's name and kingdom together

- *Hallowing God's name*: points us in the direction of reverence, worship, and praise. We pray his glory will be supreme.
- *Kingdom coming*: We seek God's rule through Christ over sin and rebellion to expand and increase.

Notice how deeply God-centered the prayer Jesus wants us to pray is. The themes that are first and foremost are his *glory—his renown, his rule*. Jesus's core passion is God's exaltation! We so need this in our man-centered, i-occupied world.

When we pray this, we keep God's glory in Christ center stage.

2) Trusting God to satisfy our essential needs together

- We pray for God's provision in 3 key areas: food, forgiveness, faithfulness.
- Just as there is no physical life without food, there is no eternal life without forgiveness and faithfulness.
- (v4a) The ground for receiving forgiveness is that we are a forgiving people.

The ability of us to forgive, overlook offense, and let go of debt...reveals how grace-oriented we truly are.

Illustration: I know a pastor who was in a car accident caused by a teenage drunk driver when he was on vacation with his wife years ago. His hip was broken. And he still walks with a limp to this day. One of the first things he did when he was back in the pulpit was lead the church in praying for the salvation of the young man. A sign that the *gospel* has taken root is that we are able to forgive someone even if they caused pain that will stick with us the rest of our life.

- Finally, "Lead us not into temptation" (v4b)
- The world is dangerous territory for disciples.
- The word can either refer to testing/trial, or temptation, i.e. enticement to sin.
- The account in Lk 22:40 & 46 may shed some light for us. Jesus instructs his disciples to pray they will not enter into temptation.

Faithfulness to withstand temptation should be regularly heard in our prayer. One pastor observed how this whole prayer puts in us the *language of humility*. (J.C. Ryle)
We can easily want to take center stage, rely on ourselves, take revenge, and let our guard down.

3. Learning from useful analogies (5-13)

- Examples shape us; Instruction informs us. Stories (analogies) can challenge our attitudes. Parables do this.

- Here we have two final examples.

1) A friend at midnight (5-9)

- The parable is about a friend who has a need he sees as fairly urgent (unexpected guest in the middle of night), and is unashamed to boldly *seek* a friend for *help*.

We need to be cautious about imputing attributes of God from the character in the parable. God does not sleep and has no need to lock doors. God is actually opposite of this friend: not reluctant or sleeping but eager to help.

It's a lesson from the lesser to greater. If a bothered, reluctant friend can respond to your requests, how much more can an all-powerful, loving King we call Father?

- The main takeaway is v9: ask, seek, knock.
- That all implies seeking and expecting a response.
- The man in the parable would not have bothered if he did not expect his friend to respond.

When we pray, we have more than an irritated friend listening, we have a loving, good compassionate Father

2) A father full of goodness and grace (11-13)

- Remember, Jesus began his instruction with a focus on the father (v2), now he weaves it back in again.
- Reminds us of Ps 103:12 "As a father shows compassion to his children, so the Lord shows compassion to those who fear him"
- Here, Jesus uses an analogy from the lesser to the greater. Even earthly fathers—flawed under the ruin of sin—will give the best to their children.
- How much more will God, in his infinite perfection, give to his own children?

That leads to a final question: "what makes for good praying?"

Good praying happens when we seek God for good things.

- Jesus ties good praying to asking for the Holy Spirit (v13).

The Holy Spirit is God's presence in our lives. Receiving the Spirit is synonymous with conversion in the NT.

—It is the Holy Spirit who opens our hearts to the love of God in Christ.

—It is the presence of the Spirit who frees us from the bondage of sin to live transformed lives.

Therefore, having the Spirit is the greatest good we can pray for and God give us.

Illustration: In the late 90's there was a young man whose fiancé was dying from a disease called sickle cell anemia. When she was on her deathbed, this man, not a believer, but in desperation, asked the few Christians he knew to pray for her healing. I was one of the Christians praying for her. Sadly she ending up dying. The question he came to me with was, "How can God be good and have allowed this?"
How would you answer?

Conclusion:

How do we process God's goodness when we don't get an answer we hoped for, like this man? He saw God as giving scorpions and snakes, not good things. Many have experiences like him and they end up doubting God's goodness because of unanswered prayer. *Unanswered prayer never diminishes God's goodness.*

Jesus sets the standard of God's goodness by zeroing in on the Spirit.

(Rom 5:5) highlights the Spirit's work in our hearts.

"God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us."

- The broader context is about rejoicing in trials and God's wider purposes. So this is not some sappy, shallow love. It's rich and robust! *When we get the Spirit, we get God's love.* What a gift! That is the greatest treasure God could ever give!

And when we have God's love, we hunger for more of Christ.

This is the most important lesson we can learn in prayer.