

Jump Start *Lesson 4* **Talking to God**

Personal Introductions (if small class and have new people)

Pray

I. Introduction

Last week we began our critically acclaimed two part series on the communication that takes place between us and God. We began last week with theme “Listening to God,” where we learned specifically that God has spoken to us through creation, generally, and through His Word, more specifically. Through creation, God has disclosed to us His power, His wisdom, and His compassion. Through His Word, He has revealed to us more specifically how we can be reconciled to Him and equipped us to live lives that are pleasing to Him.

Now we come to the second part: Prayer, which is evidence by today’s theme: “Talking to God.”

The goal of our class is to answer just a few basic questions that will hopefully set new Christians on the right path to grow in their relationship with God. Particularly if you’re a new Christian and have found prayer difficult, you should take heart. Many of Christians before you have found similar difficulty.

Praying: Preliminary Questions...

Before, we get into how we Scripture instructs us to pray, it will be to answer quickly answer a couple of basic questions regarding prayer.

Q: So, let me begin today’s class by asking you, what is prayer? What comes to mind when you hear that word?....

A: According to the Westminster Catechism, “*Prayer is an offering up of our desires unto God for things agreeable to His will, in the name of Christ, with confession of our sins and thankful acknowledgement of His mercies.*”

This is a good summary of prayer, which at it’s most basic can be described as:

- ◆ Communication with God
- ◆ An expression of our desires/needs
- ◆ A thankful recognition of our dependence on Him and His purposes for all things.

The second initial question we should ask is:

Q: Why is it important that we pray?

A: The first most fundamental answer to this question is that we are exhorted to in Scripture

- In Colossians 4:2, we are told to devote ourselves to prayer.
- I Thessalonians 5:17, Paul tells us to “pray without ceasing.”
- Luke 18:1, Jesus told his disciples a “parable to show them they should always pray and not give up.”

Secondly, scripture clearly demonstrates that praying is simply something that God’s people do. We see this first the Old Testament, Psalms being one book that is filled with prayers to God, reflecting a myriad of needs and desires and praise on the part of the writers. In the New Testament, Paul offers up many prayers for churches to which he’s writing (you can read more about Paul’s prayers in “A Call to Spiritual Reformation”). And Christ Himself is constantly seen praying to the Father (9 prayers in Luke, alone). As we’ll see, it’s this fact that leads the disciples to ask Christ to teach them how to pray.

Martin Luther summed it up well when he wrote: “As is the business of tailors to make clothes and of cobblers to mend shoes, so it is the business of Christians to pray.”

There are many things we could say about the benefits we derive from praying, but the fact that Scripture commands us to pray and clearly demonstrates that God’s children are characterized by prayer are two fundamental clues to us that we should pray, and that prayer is a vital part of our relationship with God.

Well, beyond the questions of what exactly is prayer and why should we pray are the question of how should we pray...a question, I might add, that is at least as old as Christianity itself. In Luke 11, the disciples beg of Jesus, “Lord teach us now how to pray.” And today, we’re going to look at how Jesus responded to them to help us understand how we should talk to God.

II. How to Pray, Part I...The Lord’s Prayer (Luke 11:1-4)

Turning to the question of talking to God, how do you do it? *How do you “talk” to him? What do you say and what is your attitude?* To help us understand how we’re to pray, we’re going to be reading through Luke 11:1-13.

Let’s first begin with verses 1-4. Will someone *Read 1-4*.

In verse 1 we learn that Jesus prayed, and his example was one that the disciples desired to follow. They ask Jesus to teach them how to pray. The disciples are used to seeing Pharisees at the synagogue pray out loud among the crowds and at great length, so Jesus’ example of praying in secret (which we see on numerous occasions earlier in Luke) must have been somewhat surprising and interesting to Christ’s disciples.

We see Jesus’ response to His disciples’ questions in verses 2-4. We’re going to look at each section of the prayer to help us think more fully about the content of our prayers.

First, we are told to address the Father.

Q: *What might that one word teach us about prayer?*

A: It tells us something about God and how relates to us. “Father” implies both **authority** and **intimacy**. In terms of authority, we are praying to the God that we discussed last week...the one who created the world, hung the stars in the sky, who created the oceans and sets their boundaries. And as our Creator, He *created us* to live under His authority. So, in praying to Him as our Father, we are recognizing our dependence upon Him, much like a child is dependent upon his earthly father.

And in terms of intimacy, God is not some abstract, impersonal or detached being. He’s not the man upstairs, who lives mostly apart from us, with whom we rarely interact. Rather, we are praying to a God, who created us to have and enjoy fellowship with Him; And from the Lord’s prayer, and, as we’ll see from the parable we look at today, our relationship with Him is characterized by the sort of relationship a father has with his child. The invitation to pray, therefore, is an opportunity to deepen our intimacy with Him.

Notice also that God’s name is to be hallowed. *ANYONE CARE TO TAKE A STAB AT WHAT “HALLOWED MEANS?”* To make holy, to sanctify, to honor, to venerate.

This word directs us to a couple of thoughts here...First, we see that prayer is not simply to ask for things for ourselves. Now, we will see that Christ includes our personal petitions, but notice that He doesn’t start there. Instead, he first instructs us to direct our thoughts to God’s glory. That’s the starting point. The idea here is NOT that we should pray for God’s name to be made holy or glorious in the sense that our prayers add anything to God --- He’s already those things apart from what do or pray --- but rather that the God’s glory would be on full display in our lives and the world around us --- that He would be recognized and worshiped for who He is. So, our first concern in prayer is for God to be glorified.

Secondly, understanding that God is to be worshiped and honored can help prevent us from humanizing Him such that we forget Who He really is and what He’s like. I think there can often be a tendency in contemporary Christianity toward a crass familiarity with God that does not spring from a spiritual knowledge of who He is. Even as Christians, our sinful nature constantly desires to make God into our image. So that we approach Him as if he can empathize with our sin, or trivialize it like we’re tempted to do. Yet, as we approach God, Christ indicates that we should remember whom we are approaching.

While God is near us and relates to us, and is even in us by His Spirit, God is still God – infinitely perfect; incomprehensibly holy.

To help us with this, think of the response of men in Scripture when they were confronted God’s holiness. Job becomes speechless and aware of his complete ignorance before God. Isaiah falls prostrate, overwhelmed by his uncleanness. And God has to hide Moses in a cleft of a rock so that Moses can survive God’s goodness.

So God is intimate, but He is Holy and we should approach Him, not as the buddy down the street, but as the perfect and holy God of the universe. This recognition of God, then should lead

us to reverence and worship God in our prayers. He should be the ultimate end and focus our prayers so that what flows from our lips reflects a recognition of who He is.

So we see that our prayer should recognize first the relationship between us and God (he is our Father and we are His children), and that the starting point or the spring of our motivation in prayer God's glory. He's the starting point.

The next line reads, "your kingdom come." *What does this line indicate about how we should pray?* First, note that it is not "my" kingdom come, but "your" kingdom come.

So, not only should desiring God's glory be displayed, but more specifically, as we go to God in prayer, we should be primarily concerned with God's purposes.

More specifically, this verse teaches us a couple of things, at least, about prayer. *First, prayer should be an expression of hope in God's coming kingdom.* We should remind ourselves often that there is a kingdom to come, there will be a time when Christ will consummate His eternal kingdom. I was reading through I Peter recently. And I was especially struck at how Peter addresses the church: "As aliens who are chosen." And the entire book has the flavor of expectation – the expectation of God's coming kingdom and our citizenship in that kingdom. At one point in the book, Peter exhorts them how to live "while they are on this earth," as if to say, this world is but a breath; it is passing away to be replaced by an eternal kingdom of which you will be a part.

So our prayer should not primarily be an expression of our most worldly desires and wants or of getting what we want here and now, but rather it should be an expression of our most precious hope: God's coming kingdom and our eternal union with Him.

Secondly, our prayers should be an expression of humble submission to and trust in God. In praying that God's kingdom come, we are ultimately praying that His will or purposes be carried out to their full completion, which has implication on the large and small scale of our lives. (Matthew Lord's prayer, also says, "Your will be done in conjunction...").

I think this is likely one of the most difficult aspects of prayer because it may at times go against every fiber of our being to pray with this basic purpose. Particularly in times of difficulty or tremendous need, we want God to answer the way we think is best. Therefore, it takes humility, trust, patience, and faith in God's good purposes to pray for God's will above our own.

Jesus serves as wonderful example here. Recall at the garden of Gethsemane on the eve of his crucifixion, Jesus prays, "My Father (note father), if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will but as you will." Christ, even to certain death, prayed that the will of his omniscient Father be done, and not his own or any else's.

Q: What more do we learn of prayer in verses 3-4?

A: Give us each day our daily bread

Note that we are supposed to ask for daily provision ---Literally, give us day by day our daily bread. It's worded o emphasize our daily dependence upon God to meet all of our needs. It almost seems a petition, not for abundance as we in our culture are often inclined to pray for.

Rather, it's a prayer for enough to meet our needs, but not enough to make us forget our dependence upon God.

Now, most directly, this verse calls us to trust God to meet our physical needs, recognizing that He is our provider and sustainer. If we come to God anxious, worried about the future, about our provisions, we can lay those burdens upon God, knowing he holds all circumstances in His sovereign hands. Matthew 6 Christ tells his audience that if God clothes the lilies of the field, how much more will He care for us.

And, importantly, as we learn to trust God as our physical provider, we should also learn to trust Him as our spiritual provider. If God provides for our physical needs, how much more does He desire to meet our spiritual needs. The result is that by depending on God to meet all of our needs, we learn to find the ultimate satisfaction of our souls in God alone. And our prayer then should not only help us to be satisfied in God, but should also, in turn, be an expression of our satisfaction in Him.

In His book "Pleasures of God", John Piper writes,

"Prayer is his (God's) delight because it shows the reaches of *our* poverty and the riches of *his* grace. Prayer is that wonderful transaction where the wealth of God's glory is magnified and the wants of our soul are satisfied." (Pleasures of God, Ch. 8, pg. 216)

In verse 4, we see confession cloaked in the form of a petition. In asking God to forgive us our sins, we are essentially to acknowledge our indebtedness to God because of our sin, and to plead continually for his forgiveness of sin (not in an ultimate sense). And confession of sin will, I think, flow pretty naturally as acknowledge God's holiness because an awareness of God's holiness serves to magnify our lack of holiness. So Confession is part of recognizing our tremendous need before God and signifies a humility as we enter in to God's presence in prayer.

Now, we should be careful here. The big question verse 4 poses for us is whether Jesus is talking about a merit-based forgiveness. Is He saying, that we earn God's forgiveness by forgiving others?

Well in week one we learned from looking at the book of Titus and Ephesians, that God saved us, not because of the righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy and his unmerited favor. So the forgiveness that God offers us is completely by grace. We can't earn it.

Rather, this line seems to indicate that if we are forgiving others, it's proof that we have been forgiven by God and we should, therefore, expect to continue in His forgiveness. In other words, forgiven people are forgiving people. Writing on this verse, Puritan Thomas Watson says, "It [our forgiving others] is not a cause of God's forgiving us, but a sign. We need not climb up into heaven to see whether our sins are forgiven: let us look into our hearts, and see if we can forgive others. If we can, we need not doubt but God has forgiven us. Our loving others is the reflection of God's love to us."

This verse also implies that we should not go into prayer without self examination. The question for us here is: Do we forgive others for what they do against us, the way God has forgiven us. Another Puritan Matthew Henry sums up the implication of verse 4, this way, “That we have no reason to expect, nor can with any confidence pray, that God would forgive our sins against him, if we do not *sincerely*, and from a truly Christian principle of *charity*, forgive those that have at any time affronted us or been injurious to us. Though the *words of our mouth* be even *this* prayer to God, if the meditation of our heart at the same time be, as often it is, malice and revenge to our brethren, we are not accepted, nor can we expect an answer of peace.”

So, in prayer we are to acknowledge our sin before God, asking for His forgiveness. And as we do, we should check our hearts to see whether our lives are marked by the forgiveness that we seek from God.

Moving on...

Q: How does the prayer close?

A: Prayer of protection from temptation. Essentially, this element to our prayers reflects the reality that we as Christians are under siege. In our second class, “Living by God’s Ways,” we noted that while we are dead to sin and have been given a new nature, we still struggle with the sinful inclinations of our flesh. We also know from Scripture that Satan seeks our spiritual harm (Ephesians 6).

The question for us, is what do we do with this information about reality and that spiritual battle in which we are engaged? Jesus’ answer, in part, is to pray. Pray that God, who is sufficiently ABLE, will deliver us from evil: both from the evil our hearts naturally incline us to commit, but also from the Evil One who seeks to destroy even our faith if that we’re possible.

To summarize what Christ has taught on prayer thus far:

1. Prayer is communion with God, who has authority over us and yet is also intimate.
2. It is to be done with God’s glory and purposes foremost in our hearts and minds.
3. It is an expression of our dependence upon and trust in God to meet our needs and to protect us from evil.
4. It is to be done in humility, recognizing our need for forgiveness.

In your own prayers, a useful acrostic is ACTS. Are you familiar with it?

A – Adoration

C – Confession

T – Thanksgiving

S – Supplication

We see elements of all four in Christ’s prayer. You’ll also notice we do something very similar in our Sunday morning worship service. The prayer of praise (adoration), confession, and the Pastoral Prayer (Thanksgiving and Supplication).

II. How to Pray, Part II: Parable of Midnight Visitor - Luke 11:5-8

Not only does Jesus direct us in the content of our prayers, He also uses another parable to direct us in how we should pray: or our attitude in prayer. To the parable to learn more of how we should pray, we're going to look together at the parable of the Midnight Visitor in Luke 11.

Have someone read the parable.

Before we begin, let's identify certain things about this parable...

Q: Who is Christ's audience? His disciples.

Q: Who are the characters? Man with guest, father inside house.

Q: The setting *is* Midnight. What is the dilemma? The man has a guest. The custom is to treat him with food. The problem is he doesn't have any, but he knows who does.

The host is faced with two options. He either goes at midnight to the man he knows has food when the family will surely be asleep, or he becomes a rude and inhospitable host to his guest. Neither option is pleasant. Historically, it's important to note that the average home consisted of just one or two rooms. Family's tended to sleep together on a large mat, and the doors had heavy bolts on them that would wake the entire household if opened.

The question really becomes, "who has the nerve to wake up the neighbor and family to ask for bread? Who is willing to put aside their own pride and recognize they need only what another can offer?"

Subsequently, that's one great lesson for us concerning prayer: We must be willing to approach God NOT as self-sufficient but as those need what only He can provide.

Q: So what does the man do? Wakes friend. And the response he gets is just what he didn't want to hear – Go away! (vs. 7) But what does Jesus say in vs. 8? Because of the man's boldness the friend will help.

So, the man's persistence paid off. It prompted his friend to respond to his request.

Q: What do you think this teaches us about prayer?

A: Not only are we to approach God with humility, recognizing that only He has what we need, we are also to be persistent in our prayers.

We see this very clearly in verse 9, where Jesus essentially spells as much out for us. He says, "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.

So the promise is: God will meet our needs.

Now a question: Does this mean that God gives us everything we want? For instance there's been the "Name it and Claim it" movement in some evangelical circles. We name and claim what we want from God and voila, it's ours?

In James 4, James says we have not because we ask not, but he also says that we have not because we ask with wrong motives, so that we can spend it on our pleasures. And then in the Lord's prayer, we've already discussed that we are to pray with God's kingdom and His glory in mind, not ultimately for what we desire, but what God ultimately desires.

DA Carson, in a Call to Spiritual Reformation, uses the analogy of father to illustrate well how God deals with us. "If a boy asks his father for several things, all within the father's power to give, the father may give him one of them right away, delay giving another, decline to give him a third, set up a condition for a fourth.... The father may decline to give something because he knows it is not the child's best interests. He may delay giving something else because he knows that so many requests from his young son are temporary and whimsical. He may also withhold something that he knows the child needs until the child asks for it in an appropriate way. But above all, the wise father is more interested in a relationship with his son than in merely giving him things."

So ultimately, we must trust that in His sovereign wisdom, God answers according to what He knows is best for us, not what we think is best for us. And the best gift He can give us is the gift of Himself, a deeper walk with Him.

Moving on....Verses 11 through 13 present a beautiful picture of a loving and gracious God anxious to provide for His children.

Q: What is Christ contrasting in this passage? The love we as sinful creatures have for our children verses the love God has for His children. *Jesus asks a rhetorical question, what is it?* Son asks for egg, and Father gives a scorpion instead.

Q: As a parent, or putting yourself in place of a parent, what would your response to Jesus' question be?

A: Of course a parent would not respond in such a way. The very thought is preposterous. We would never consider our child something harmful when they need and ask for something beneficial to them. The very thought is unnatural. That's the response Jesus' is trying to evoke.

Now notice what He says next: "How much more does your Heavenly Father desire to give the Holy Spirit to those who asks?" The point is that if earthly parents, who are evil, or sinful, would not deny good gifts to their children, then certainly our Heavenly Father, who is perfectly good, will not deny good gifts to His children.

Christ here is pointing to God's CHARACTER AND DESIRE. He is good, and He desires to give us, as His children, good gifts....

Q: What does this tell us about what God desires to give us above all else?

A: His Holy Spirit.

Essentially, what God desires to give us most is more of Himself, more of His presence to us. And He does this through the Holy Spirit. In Scripture we see what a tremendous gift the Holy Spirit is. It is the Holy Spirit who marks the Christian from the Non-Christian. It is the Holy Spirit who gives us new life, regenerating us. In Ephesians, we see that the Holy Spirit is given to us as a seal guaranteeing our inheritance in God's kingdom. The Holy Spirit also enlightens our minds, revealing spiritual truth, giving us wisdom that is from God; sanctifying us. The Holy Spirit comforts us. And in Romans 8 we see that it is the Holy Spirit who intercedes for us and helps us in prayer before God.

The Holy Spirit is the BEST possible gift God could give and the one thing we should desire above all else.

This is a good challenge for us. Do you want a better idea of what your desires are when you pray, think of what you pray for. Is it a laundry list of physical or relational desires: a job, a promotion, life direction? All these things may be worthy of prayer, but are your prayers consumed by these things? Or do you pray that you might have more of God Himself; more of His Spirit? Do you pray as if intimacy with Him is your number one petition --- as if He is the best gift above all else we have in this world? What we pray for tells us a great deal about what we desire.

Well, the promise this parable holds out to us, is that if we truly seek God and His will, we will find. In knocking there is a picture of coming into God's presence where we find fellowship and eternal life.

Q: And how do we receive this wonderful gift?

A: Simply by asking the father.

Q: What is the picture? How does this picture of God compare to the neighbor we saw in the parable above?

A: We do not have a begrudging father like the neighbor, but rather one who gives generously to those who persistently and boldly ask of Him. This thought is remarkable when you recall what we learned about ourselves in week one in Titus. Apart from Christ, we are an enemy of God. Yet, to be reconciled to Him and to grow in fellowship with Him we simply need to ask of Him.

In the parable Jesus teaches that our attitude in prayer should be to ask, seek and knock continually. We are to be fervent and persistent in prayer. And the Promise is that God will answer and desires to give us the best of gifts. Quoting John Piper again, he says,

“The most wonderful thing about the Bible is that it reveals a God who satisfies his appetite for joy by answering prayers. He has no deficiency in himself that he needs to fill up, so he gets his satisfaction by magnifying the glory of his riches by filling up the deficiencies of people who pray.”(Pleasures of God, Ch. 8, pg. 216)

III. Conclusion

So to sum up, what have we learned about prayer?

Prayer is a privilege where we convene with the one and only holy God. From Jesus' example, we learn that we are to pray with reverence, trust, humility. And then ultimately, our prayers should be an expression of our desire for God Himself, to fellowship with Him. And God, who is our loving Father, will answer our prayers and give Himself abundantly to us.

Some other great passages to consider: Philippians 4:6-8, Psalm 5:1-3, John 14:13-14, Romans 8:26-27, I John 5:14-15. **Prayer / Next week – Meeting with God's family**

Notes on Prayer:

The Lord's Prayer: There are some differences between the Lord's prayer in Matthew and Luke, by which it appears that it was not the design of Christ that we should be *tied up* to these very words, for then there would have been no variation. – M.Henry

Our father will not always answer his children's prayers in the form in which we offer them. Sometimes we ask for the wrong thing! It is God's prerogative to give good things, things that we have need of, and if in our unwisdom we ask for things that do not come under these headings God, like any good parent, reserves the right to say, "NO, not that; it wouldn't be good for you – but have this instead." The example of Paul's thorn in the flesh. Paul asked the Lord to graciously remove his thorn in the flesh, and the Lord replied by graciously leaving it and strengthening Paul to live with it. (Packer, Knowing God).

Though the Father only be named in the Lord's prayer, yet the other two Persons are not excluded. The Father is mentioned because he is first in order; but the Son and Holy Ghost are included because they are the same in essence. As all the three Persons subsist in one Godhead, so, in our prayers, though we name but one Person, we must pray to all. – thomas watson...