

Lord Teach Us To Pray

Luke 11:5-13

Pastor John Miller

I want to start with verse 1. “Now it came to pass, as He...” that is, “Jesus” “...was praying in a certain place, when He ceased, that one of His disciples said to Him, ‘Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples.’”

As Christians, if we're honest with ourselves, most of us would admit that we do not pray as we ought. We may witness, we may sing, we may give, we may serve, we go to church, but do we really pray the way that we should as believers? I think we all would admit that we lack when it comes to our prayer life.

Someone said, “Satan trembles when he sees the weakest saint on his knees.” Because of that, I believe that the devil does everything he can to keep you from prayer. Be careful; apostasy starts at the closet door. If you're not spending time with God, you're falling away from God. If you're lacking in your prayer life—as I feel I lack in my prayer life—then we're not really where we should be spiritually in our walk with the Lord.

Warren Wiersbe said, “No Christian rises higher than his or her praying. Everything we are and everything we do for the Lord depends on our prayer life.” I would add, “Everything flows out from a life of prayer.”

Perhaps that is why, in verse 1, that one of the disciples—we don't know who—asked Jesus to teach them to pray.

Have you ever asked the Lord to teach you to pray? That should be our heart's cry.

We spent five weeks with Christ in the school of prayer. But we're not yet ready to graduate. Jesus is not finished teaching us about the subject of prayer. We went in depth over verses 1-4, but I want you to understand that the text is actually verses 1-13. The whole unit goes from verse 1 to verse 13. It's all one, big package. If you only take verses 1-4 and don't take verses 5-13, you don't get the whole picture. So I want to wrap it up by also talking about verses 5-13 on prayer.

Looking over the whole text, Jesus teaches us three, important truths about prayer. And I have reduced my focus to the three, main divisions of these 13 verses. Number one, Jesus taught us the pattern of prayer. It was commonly called The Lord's Prayer, but it is Jesus' pattern for our prayers. He didn't say, “Forgive us our sins,” because He didn't sin. But He did teach us to pray this prayer. Maybe not word-for-word, but He gave us the pattern and priorities of prayer to teach us how to pray.

There are six petitions from verses 2-4. The first three deal with God and focus on the priority of prayer to be on God; the second three deal with man's needs. In verse 2 it says, “When you

pray, say: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name." Prayer starts with God's name. So everything in prayer flows out of the relationship that God is my Father and I am His child.

And the purpose and priority of prayer is the glory of God. If we're praying and the answer to the prayer does not bring glory to God, forget about it. God is interested in being glorified for His creation. So all of prayer should lead to the glory of God.

What does it mean, "Hallowed be Your name"? The word "name" means God's nature and character. So when you pray, think, Will this prayer bring glory to God? Or am I asking selfishly, to consume it upon my own lusts?

The second petition concerns His kingdom, verse 2: "Your kingdom come." The kingdom of God is to be advanced. It's not "My kingdom come"; it's "Your kingdom come." The purpose of prayer is not to get God to do what I want Him to do for me but for God to use me for His purposes, for His glory and for His kingdom.

The third petition is "Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

So notice His name, His kingdom and His will. These are the first three priorities of prayer. The purpose of prayer is to get God's will done; not to get our will imposed on God or to overcome His reluctance. Rather, it's for God to use us to accomplish His will.

"Give us...forgive us...deliver us," verses 3-4. "Give us day by day our daily bread" is God's provision. "Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who is indebted to us" is God's pardon. "Deliver us from the evil one" is God's protection. So we pray for God's provision, God's pardon and God's protection.

But remember that the priority of prayer is God's name being hallowed, that God be glorified.

What happens when we pray? Many times we get discouraged, lose heart and want to give up. The Bible says, "Let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart" (Galatians 6:9). So we need to persevere in prayer, to stand on the promises of God when we pray. We need to keep praying, keep seeking, keep knocking and don't give up (Matthew 7:7).

The second division of our text is in verses 5-8: give persistence in prayer. We first have the pattern of prayer and now persistence in prayer. Here Jesus gives us a parable. It doesn't use that term to describe it, but most New Testament, Bible scholars believe that's what it is. In the Greek, the word "parable" is "parabole," which means "to lay alongside." A parable is an earthly story with a heavenly meaning. Jesus tells a story that is true to life, and it has spiritual application.

The context here is that He is talking to His disciples. "And He said to them, 'Which of you shall have a friend, and go to him at midnight...'" If you go to your friend at midnight, it had better be a good friend, a really good friend.

I grew up in San Bernardino. If you go to your friend's house at midnight in San Bernardino, you get shot! Or the guard dogs will eat you alive! Or you get shocked by the electrified, barbed-wire fence around the house!

So in this parable, if the man goes to his friend at midnight "...and [says] to him, 'Friend, lend me three loaves.'"" Think about that. He says, "Wake up! I need some bread!" It's midnight! Now he explains why. "...for a friend of mine has come to me on his journey, and I have nothing to set before him"; and he will answer from within and say, 'Do not trouble me; the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot rise and give to you'?"

Now Jesus applies it in verse 8: "I say to you, though he will not rise and give to him because he is his friend, yet because of his persistence he will rise and give him as many as he needs."

So Jesus gives us this awesome parable, commonly called "the friend at midnight." Its purpose was to encourage us to pray with shameless persistence.

In the Middle East culture, if you didn't show hospitality, that was very bad. No matter what time of the day or night it was, if someone dropped in on you, you had to feed them, wash their feet, open your home to them—be hospitable. Hospitality in the Middle East at this time was high on the list, a priority. So the man in this parable was urgent to get food to his friend.

No doubt the friend who had dropped in at midnight had traveled at night; it was common because of the heat of the day. He knocked on his friend's door and said, "I'm here!" His friend said to his wife, "We don't have any bread!" I wonder if the husband and wife debated who was going to get bread from the neighbor. But finally the husband went to his neighbor's house, knocked on the door, and when his friend opened the door, he said, "Lend me three loaves of bread!"

We saw in verse 3 of The Lord's Prayer, it says, "Give us day by day our daily bread." He was asking his friend for some bread; he needed help. And his friend said to him, "Do not trouble me; the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed. I cannot rise."

He probably had a one-room house and one bed in the house. It was believed that they would sleep on a lifted, wooden pallet with mats on it. Then underneath the pallet the animals would sleep. They would bring the animals into their house, and all the family and animals. You talk about a community bed!

My wife and I never did sleep with the kids in our bed. I don't understand that. Today young families sleep with all the kids in their bed. Then they complain they don't get any sleep at night. I used to come home late at night after ministering and would read this parable and laugh. My wife would have these big notes on the door: "Shh! Baby sleeping."

So basically this man was saying that there was no way he was going to get up and give his friend some bread, even though he was his friend.

Now Jesus applied this parable in verse 8, and this is our focus. When Jesus used the phrase, “I say to you...” then listen up; He’s giving application of the parable. “I say to you, though he will not rise and give to him because he is his friend, yet because of his persistence he will rise and give him as many as he needs.”

If I were doing a movie of the life of Jesus telling this story, I would have the neighbor throwing the bread out the window hitting his friend in the face with it. The neighbor was probably saying, “This guy won’t stop knocking! He’s waking up the whole house!”

His wife probably said, “You might as well get up and get him the bread. We’re all awake anyway! Get up and give him whatever he needs!”

“I’ll give it to him alright! I’ll knock him over the head with it!”

So it wasn’t because the neighbor was his friend that he gave him the bread; it was because of his shameless persistence.

There are some important lessons to be learned from this parable. This is not a parable of comparisons; God is not a grumpy, sleepy neighbor. You don’t have to bug God, pester God to get what you want. Rather, it’s a parable of contrasts. God is not anything like this sleepy, grumpy neighbor. God is not annoyed by us in our prayers; He is our loving Father in heaven, who never sleeps and never slumbers. Psalm 121:3-4 says, “He who keeps you will not slumber. Behold, He who keeps Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep.” If you cry out to God any time—day or night—or any place or anywhere, God is always open to the prayers of His children.

When Elijah was on Mount Carmel chiding the prophets of Baal, Baal did not answer his false prophets or grant their petition (1 Kings 18). Elijah basically said, “Maybe he’s asleep! Maybe he’s on vacation! Maybe he’s in the bathroom right now!”

Aren’t you glad that our God is always available? When you call out to God, you don’t get a busy signal, you don’t get a voicemail, you don’t have to leave a message for Him to call you back. He’s always there and His ears are always open. He never sleeps and He never slumbers. God our Father knows our needs before we even ask Him (Matthew 6:8).

But you say, “Then why ask Him?” Because He wants to hear from you. He wants fellowship with you. And we do not irritate God by our petitions.

“Man’s chief end is to glorify God and annoy Him forever.” No, that’s not the way it goes. God takes pleasure and delights in hearing the cries of His people; He loves to help us in times of need. God is the gracious giver.

And we should also pray, like verse 8 says, with shameless persistence. It’s with importunity. I broke the verse down like this: we should pray persistently, earnestly, boldly, relentlessly, fervently and humbly. In James 5:16, it says, “The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man

avails much.” So we need to pray.

And we need to pray humbly. When the Pharisee and the tax collector went into the temple, one prayed proudly and did not go home justified. The other one prayed humbly and beat his breast and said, “God, be merciful to me, a sinner!” (Luke 18:13). That man went home justified.

In Matthew 15:21-28, the Syrophenician woman, who was a Gentile, came to Jesus and said, “Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David! My daughter is severely demon-possessed.” But Jesus did not answer her, so she kept crying out to Him. Every time she took a step toward the Lord, He would take a step backward. It is one of the most confusing stories of Jesus’ healing. At first you might say, “Why is He ignoring this woman’s needs?” She was a Gentile coming to Him on the basis of Him being the Son of David, which means He was the Messiah. Jesus was wanting to show off her faith, to pull out her faith. He kept backing up from her, so she would keep pursuing Him.

Then He said to her, “It is not good to take the children’s bread and throw it to the little dogs.” He meant a household, domesticated dog. But her reply was, “Yes, Lord, yet even the little dogs eat the crumbs which fall from their masters’ table.” She was earnest and persistent. “Then Jesus answered and said to her, ‘O woman, great is your faith! Let it be to you as you desire.’ And her daughter was healed from that very hour.” The word “great” is “mega.” Jesus was backing up so she would come toward Him.

When God sometimes doesn’t answer your prayers but seems to be stepping back instead of coming toward you, He has a plan. He knows what He’s doing. He’s trying to strengthen your faith. He’s trying to show off your faith. And Jesus wanted everyone to see the greatness of this woman’s faith, so He delayed the answer. But when He did answer, it was to her relentless, bold, persistent, earnest, fervent, humble prayer.

I like how Hannah prayed for a baby boy. She was barren. What a reproach in that time, in that part of the world that is. But she kept praying. She went to the temple and prayed, but “only her lips moved, but her voice was not heard. Therefore Eli [the priest] thought she was drunk.” So he asked her what her problem was. So she said, “I am a woman of sorrowful spirit. I have drunk neither wine nor intoxicating drink, but have poured out my soul before the Lord....Then Eli answered and said, ‘Go in peace, and the God of Israel grant your petition which you have asked of Him’” (1 Samuel 1:13-17).

Sometimes the deepest prayer cannot be verbalized. Sometimes we just groan our prayers, and the Holy Spirit interprets that.

Then Hannah went home and discovered that she was pregnant. She had a little boy. It was Samuel, who was to become a prophet, one of the greatest prophets in the history of Israel. And she dedicated him to the Lord.

What God wanted was a prophet, and He started with a barren wife. He needed a prophet to turn the nation back to Him, so He looked around and started with Hannah. She would be

burdened, broken, barren but earnestly sought Him in prayer. What was such a tragedy in her life turned out to be such a great blessing. She was the woman God would use to bring Samuel the prophet, because of her earnest prayer.

I think of Jacob, in Genesis 32, who wrestled with what seemed to be a stranger, an angel it says, but I believe it is what the Bible calls “a Christophany,” a preincarnate appearance of Christ in the Old Testament. It’s not an Incarnation; it’s a manifestation. The virgin birth is an Incarnation; He became humanity fused with deity for all eternity. But Christ did appear from time to time in the Old Testament as the angel of the Lord. So Jacob is wrestling with the Lord.

When you wrestle with the Lord, guess who wins? The day dawned and the Lord said to Jacob, “Let Me go....But he said, ‘I will not let You go unless You bless me!’” (Genesis 32:6). The New Testament tells us, in Hosea 12:4, there were tears running down his face. Jacob just wanted to hang on to the Lord and not let Him go until he was blessed. This is one of the most beautiful stories in the Bible. It is the blessing of brokenness.

What the Lord did to bless Jacob was to cripple him. You say, “That’s a blessing?!” It was. Jacob was full of cunning, deceit and self-manipulative in doing his own thing. But now it’s all gone; he’s broken. He walks with a limp. God crippled Jacob so that his name Jacob, which means “heel-catcher,” could be changed to Israel, which means “governed by God” or “prince with God.”

So when we wrestle with God or struggle with God in prayer, He may cripple us in order to crown us with blessings.

One of my favorites is Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane. You talk about an episode of prayer! He’s the Son of God, face down in the dirt weeping with blood pouring out of His pores in agony. And three times He prayed. He prayed, “O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will” (Matthew 26:39).

Some people say if you pray for something more than once, it’s a lack of faith. No so. I’ve heard preachers say that you shouldn’t have to say, “Not my will, but Yours, be done” (Luke 22:42). Jesus said it, so why wouldn’t we say it? Isn’t the purpose of prayer that God’s will would be done and not mine?

Three times Jesus prayed it, but God the Father did not take away the cup. Jesus suffered and died and bore our sins on the Cross. He drank the cup of suffering for us. Jesus was in agony.

Wrapping up this parable, in verse 8, Jesus is saying that if a grouchy neighbor can be forced by his friend’s shameless persistence to give what he ought, much more—from the lesser to the greater—will our heavenly Father respond to our shameless, persistent, earnest prayer. So verses 5-8 tell us to pray persistently.

In closing, we have verses 9-13, the promise of prayer. So we have the priority and pattern of prayer, the persistence of prayer and now we have the promise of prayer. Here Jesus is making

further application. He said, "So I say to you..." which He also said in verse 8 "...ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened."

Isn't that a great promise from our Lord? If we ask, we'll be given; if we seek, we'll find; if we knock, it'll be opened. Jesus is now applying the parable by giving us a promise in verses 9-10.

"Ask...seek...knock." In the Greek, ask, seek, knock is called a present-imperative tense. It's in the present tense, so keep asking, seeking and knocking. It's not just ask once and forget it, seek once and go your way and knock once. No; this is keep on asking, seeking and knocking. And because it is an imperative, it is a command; it's not an option.

There is what's called the sin of prayerlessness. When the Bible commands us to pray and we do not pray, we sin against God. That's a sin of omission; we are omitting what we should do. "To him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin" (James 4:17).

These words also indicate an increasing intensity. "Ask" implies requesting assistance for a conscious need. When you ask someone for something, you have a need that you're aware of. When you "seek," it denotes asking but also action; you're looking for something, seeking and pursuing. Then "knock" is intensified where we have asking, plus acting and persevering. It starts with a conscious need, then it goes to seeking, which is action, and then it goes to knocking. You knock, no answer, so you knock again and again. You keep knocking.

The Bible says to "Watch and pray" (Mathew 26:41), "Pray without ceasing" (1 Thessalonians 5:17), "...continuing steadfastly in prayer" (Romans 12:12) and "Men always ought to pray and not lose heart" (Luke 18:1). I like that.

Also, the word "ask" in the Greek indicates a petition of an inferior to a superior. So our petitions are to be in humility. We should never order God around. We never command God, boss God around or order God around. I hear some people praying, and they expect God's up in heaven writing everything down, so they make sure He gets their list of what they want Him to do. "And what time on Friday do you need that?" No. It's like God's our heavenly genie or servant that we order around. No; we come with humility, because He's our holy Father who is in heaven.

And in these statements, verses 9-10, Jesus is not promising that we can have whatever we want. It must be in God's will, for God's glory and for our spiritual good. That's so very important.

God does answer prayer, verse 10. Note the words "receives...finds...will be opened." These are strong promises that we will receive, we will find and it'll be opened to us.

Let me give you four ways that God answers prayer. First, it's the direct answer; you pray and God answers. When Peter and John went to the temple and they saw a lame man, Peter said, "In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk" (Acts 3:6). Peter took the man by

the hand, and he rose up and was healed. That's cool! That's what we want.

But God does not always answer directly. Second, sometimes it's a delayed answer. This was the case with the Syrophenician woman. But God's delays in answering prayer are not His denials. Many times what God is doing is that He wants us to become the kind of people who can accept His answer to our prayer. He wants us to mature, to be humble, to be grateful, so He'll step back until we become the kind of people who can handle the answer to our prayer.

Third, there are different answers. In 2 Corinthians 12, Paul had a thorn in his flesh. He said that it was "a messenger of Satan to buffet me." He doesn't tell us what it was, but I think it was a physical infirmity. Paul asked God three times for Him to take it away. That's a natural response when you're physically infirmed. "God, will You please heal me. Please take it away." But God said "No" each time. But God said, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." When Paul heard that he said, "I take pleasure in infirmities....For when I am weak, then I am strong."

That thorn in Paul's flesh, that "messenger of Satan to buffet" him was to keep him humble, so he could be useable. Paul actually said it: "And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me." He had been caught up to the third heaven and heard things that were unspeakable. And because of that he was given the thorn in his flesh.

God knows how to balance our lives. When the blessings come, we must stay humble, if we're going to be useable.

Then Paul discovered God's all-sufficient grace. God didn't answer the way Paul asked, but He did something better for Paul; He gave him His grace, which was sufficient for him in his weakness.

So we must ask according to the Father's will, which is the background for verses 11-13. This is not so much a parable as it is a metaphor, in order to drive home the lesson of the lesser to the greater. "If a son asks for bread from any father among you, will he give him a stone?" No. "Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent instead of a fish?" No. "Or if he asks for an egg, will he offer him a scorpion?" What kind of a father would do that?! Now here's the application: "If you then, being evil..." notice Jesus's commentary about our hearts "...know how to give good gifts to your children..." now the lesson from the lesser to the greater "...how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!" What a blessing!

This is what's called an argument of the lesser to the greater. The first parable was a contrast. God is not a grumpy, old friend you have to wake up to get what you want; He's a loving Father. Now this metaphor is to remind you that you, being evil, give good gifts to your children, but much greater will your heavenly Father, who loves you, "give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him."

What does Jesus mean by "give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him"? This literally means

“the blessings of the Spirit.” In Matthew’s rendition, he says, “give good things to those who ask Him” (Matthew 7:11). In Luke, it reads that He will “give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him.” I believe the idea that is being conveyed is that we should be praying for the blessings that the Holy Spirit brings to us.

Since the day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit, the promised Parakletos or Comforter came, as a Christian, you have the Holy Spirit. You cannot be a Christian without having the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit blesses you by convicting you in your unsaved state, showing you your need for a Savior. Then He regenerates you by giving you new life and indwells you. He takes you out of Adam and places you “in Christ.” He becomes the permanent resident in your heart. You were “sealed for the day of redemption” by the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 4:30). And then He gives you fruit and gifts, the blessings of the Spirit.

Jesus is saying that for you, as a Christian, are not asking to receive the Holy Spirit; you’re asking God to give you the blessings and the joys that the Holy Spirit brings into our lives.

It’s funny that so many times our prayers are, “O Lord, I need a job,” “O Lord, I need healing,” “O Lord, I need a higher-paying job,” “O Lord, I need a house,” “O Lord, I need a husband,” “O Lord, I need a new husband.” But very rarely do we pray, “Lord, I need your joy, your love, your peace, your gentleness, your self-control in my life. I need the fruit of the Spirit. I need the blessings the Holy Spirit brings into my life.”

I think Jesus is capping off this whole section on “Lord, teach us to pray” by talking about the most important, the best things that we can pray for are spiritual. They come to us from the Holy Spirit. We need to be filled with the Holy Spirit, have the fruit of the Spirit and the joy of the Lord in our hearts and have the spiritual blessings that the Holy Spirit alone can bring.

“Thou art coming to a King,

Large petitions with thee bring.

For His grace and power are such

None could ever ask too much.”