

Series Gospel of Luke

This Message #18 Jesus Teaches About Prayer

Scripture Luke 11:1-13

For several weeks we have been thinking about the characteristics that disciples must acquire before engaging in kingdom service. We have learned that disciples must deny themselves and take up their cross daily; they must do unto others as they want others to do unto them; and they must make Jesus and the kingdom work the priority of their lives.

Today we will focus on another of the important lessons that disciples need to understand. This is the subject of prayer. Our first reading is Luke 11:1-4. This is Luke's version of the prayer that Jesus taught His disciples.

Read Luke 11:1-4

Luke mentions prayer more often than the other gospel writers. Up to this point, he has called attention to the prayer life of Jesus five times (*see Luke 3:21; 5:16; 6:12; 9:18, 28*). The first verse in our reading is the 6th time. The disciples had undoubtedly observed these times of prayer. They were aware that Jesus spent much time in prayer, and as a result He gained strength, courage, wisdom and power to overcome the evil one and to bring new life to many around Him. They recognized how vital prayer was for Jesus, and how dependent He was on the guidance of the Father.

It wasn't so much that the disciples wanted to learn a method of praying as that they wanted to understand the secret of the Lord's life and why He was always praying. The disciples had come to realize that neither their prayer lives nor their ministry abilities measured up to that of Jesus or, before Him, of John the Baptizer. One of the disciples, who is not named, asked Jesus to teach His disciples to pray, just as John had done.

The most common prayers of the Israelites were communal prayers, recited in unison by everyone present at a gathering. Printed books were, of course, not available yet, so everyone relied on memory during worship times. The typical Jew knew from memory numerous hymns and prayers and benedictions. The Psalms were often recited as prayers. Individual prayers could be offered in private as well, but the request of the unnamed disciple was for a community prayer: “Teach us” (as a group). The prayer that Jesus taught was a communal prayer, but it was different than others known by the disciples.

In His response to the request, Jesus said, “When you (plural) [all] pray, say: ‘Father.’” As a group, the pray-ers would affirm their unity by acknowledging one common Father. This is appropriate because God is indeed the Father of all believers. He is the One who has given both physical and spiritual life. All those who are true followers are members of one spiritual family. He is the Father of us all. All true believers pray to the same God.

The word “Father” in the Aramaic language is the word “Abba.” Aramaic was the native language of Jesus. “Abba” was the title that Jesus used, and it was the word that carried into the early Church (*see Romans 8:15; Galatians 4:6*). It is an intimate term, still used today by small children in Israel when addressing their human fathers. It is translated into English as “Daddy” or “Papa.” Use of such an intimate term was unusual in the context of Jewish prayers. The Jews would address God the Father in a less personal, more formal way (“*Ali,*” *my Father,* or “*Abinue,*” *our Father*).

Intimacy, however, was not disrespectful. The prayer's first statement is “hallowed be your name.” The literal meaning is, “Let your name be regarded as holy.” The name of God in the Bible is an expression of His Being, of His glory, the sum of His attributes. It represents who He is. The most common attribute of God in the Old Testament is “holiness.” Throughout the Old Testament, the Israelites were told to sanctify God’s name and to keep it holy.

The phrase, “hallowed be your name,” was a statement of submission. It acknowledged the sovereignty of God over the pray-er — the fact that he/she was a dependent creature seeking God's ruling presence in life. When combined with the word “Father,” the term of intimacy, we have the expression of personal relationship. Something on the order of, “Daddy, I belong to You.”

The Jews of Jesus' day tended to view God as so awesome and holy that they dared not be too intimate with Him. They dared not utter the name of God or write it, because they thought it was too sacred for human articulation. Temple worship was a frightening experience because it was so close, they thought, to the actual presence of God who dwelled in the Holy of Holies. Jesus, in contrast, encouraged His disciples to approach God as a kind and loving and personal Father.

The next statement in the prayer is also an acknowledgement of God's sovereignty. "Your kingdom come" has the meaning of "Let your divine rule or authority come upon us." This part of the prayer was a request that the Father's divine sovereignty would attain its rightful place in the hearts and lives of fallen mankind. This request concerned the time that Jesus was on the earth. He spoke about and demonstrated the powers of God's kingdom. It also concerned the present age, this Church age, which was initiated by the redemption of Jesus Christ through His death on the cross and the presence of the Holy Spirit, and it also encompasses the complete and perfect rule of God over all of humanity when Jesus Christ will reappear on earth in the future to destroy all the powers of evil. The phrase, "the kingdom of God," has universal application.

At the beginning of this model prayer, Jesus put all the emphasis on God's character and authority. In the remainder of the prayer, there are three requests which focus on our personal needs: "give us each day our daily bread," "forgive us our sins," and "lead us not into temptation." Again we note the communal aspect of these requests; "give us," "forgive us," and "lead us."

The first request was for the most basic physical need of people — "food." The word "bread" in this prayer has a very broad meaning. It refers to all the provisions needed by people, not just the stuff made with flour. It is also possible to expand the meaning to include everything that people need for earthly physical existence. The individual who is in the Father's family looks to the Father for provision and protection. By praying this prayer, the children of the heavenly Father are acknowledging their dependence on the grace of God for all their physical needs.

Next the disciples are instructed to ask God for forgiveness. When a person prays for forgiveness, it is the same as an admission of sinfulness and guilt. In order to ask for forgiveness, there should be the willingness on the part of the disciple to forgive others.

We dare not ask God to do something for us that we are not willing to do for others. Unless there is the willingness to forgive, bitterness and sin and animosity between people increase. The disciple recognizes that sin is not only against individuals. It is, in an ultimate sense, an act of opposition to God, an affront to His holiness, which was mentioned earlier in the prayer.

The final request is for spiritual protection. The phrase, “Lead us not into temptation,” does not imply that God might entice us to do evil. Scripture makes it clear that God does not tempt anyone (*see James 1:13-15*). On the other hand, Scripture states that “each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed.” It is not a sin to be tempted; it becomes sin when we give in because of our own evil desires.

The prayer, “Lead us not into temptation,” is an acknowledgement of the weakness and sinfulness of our hearts. It is an admission that if God were to withdraw His gracious hand, we would fall into sin immediately. Jesus meant that we should cultivate the attitude of fleeing from every situation where we might fall into sin. The idea is that, far from leading us into temptation (which He cannot do), God would lead us into His ways of righteousness where we will be kept from sin.

Let me summarize the main thoughts of this prayer. Our use of the term “Father” implies the intimacy and love of a personal relationship with the Sovereign Creator of the universe. The emphasis on the Father’s name implies a concern for a lifestyle of holiness. The emphasis on the kingdom implies that God can overcome the evil and sin of this world. Through our trust and submission to God we can expect to receive the provisions we need, the pardon we need, and the protection we need.

Verses 2 through 4 give us the pattern for prayer. In verses 5 through 13 Jesus continues His instruction by showing us how we should approach God in prayer. This was an important part of Jesus’ instruction on prayer, given the timidity of the typical Jew about approaching Almighty God. The gist of what Jesus is going to say in verses 5 through 13 is “be bold and shameless about what you ask of the Father.”

Read Luke 11:5-13

There are a lot of reasons why people don't pray as often or as intensely as they should. Some of God's people rationalize their lack of prayer by saying that they don't want to bother God because He is sovereign and holy, and already knows what we need without our asking. Others are reluctant to bother Him with our petty needs. Some individuals pray apologetically and timidly; they are hesitant to say what is really on their minds. Other individuals assume that one request is enough, and after they have made their needs known, they should back off and not bother God again.

Jesus addressed these kinds of concerns with a parable. A guest had arrived late at night. The host had no bread with which to serve his guest so he hurried to his neighbor's house in order to obtain some. It was a most inconvenient time for the neighbor as he and his family had been asleep. The typical Galilean home of the time would have one large room, everyone would be sleeping on a large mat on one side of the room, and getting up, unbarring the door, and handing over the bread, would mean that everyone in the house would be awakened.

Some commentators misinterpret this parable by using the word "persistence" instead of "boldness." The word in Greek has both meanings. If the word "persistence" is used, it implies that God is at first unwilling to answer the request but will finally give in and provide the bread because the man begs and begs. That interpretation is not consistent with the point that Jesus is making.

The key person in this parable is not the one who provides the bread, but the man with the need. He receives what he needs because he so brazenly and shamelessly makes his request known in the middle of the night. For him, it was better to trouble his neighbor with his request than to insult his guest by not serving food. The point is that Jesus is encouraging His disciples to boldly go to the Father — to not be timid or hesitant, but rather be shameless and unapologetic about asking the Father for any and every perceived need.

In verse 9 Jesus continues, "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you." The exhortations "ask," "seek," and "knock" are encouragements to be bold and "gutsy" in prayer. There is no reason for us to hesitate in setting our requests before God. The response is still God's choice, but we do not need to hesitate in making our requests known.

And what kind of answers will the Father give in response to our prayer requests? In verses 11 and 12 Jesus explains with a ludicrous illustration. A human father would never consider giving a snake to his son when the son wants something beneficial to eat, like a fish. Neither will the human father give a scorpion to his son if an egg is desired. Jesus compares the son to the disciple who asks the heavenly Father for good and necessary things. If earthly fathers know how to give good gifts to their children, then “how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!”

Disciples need to understand that the Father is ready to help them. He is eager to work in them and to supply His spiritual gifts to them. The Father responded to Jesus’ prayers by supplying spiritual power to Jesus through the Holy Spirit. The Father will likewise supply the Holy Spirit and the power of the Holy Spirit to those who pray according to God’s will. The greatest need of every disciple is to have God’s Spirit living in them.

There is a strong emphasis in this whole section on meeting the needs of people. The man got the bread he asked for even though it was late at night. The son received good edible food from his father. Jesus asked for and received power for healing and casting out demons. Earthly satisfaction for these people was obtained by asking, seeking, and inquiring. In the same way, disciples are encouraged to ask, seek, and make inquiries about their concerns. And the point of the teaching is summed up in the words “how much more will the heavenly Father respond favorably to those who ask Him?”

There are a couple more points that need to be made if we are to have a full understanding of this passage. First of all, the answers that the Father will give to our requests will be related to the “hallowing of His name” and the “coming of His kingdom.” The Apostle John wrote that we can have assurance that our prayers will be heard if we pray according to God’s will (*see 1 John 5:14-15*).

Second, we understand from the parable that the request for bread was not for the host, but for the guest. In other words, the host asked for resources that he did not have for the benefit of someone other than himself. All too often our prayers are for ourselves and not directly connected to the advance of the kingdom of God.

I can pray for a million dollars so I can buy a yacht, a bigger house, and a better TV. This kind of prayer would not be for either God's kingdom purposes or for the benefit of others. Such a prayer would be a selfish prayer. Yes, we should go boldly to God to find help for our own needs, our own "bread," but we should keep in mind that the main thrust of prayer is not just for our own sakes, but to further the Father's kingdom. We should ask for what we need in order to meet the needs of others in the name of the Father's business.

Third we learn from the parable that necessity is the driving force behind bold prayer. When we are confronted with unanticipated overwhelming needs beyond our limited resources, that brings out the most urgent prayers of people. Think about soldiers in foxholes under fire, or the person who has just learned that he has cancer. Prayer can be really intense at those times. However, when circumstances go well, we can become very casual about our praying, and when we realize that we are destitute of adequate physical, mental, and spiritual resources, then we get serious about calling on God for help. The point is, if we stay closer to Him, then there will be fewer panic situations.

Finally, it is best to have an established connection with someone before going to their house at midnight. Midnight is not a good time to wake someone up, introduce yourself, and then ask for a favor. Think about prayer. While it is possible for a person to establish a relationship with God in the midst of a dire circumstance, the best time to get acquainted with God is before there is a problem. You will feel much more comfortable about banging on His door at midnight if you are already a member of His family.