

Prayer - Unlimited Possibility (Luke 11:1-13)



A. The Lord's Prayer (Luke 11:1-4)

1. The Lord's prayer is a doorway into spiritual reality, and an invitation into Jesus' inner life, and to unlimited possibilities in God.

- a. When Jesus finished his prayer in an unknown place, a certain unnamed disciple asked Jesus to teach them to pray as John the Baptist taught his disciples to pray. (11:1)

Imagine, one morning the disciples woke up and found Jesus wasn't in his bed. When they didn't find Him in the kitchen or anywhere in the house, they decided to go out and look for Him. They found Him on a hillside. And He was deep in prayer with His heavenly Father all on His own. The disciples felt a holy hush as if they were peering into the most sacred and intimate moment of private communion between the Lord and His Father. Yet they just didn't want to leave that place, mesmerised by what they saw and heard. When Jesus ended His prayer, one of the disciples approached Him and asked Him to teach them to pray just as John taught his disciples. What they were really saying was, 'Please, let us in on Your inner world with God.'

- b. Jesus responded without scolding the disciple's intrusion into His private time, "When you pray, say these words..." The Lord's Prayer was not meant to be parroted mechanically, yet it provides the 'model prayer' - a launching pad from which we can move into the depth of God. The words of the prayer are brief, yet specific and to the point, touching the centre of human life and human need.

Luke's version is shorter than Matthew's. The emphasis in Luke is on the quality and depth of prayer, rather than the quantity and length.

2. The Lord's Prayer, Jesus focuses FIRST on God's priority, and then on our needs SECOND. Note, prayer is not giving God advice on what He should do.

- a. **"Our Father in Heaven"** (1) 'Our Father' is the most important opening words. There were other similar Jewish prayers, but they addressed God as the 'Creator'. But absolutely unique to Jesus' prayer is the first word 'Father', 'Abba' in Aramaic. He said just a few days before, "No one knows the Father except the Son and the one to whom the Son wills to reveal Him." (10:22) Here Jesus introduces the 'unknowable' Father for the first time. How does He make the Father known to His disciples? "Address God as your heavenly Father, Abba, in your prayer." (2) 'in heaven' is a term for 'elevation' rather than location. 'Prayer is climbing onto the Father's lap.' In prayer we access God's heavenly throne and climb up onto His lap.

- b. **"Hallowed be Your name"** God's name refers to more than a designation but to His character. It is the summation of God's essential nature, i.e. 'holiness' (Rev 4:8). What is the greatest lack in the modern Church? I would say it is the revelation of 'God's holiness'. Even with the explosion of knowledge through the internet and other means, the understanding of 'God's holiness' is something that cannot be communicated through natural means. Through human experience, we can know the difference between what is 'clean' and 'unclean', and what is 'just' and 'unjust' etc.

A pastor who rescues homeless children, gives them a full bath when they first come to the children's home, and he clothes them in brand new clothes. He then packs away their dirty old clothes. About three months later he brings out their old clothes and tries to put them on the children. Every one of them runs away and does not want to even touch the old clothes. This is how he teaches them about 'clean' and 'unclean', and the old life and new life in Christ.

But how can we know "holiness" when such a quality is not found in the world? The only way we can know holiness is for God to reveal it to us directly. *I believe the lack of knowledge of God's holiness is the basis of all moral decay in our society.* (c.f. Salt) Jesus teaches us that our first petition in prayer should be for the knowledge of 'God's holy name'. As we pray, "hallowed be Your name" we receive the revelation of God's holiness, and then it flows through us into different spheres of our lives and into the society. (C.f. Ezek 36:23 – God will 'sanctify His holy name' which has been profaned among the Gentiles world.)

- c. **"Your kingdom come"** All expression of church ministry is answering this prayer. (1) Future: We are praying for the coming of the King at the Second Coming of Jesus - 'Parousia'. Not everyone is excited

about this because of the cost required of Christians in the end hour. (2) Present: God's kingdom is where God's rule is made actual and effective. When Jesus cast out a demon, He said, "Surely the kingdom of God is coming upon you." (11:20).

- d. **"Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven."** (1) The ultimate purpose of our life on earth is to do the will of God. Jesus demonstrated this when He prayed in the garden of Gethsemane, "but not My will but Yours be done." (Luke 22:42); (2) 'on earth as it is in heaven', i.e. as speedily and completely as His will is obeyed and carried out in heaven. It means our immediate and complete obedience to God's will.

Jesus teaches us we are to approach God as our Father whose fatherhood is to be enjoyed by His children, and Judge whose holy name is to be upheld with reverence, and King whose will and rule is to be obeyed!

- e. **"Give us day by day our daily bread" (Physical - Food)** This expresses our total dependence on God for our daily living on earth. (1) Due to Covid-19 and GI foodbank, we have been a part of the answer to this very prayer of some people for the first time, PTL! (2) For those of us who have enough food in our fridges, praying this prayer builds a defence against ingratitude. All our physical needs on earth are received daily from our heavenly Father, including our healing which is 'children's bread'. (3) Note, everything we receive from God is connected to His name, provision - Jehovah Jireh, healing - Jehovah Rapha etc.
- f. **"And forgive us our sins for we also forgive everyone who is indebted to us." (Relational - Forgiveness)** (1) Receiving the grace of God's forgiveness releases us to also freely extend forgiveness to others. Sin is 'debt'. We need to tear up the 'IOU notes' to be free in God's grace. (2) Receiving forgiveness and extending forgiveness is closely connected to deliverance from evil and torments.
- g. **"And do not lead us into temptation but deliver us from the evil one." (Spiritual - Freedom)** (1) The need for deliverance for Christians is still great today because we live in a demonised world. Many of God's children suffer from demonic oppression. (2) Honesty in prayer regarding 'temptation' is very important. "Don't let me be pushed too far to a place where I cannot handle the pressure! Help me not to be in the wrong place at the wrong time." e.g. *David & Bathsheba*.
- h. **For the Father's glory (Doxology)** All thanks and glory go back to God!
- i. **Note:** One disciple asked Jesus to teach on prayer, and Jesus taught them to pray, 'OUR Father', 'OUR bread', 'OUR sins'.

A single mother of three children with a cleaning job by night and study by day came to see me this week. Let's call her Jenny. Jenny came to collect some food and to receive prayer for a friend of hers who couldn't come because she was in pain and in need of surgery for appendicitis. That day Jenny found \$1,000 cash bundled with a rubber band at her workplace. Although Jenny was in great need, she was aware of God's eyes. So she called her boss who gave her the cleaning contract and asked him to find the owner of the bundle of cash. She made the decision to 'depend on the Father' for her daily needs instead of what the \$1000 could secure for her. When I tried to give Jenny some money, she asked it to be given to her friend who faces the surgery because she needs it more.

Praying the Lord's prayer will deliver us from selfishness because we pray 'Our Father', 'Our need', 'Our sins', NOT 'My Father', 'My way & My will', 'My needs', 'HIS/HER sins'.

God the Father in heaven is not only hearing many individual people praying for their individual needs, but He has many children on His lap, praying together and for each another. This is how we become one in prayer as we acknowledge our brothers and sisters, and their needs along with our own.

It is impossible not to grow spiritually if we pray like this every day.

B. Persistence in Prayer (Luke 11:5-11)

1. Jesus begins with "Prayer 101" - the very basics of prayer. It is asking, 'Abba, please?' There are different forms of prayer, but asking is the foundation of all prayer. What really goes on between heaven and earth when we pray in childlike faith?
2. Unexpected Need at an Inconvenient Time (Luke 11:5-8)

- a. A family house in Jesus' days was really a single room, similar to a large tent. At night the whole family slept neatly in a row from the inner part of the room right to the door, with senior members occupying the inner parts and the family pet stationed outside the door. People went to sleep when the sun set and rose early when the sun rose. Travellers often travelled into the night to avoid the hot mid-day sun. And in the middle of one night, an unexpected situation arose in one family. A family friend arrived late at night without warning, and there was no food in the house.
 - b. So at midnight the host ran to another friend's house to ask for three loaves of bread, for hospitality was a sacred duty in those days. This friend had leftover food, but really didn't want to get up and disturb the rest of the family, jumping over the sleeping children all the way to the door. So at first he tried to send his friend away, but because of his persistence, ἀναίδει - shamelessness of the one calling out to him, the man had no choice but get up and give his friend what he was asking for (11:8). But it was not friendship but persistence that won the day.
 - c. The point of the story is not that God is reluctant to give. It is the very opposite. If this works with the unwilling human beings, then how much more would it work with God who is loving and kind? Jesus highlights the common problem of unanswered prayers. We get discouraged and give up too easily.
3. Jesus reinforces this lesson, *"So I say to you, 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."* (Luke 11:9-10)
- a. Jesus breaks down the process of answered prayer in three stages in continuous tense: (1) keep on asking; (2) keep on seeking; (3) keep on knocking, like that shameless friend.
 - b. For **EVERYONE** (1) who asks receives; (2) who seeks finds; (3) who knocks it will be opened to him. What is Jesus' view of prayer? 100% positive! If this is all Jesus said about prayer, it would be enough for us to go on praying in faith. The law of prayer is simple. We end up with what our hearts truly long for continually.
 - c. We need to ask ourselves when we pray: (1) Are we asking God in childlike faith? (2) What are we asking for? Jesus is saying our life is shaped by what our heart seeks after. He is also saying far too few of God's children are asking Him in childlike faith for what would truly please Him.

C. Our Good Father (Luke 11:11-13)

1. We need to be assured of God's goodness when we pray. *If we don't have the confidence in God's willingness to give the best to us His children, that lack of trust in God's goodness will stop us from praying persistently. "If a son asks for bread from any father among you, will he give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent instead of fish? Or if he asks for an egg, will he offer him a scorpion?"* (11:11-12)
 2. When we ask our heavenly Father for 'bread' (basic staple food), 'fish' and 'egg' (protein diet), would He 'trick us' by giving us something harmful and sinister? Stones look like ancient bread. A child could bite on them and break his teeth. Snakes look like fish, and snake bites can be lethal to a child. And scorpion stings are well-known for their indescribable pain, and when curled up a scorpion looks like an unwashed egg, and can sting an unsuspecting child. Would God find it funny to deceive His children this sinister way? Never!
 3. Parents find great joy in feeding their children good food. It is a sacred task. But no matter how good we are as parents, in comparison to God's unimaginable goodness, we are 'evil'. Therefore Jesus emphasizes again, *"If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him?"*
 4. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit - each person of the Holy Trinity longs to give Himself to those who seek Him. Jesus is teaching His disciples that the doorway to know the Father is through prayer. He is teaching us to ask without giving up, trusting the absolute goodness of our heavenly Father. He is teaching us to ask without the fear of receiving a wrong answer. And He is teaching us to ask for the Holy Spirit!
- Prayer opens the door to unlimited possibilities. If you ask the Father for the Holy Spirit in the name of Jesus, it is impossible to waste that prayer or to receive another spirit. The Holy Spirit is God Himself!
5. We are approaching the Pentecost Sunday next week, 31st May. Will you pray and ask for the Holy Spirit?