**THE GOSPEL OF LUKE**

**TRUE PRAYER**

**Luke 11:1-13**

**INTRODUCTION**

There are many spiritual disciplines that have become irrelevant in the eyes of our culture. Reading the Bible, going to church on Sundays, and the sacraments of the Lord’s Supper and Baptism are largely seen as historical artifacts that are part of an era that is quickly passing away.

One spiritual discipline that remains acceptable and even celebrated in our culture is prayer. Western society is as secular as ever, and yet, whenever tragedy strikes, or someone famous dies, all sorts of people come out of the woodworks as praying people as they tweet and post messages about how their “thoughts and *prayers*” are with those who are suffering.

The popularity of prayer was demonstrated a few years ago by the massively popular novel “Eat Pray Love”. It was a New York Times Best Seller for 187 weeks and was later turned into a film starring Julia Roberts. People around the world gobbled the book up as the author narrated how she discovered true “prayer” while exploring Eastern Mysticism in India.

Mike Babcock, the coach of the Toronto Maple Leafs, has told the media during interviews that he prays every night. The object of his prayers, however, is not God. It’s his mom. He believes that his mom watches over him, and that from whatever better place she’s in, he believes she hears and answers his prayers.

Why is prayer so accepted by our culture, but other spiritual disciplines are not? It’s because prayer is understood as being a subjectively defined spiritual exercise. People think that they can pray whatever they want, to whomever they want, as long as it “works” for them.

But is this true? Is prayer whatever people want to define it? Is it merely a subjectively defined exercise? Or does prayer have objective definition? In other words, do we define what prayer is, or does someone else?

In our text today, we reach what is commonly called “The Lord’s Prayer”. Here, Jesus is going to teach us about true prayer. He’s going to teach us how we pray, what we pray, and who we pray to. This may not be an easy topic for those who approach prayer by simply “doing what works for them”, but if we are to call upon Jesus as our Lord, then we must follow his teaching, including his teaching on prayer.

**Read Luke 11:1-11**

The title of this message is **True Prayer**. My aim today is to show you that **The Lord’s Prayer Sets the Priorities for Our Prayers.**

I’m going to take you through six principles of prayer today that we get from our text today.

(1) **PRAYER IS LEARNED**

Our text today begins shortly after a key turning point in the Gospel of Luke. Back in Chapter 9, Luke told us that Jesus finally “set his face to go to Jerusalem”, which symbolized a switch in the emphasis of Luke’s Gospel from the miracles of Jesus to the teaching of Jesus.

This new section begins with Jesus’ teaching on what it means to follow him as his disciples. We saw this earlier when Jesus speaks to three men who want to follow him and tells them that, if they are to follow him, then they must follow him completely, without reservation, excuse, or regret. They must make Jesus their ultimate priority in life over everything else, including their own families and homes.

What comes next is a series of narratives that give us practical examples of what it looks like to follow Jesus. Jesus sends out the seventy-two disciples to heal and proclaim the kingdom of God, showing us that following Jesus means sharing the good news of Jesus Christ with those who don’t know him. Jesus then tells the parable of the Good Samaritan, showing us that following Jesus means reaching across racial, religious, and socio-economic barriers to meet people’s needs and point them to the ultimate Good Samaritan, Jesus Christ himself. And most recently, Luke told us about Jesus’ encounter with Mary and Martha, showing us that the true disciple isn’t primarily concerned with much serving, but with sitting at the feet of Jesus and listening to him.

Our text today in Luke 11 follows this pattern of examining what it means to follow Jesus and extends that question to the topic of prayer. Verse 1: “Now Jesus was praying in a certain place, and when he finished, one of his disciples said to him, ‘Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples.’”

This leads to our first lesson about prayer: prayer is learned. The disciples didn’t just do what worked for them when it came to prayer. They asked Jesus to teach them to pray. If prayer is part of discipleship, then disciples must look to Jesus to learn how to pray.

It’s ironic that churches put so much effort into training believers to do all sorts of things – study the Bible, do evangelism, run a program, etc. – but you hardly ever hear about prayer training. We just assume that, as long as people are sincerely talking to God, they’re doing fine in the area of prayer.

That’s not what the Bible teaches. There’s a right way to pray, and there’s a wrong way to pray. God tells us how to pray, and what to pray for, in the Bible, and yet it can be easy for us to completely ignore what the Bible teaches about prayer.

It’s alright to start the Christian journey with a simple understanding of prayer, but it’s not alright to stay there. God wants all of us to pray, even simple, child-like prayers when we don’t know how to pray or what to pray for. But God also wants us to grow in our prayer life. He wants us to align our prayer life with what the Bible about prayer.

How do we do that? We can do that by studying the Bible, reading books about prayer, and even attending our prayer meetings, where we spend time praying and learning together about how God wants us to pray.

When believers gather to pray together, we don’t believe that the best way to facilitate prayer is to just take up whatever requests people bring to the group and let those requests dictate what is prayed about. There’s certainly room for personal requests, but the danger there is that we focus completely on what we want and forget what God wants. To know what God wants us to pray for, we need to turn to the Scriptures. That’s why our prayer meetings focus just as much on teaching as they do on prayer. So if you want to learn how to pray, one of the ways you can do that is to come to our prayer meetings.

(2) **PRAYER IS COMMUNAL**

The topic of prayer meetings naturally leads us to our second point: prayer is communal. We see that in the repeated use of plural pronouns in our text. The disciple approaches Jesus and says, “Lord, teach *us* to pray”, not “teach *me* to pray”, and though it was only one disciple who asked Jesus this question, Jesus gives him a model prayer that includes the language of “us”. “Give *us* each day our daily bread, and forgive *us* our sins, for *we* ourselves forgive everyone who is indebted to *us.* And lead *us* not into temptation.”

In other words, prayer is meant to be done with others and for others. The Lord’s Prayer uses plural pronouns because a plurality of people are meant to be present during prayer!

That’s not to say that prayer must always be done with other people. There are times when we need to retreat and pray in solitude. Jesus did this all the time. Luke tells us that Jesus would often withdraw to desolate places and pray by himself, especially during busy seasons of ministry. Jesus also tells us in Matthew 6:6,

“But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.”

Praying by yourself is essential to growing in your relationship with God and your dependence on him. God wants us to pray all the time, whether other people are around or not, and he wants us to retreat to a quiet place and spend time alone with him in prayer.

We must not forget, however, that praying with others is just as important as praying by ourselves. Praying with others *also* leads us into deeper fellowship with God. In fact, when I find prayer difficult to do by myself, what often helps is praying with others. Praying with others often gives us greater faith in God’s promises, and even greater passion for what he has promised.

So let us prioritize praying in community, whether it be praying with your friends, or your spouse, or your kids, or your church. One of the reasons why Pastor Tim and I put so much work into our Wednesday night prayer meetings is that we strongly believe that these meetings are crucial not only to the health of our church, but to the health of each individual person who comes to pray. Let’s prioritize praying with one another, because that’s how Jesus taught us to pray.

(3) **PRAYER IS GODWARD**

Now we switch gears from how to pray and turn to what to pray as we look to our third principle: prayer is Godward. We see that in the way Jesus opens up the Lord’s Prayer in verse 2, when he teaches us to pray, “Father, hallowed be your name.”

What does this mean? These days we’re not familiar with the term “hallowed”, which is an Old English term that has been kept in most popular Bible translations since the King James Version. The Greek word for “Hallowed” is actually the same word translated elsewhere as “Sanctify”, which means “to make holy”.

But since we know that God is already perfectly holy, Jesus isn’t teaching us to pray that God would make himself holier. He’s teaching us to pray that God would make his holiness known. The New Living Translation translates this request as, “Father, may your name *be kept holy*.” In other words, Jesus wants us to pray that God would display his holiness throughout the earth so that people all around the world would recognize that he is holy. And when people recognize that God is holy, they are recognizing that he is worthy to be worshipped, because he is completely set apart and unique in the perfection of all that is good: love, truth, justice, righteousness, mercy, wisdom, joy, etc.

This prayer that God would display his holiness is related to the second request in verse 2: “Your kingdom come.” Jesus’ disciples are meant to have a deep awareness that this world is not our home. Our home is with God, and we want God to bring his home into the world so that all the world, including us, would see him as he truly is in the beauty of his holiness. This is why we want his kingdom to come, because the more we see the world reflecting the values and truths of God’s Kingdom, the more we see God’s holiness. As Darrell Bock puts it in his commentary,

“The hope is in the full realization and culmination of God’s promised rule. God is holy, set apart from all others, and the kingdom’s coming will show this to be true in a way that nothing else can.”

Now we need to be honest with ourselves. How often do you pray that the Lord would be recognized and worshipped as holy? How often is it our prayer that God’s kingdom would come? I must confess that I often begin my prayers with one of two things: thanksgiving for what God has given me, or expression of my need for God's help. Both are good prayers, but they're not what Jesus tells us to start our prayers with. We're not meant to start with such things because prayer isn't primarily *manward*. Prayer is primarily *Godward*.

Thanksgiving for what God has given me is rooted in what God has done for *me*. Expression of my need for God's help is a request for what I want God to do for *me*. Jesus doesn't want us to approach prayer from a "me first", "manward" perspective. He wants us to approach prayer from a "God first", "Godward perspective."

There's nothing wrong with giving thanks to God for his blessings and asking him to lead us and provide for us. They're good things, and we should pray like that, as Jesus will teach us in verse 3. But Jesus wants us to become the kind of people who burn with a desire for God’s holiness and God’s kingdom that they’re the first requests we bring to God in prayer.

So when we pray, let's keep praying, "Father, thank you for our many blessings. Please keep us safe and lead us", but let's begin first by praying, "Father, you are holy. Please show that you are holy in all the world as you establish your heavenly reign in this world."

(4) **PRAYER IS DEPENDENT**

After Jesus leads us to reflect on God’s holiness, he then leads us to present our personal requests to God, leading to our fourth principle: prayer is dependent. We see that in verse 3 as Jesus teaches us to pray, "Give us each day our daily bread." It’s not difficult to see why this request only comes after the previous one that God’s name be hallowed. The more we meditate on God's holiness, the more confident we can be that he will provide everything that we need.

And in this prayer for ourselves, Jesus teaches us to live dependent on God even for the most basic necessities of life. We are to depend on God even for the simple provision of bread, which represents what we need to simply survive. What's more, Jesus teaches us to express this dependence on God every single day. When we pray for provision, we often pray generically that God would provide what we need, but Jesus says in verse 3 that we are to ask God to “Give us *each day* our daily bread”. Jesus wants us to come to God daily for what we need for that day.

I feel myself particularly convicted by this part of the Lord's Prayer, because I rarely pray like this. I give thanks for God's provision, but I rarely ask for it. When I do ask for provision, it's for exceptional needs, not the basic necessities of life. When it comes to the basics, it's so easy for me to feel like I have that covered. No need to bother God with it.

What that reveals about me, however, is that I'm not really depending on God. I'm depending on myself. I only depend on God when I don't believe I can depend on myself. The problem with that kind of thinking is that, the more I become able to depend on myself, the less dependent I will become on God. Our dependence on God shouldn't change based on how much we feel we can depend on ourselves. Our dependence on God should be absolute and unchanging regardless of how much money we have in the bank account, and how much food we have in the fridge. Jesus teaches us to express and cultivate this kind of humble dependence by asking God daily to provide for even our most basic needs.

Our dependence on God, however, isn't just physical. It's spiritual as well. In verse 4, Jesus teaches us to ask God to forgive us our sins. Why? Because we need forgiveness just as much as we need food. We sin every day, just like we get hungry every day, and we will continue sinning every until the fullness of God's kingdom comes, and we are made holy as our heavenly father is holy.

So is confession part of your daily prayer routine? Each day, are you asking God to forgive you of your sins? If you're not, then it reveals something about who and what you’re depending on when it comes to your sin. Just as failing to ask God for daily provision means that we're depending on ourselves, failing to ask God for daily forgiveness also means that we're depending on ourselves. It shows that we’re trying to make up for our sins in other ways. We start believing that our good works will outweigh the bad ones, or that the sins we’re committing aren’t actually sinful. Whatever we’re depending on, if we’re not depending on God to forgive our sins, we’re going to drift away from him.

None of our finest works can atone for our sins, and nothing that we believe can change what is actually sinful in God’s eyes. We need to depend daily on the forgiveness that God offers us through Christ, and we express and cultivate that dependence through daily confession.

(5) **PRAYER IS SANCTIFYING**

The practice of daily confession shows us our fifth principle about prayer, which is that prayer is sanctifying. We see that in the remaining portion of verse 4, starting with the phrase, “for we ourselves forgive everyone who is indebted to us."

What Jesus has done here is he's built in a way for us to check our hearts before we come to God for forgiveness. Do we want God's forgiveness? If so, then we need to ask ourselves whether we're willing to extend forgiveness to others.

Now, Jesus isn’t saying that God will only forgive us if we forgive others, as if forgiving others is a condition of his forgiveness. Instead, he’s saying that, if we are truly forgiven by God, then we will become people who forgive those who wrong us. There’s a difference between forgiving others *so that* we can receive God’s forgiveness (false), and forgiving others *because* we have received God’s forgiveness (true). Forgiving others isn’t the cause of God’s forgiveness. It’s the result of God’s forgiveness.

But what if someone says they’re forgiven by God, but they’re unwilling to forgive others? Then they show that they never received God’s forgiveness in the first place. If someone has truly been forgiven by God, then they will become forgiving people. It may take time, it may take much grace, but it will happen.

So when Jesus teaches us to pray “forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone who is indebted to us”, he’s reminding us that, though God’s forgiveness costs us nothing, it changes us into different people. We become so aware of how much God has forgiven us, that even the worst of wrongs done to us by other people seem small in comparison and we’re able to forgive them.

This shows us that prayer is sanctifying. As we ask God to forgive us of our sins against him, we become the kinds of people who are able and willing to forgive others of their sins against us. Meditating on our forgiving God makes us forgiving people who increasingly resemble him.

The sanctifying work of prayer is echoed in the last part of verse 4: “And lead us not into temptation”. As we reflect daily on our need for forgiveness from a holy God, we recognize how desperately we need his help to stop sinning. Therefore, we don’t just pray that God would forgive our sins. We pray that God would keep us from the temptations that lead us to sin.

This leads us back full circle to the first request, that God would hallow his Name. God will increasingly hallow his name *through us* as we become increasingly free from sin and its temptations. Our prayer that God would sanctify us is really no different from our prayer that God would sanctify himself. Our holy God manifests his holiness through the holiness of his people.

(6) **PRAYER IS CONFIDENT**

Jesus ends his teaching on prayer with a parable and a final word of encouragement. Two teachings, but one point, leading to our sixth and last point: prayer is confident.

Jesus tells the parable in verses 5-8. It’s a story about three friends. The first friend is a man who has just completed a journey. The second friend is a man who is asked to host the first friend. The third friend is a man who is asked by the second friend to provide food for the first friend.

It seems like a rather innocuous little situation, but there are a couple problems. The first friend arrived at the second friend’s house at midnight, and the second friend has no food for him. This parable is set at a time when hospitality mattered a lot more than it does now. To host an out of town guest at your house without giving him anything to eat was disgraceful, even if the guest arrived at midnight. But what was the second friend to do? He had no way of providing food because the day’s bread had already been consumed and the market had long been shut down for the day. So he has one of two options: he can suffer the shame of being a bad host, or he can ask the third friend who apparently has some spare bread to lend him some.

The second friend chooses the second option, even though it’s going to cause the third friend a lot of inconvenience. Ancient houses typically only had one room, so to wake up the third friend at midnight would likely mean waking up the entire family. Jesus tells us what would have gone through the third friend’s mind in verse 7: “Do not bother me; the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed. I cannot get up and give you anything.”

That’s what he was thinking, but that’s not what he does. Jesus says in verse 8, “I tell you, though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, yet because of his impudence (or persistence) he will rise and give him whatever he needs.”

What’s Jesus teaching us about prayer here? It’s not entirely clear yet, but it becomes clear when we look at verses 11-13: “What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will instead of a fish give him a serpent; or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!”

What Jesus is doing here is he’s making a “lesser-to-greater” argument: if tired, grumpy friends will give you what you ask for, and sinful, fallen fathers give their children what they ask for, how much more will God, who is never tired, never grumpy, and never sins, give you what you ask for in prayer?

In other words, Jesus leads us to reflect on our own experiences as friends and parents in order to draw a conclusion about God. Knowledge of who we are can lead us to knowledge of who God is. We give good things to people all the time. We give sacrificially like the third friend, even when it’s inconvenient. We give happily to our children, even though we are sinful. If we give freely, sacrificially, and even happily, then we can be confident that God will give us what we ask for in prayer as well.

Our confidence in God’s eagerness to answer our prayers doesn’t only come from the fact that he is greater than us. It also comes from the fact that God, the greater one, is also our Heavenly Father. The illustration Jesus uses in verses 11-13 isn’t just a comparison of sinful man and a holy God. It’s a comparison between earthly fathers and our Heavenly Father.

Jesus died on the cross not only to forgive us of our sins, but to adopt us into God’s family. That’s why he doesn’t teach his disciples in verse 2 to pray, “God, hallowed be your name”, but “Father, hallowed be your name.” For those who have put their faith in Christ, God isn’t just a divine, eternal being living in heaven dispassionately listening to our requests. He is a personal, intimate, and loving Father who loves to hear us and answer our requests.

This shows us that Jesus doesn’t just teach us how to pray. He also gives us the assurance that we can pray to God with confidence. His life, death, and resurrection have granted us the forgiveness of our sins, *and* have brought us into a new relationship with God: he is our Heavenly Father, and we are his beloved children.

And so, Jesus assures us with this promise in verses 9-10: “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 the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened.” We ask, seek, and knock through prayer with confidence, because the one we approach is our loving, heavenly Father.

That doesn’t mean that God will give us whatever we ask for, because not everything we ask for is good for us. We can be like the child in verse 11, except we reverse the animals: we don’t ask for the fish, we ask for the serpent. What mother or father among us would actually answer that request? Of course we wouldn’t, not because we don’t love the child, but precisely because we do.

We may not ask God for serpents and scorpions, but we do ask God for things that can be just as harmful. They can be things that may be good for us later on in life, but not now. Things like relationships, a good career, or certain material possessions. God often answers prayers for those sorts of things by denying them, not because he doesn’t love us, but precisely because he does. He sees the dangers even when we don’t, so he denies them for our own good.

**CONCLUSION**

Jesus ends his teaching on prayer with a rather surprising conclusion in verse 13 when he says, “If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!”

Why does Jesus end like this? What does the Holy Spirit have to do with any of the things he’s just said? The answer is everything. The Holy Spirit has everything to do with everything that Jesus has just said, because God gives the Spirit in answer to all that Jesus has taught us to pray.

Jesus teaches us to pray that our Heavenly Father would sanctify his name, and God answers that prayer by sending his Holy Spirit. It’s the Spirit who shows us the holiness of God as he works in our hearts, and it’s the Spirit who brings God’s kingdom to earth as he convicts sinners, give spiritual gifts to believers, and empowers us for ministry.

When we pray that God would forgive us our sins, God sends his Spirit to assure us of the forgiveness we have in Christ.

When we are reminded that we must forgive those who are indebted to us, God sends his Spirit to sanctify us and make us more like him.

When we pray that God would lead us not into temptation, God sends his Spirit to lead us in paths of righteousness and to stand up under every temptation in victory.

God may not give us the serpents and scorpions that our sinful nature so desperately craves, but he will give us his Spirit. The Spirit is the one thing we can always be confident that God will give us, because the Spirit is the ultimate answer to the Lord’s Prayer. So let us ask, seek, and knock at the door of our Heavenly Father’s home with confidence, that he may send his Spirit as his answer to our prayers.