

The School of Prayer

Luke 11:1-13

Sunday, March 22, 2026

What would it be like if you could learn a skill from a world-class expert? What if you could learn the fundamentals of basketball from Michael Jordan or LeBron James? What if you could get Warren Buffet to teach you his secrets of investing? What would it be like to get acting lessons from Meryl Streep? If you could travel back in time, imagine learning to paint with Michelangelo, learning to write symphonies with Mozart or Beethoven, or learning to cook with Julia Child. It's unlikely that we'll ever be invited to learn from one of *these* experts, but when it comes to learning how to pray, we have access to the Master Teacher himself.

We're moving into chapter 11 of the Gospel of Luke today, and here at the start, we have another one of Jesus's greatest hits. Today we're talking about the Lord's Prayer.

Like some of the other texts we've come across recently, the Lord's Prayer is a passage many people are familiar with. Christians all over the world regularly recite the Lord's Prayer.

We'll dig into the prayer itself a bit this morning, but I don't want us to miss that the Lord's Prayer is part of a larger teaching on the subject of prayer. Like any good sermon, we're going to take this one in three parts. We'll start by seeing how Jesus, our Teacher, gives us a pattern for prayer. Second, we'll see how Jesus, the Son, puts the focus of prayer on the Father. Then finally, we'll finish by seeing how Jesus, our Savior, makes prayer possible.

We'll start with the most familiar portion of this passage, verses 1-4, including the Lord's Prayer itself. What we see here first is that **Jesus, our Teacher, gives us a pattern for prayer**, and he does this in two ways.

Luke launches into this story by telling us that "One day Jesus was praying in a certain place" (11:1).¹ That's about the most nondescript statement he could have made about Jesus' activity. We don't know how long after the visit with Martha and Mary that this event took place. Luke doesn't tell us *where* Jesus was praying, only that it was in a "certain place." We don't get to hear the actual words that Jesus prayed. But we can learn a lot about prayer not by seeking to *mimic* Jesus' actions, but by patterning our prayer life after his own.

When you have time, read back through Luke's Gospel and notice how many times we're allowed to eavesdrop in on Jesus' prayer life. Sometimes we *do* get to hear what Jesus said in his prayers, but other times we observe Jesus in prayer from a distance. In Luke 11:1, we see Jesus' habit of designating a particular time and place for prayer.

Certainly, we can pray throughout our day and in a variety of places. The point is not that we must limit our prayer time to *only* one place or one particular hour of the day. Instead, our takeaway should be, when we observe Jesus' own prayer habits, we see that even the Lord made plans to pray.

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations are from the NIV Bible (The Holy Bible, New International Version, © 2011 by Biblical, Inc.)

Prayer is no different from any other habits. If you don't plan to exercise, you probably won't. If you don't plan to call that friend you haven't talked to in a while, you probably won't do it. If you don't plan to complete that chore, read that book, or run that errand, it likely won't happen. The same is true of prayer. Prayer without a plan typically doesn't happen. Even the Lord Jesus intentionally made plans to pray.

Have you ever carved out *a particular time* in your day to pray? The time of day doesn't matter so much as long as it works for you. Prayer almost never happens if we wait until there's an opening in our schedule. Prayer often gets rushed if we try to squeeze it in between appointments and responsibilities. We may desire to be people of prayer, but too often the tyranny of the urgent crowds it out. Do you make it a habit to carve out a *particular time* in your day to pray?

Likewise, have you ever designated *a particular place* where you spend time in prayer? The location doesn't matter as long as it's free of distractions preventing you from focusing. For me, I never want to be within arm's reach of my computer when I'm trying to focus on prayer. Likewise, I know how easy it is for me to want to pick up my phone and send someone a text, do a quick Google search, or even check the weather. For me, I don't want the place where I go to pray to be too comfortable, lest my prayer time turns into nap time.

What about you? When you plan to pray, do you designate *a particular place* that is conducive and not counter productive to focusing on prayer?

If you don't have a plan to pray, you're probably not going to. This is true whether we're talking about private times of prayer or when we're praying with others. Luke doesn't tell us exactly when, where, or what Jesus prayed, but we see how even Jesus consistently made plans to pray.

When Jesus finished praying, Luke tells us that "one of his disciples said to him, 'Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples'" (11:2). Much like Mary in the previous passage "who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said" (10:39), this unnamed disciple, speaking on behalf of the others, asked Jesus to disciple them in learning how to pray.

Prayer is not a hard skill to learn. Someone likely taught you to pray. It might have been a parent or grandparent, a Sunday school teacher or a youth leader, or it may simply have been a Christian friend who took time to pray with you. You learned to pray by listening to someone else pray.

That's what's going on here. Jesus doesn't start with the mechanics of prayer, a theology of prayer, or even an exploration of the great prayers of the Bible. Jesus, the Teacher said to his disciples, "When you pray, say," and then he led them in a prayer they could make their own.

Since we're looking at verses 1-13 today, I'll only make a few observations from verses 1-4. However, if you want to dig deeper, let me recommend two little books to check out. Both are short, just over 100 pages each, but they're rich in what they teach.

Author J.I Packer put out a little book in 2007 called *Praying the Lord's Prayer*, and more recently, pastor and author, Kevin De Young's little book *The Lord's Prayer: Learning from Jesus on What, Why, and How to Pray* came out in 2022. An Amazon search will turn up dozens of books on the Lord's Prayer, but I would recommend starting with either of these two.

Notice, first, that Jesus *does* tell his disciples, "When you pray, say: "Father," and so on. We might think that prayers are more authentic and from the heart when they're spontaneous, but that's not necessarily the case. It's good to pray the Lord's Prayer once in a while. Written prayers are just as powerful as spontaneous prayers.

Notice also the form this prayer takes. Each line as it is addressed to God the Father is a petition. *May your name, Father be hallowed (made holy). Your kingdom come. Provide for us and forgive us. Protect us and prevent us from yielding to temptation.*

Notice also the pronouns "us," "our," and "we " in verses 3-4. Those are *plural* pronouns. Yes, I think we're free to swap in "I," "me," and "my," when we pray the Lord's Prayer, but it seems that Jesus wanted his disciples to pray with and for one another.

There are a number of other observations we could make here. I encourage you sometime to sit down with your Bible, a pen, and a notepad and write down what you observe about prayer in these first four verses. For now, between Jesus' own example and the words he taught his disciples to pray, I want you to see how Jesus, our Teacher, gives us a pattern for prayer.

What I find interesting about this passage is that aside from a brief word of narration, followed by a question from one of the disciples, the rest of this passage (verses 2-13) come entirely from the mouth of Jesus. This whole passage is Jesus' response to the request, "Lord, teach us to pray" (11:1).

Notice how the beginning and the end of Jesus' teaching directs the disciples' focus toward God the Father. In verse 2, Jesus begins by teaching them to address God as Father. In the final verse, verse 13, Jesus concludes by showing them how the Father loves to give good gifts to his children.

What this suggests is that Jesus was doing more than just teaching his disciples how to pray. In addition to giving us a pattern for prayer, **Jesus, the Son, puts the focus of prayer on the Father.** How does he do this? Jesus utilizes a parable.

You remember what I said a couple of weeks ago about what a parable is and how Jesus used them? Jesus often used stories to illustrate spiritual truth. Let's read verses 5-13 and listen to his parable. I'm skipping verses 9-10 for now, but will come back to them later.

"Then Jesus said to [his disciples], "Suppose you have a friend, and you go to him at midnight and say, 'Friend, lend me three loaves of bread; a friend of mine on a journey has come to me, and I have no food to offer him.' And suppose the one inside answers, 'Don't bother me. The door is already locked, and my children and I are in bed. I can't

get up and give you anything.' I tell you, even though he will not get up and give you the bread because of friendship, yet because of your shameless audacity he will surely get up and give you as much as you need" (11:5-8).

Skipping ahead to verse 11:

""Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!" (11:11-13).

The scene Jesus describes in the first part, verses 5-8, probably wouldn't happen today. If someone came to one of our homes at midnight to ask for some groceries to make a meal for an impromptu visitor, we would probably see them on our doorbell camera and tell them to go find a store that's open 24 hours. In Jesus' day, people didn't have that option, and as we've seen in Luke's Gospel, this was a culture in which hospitality was expected to be shown to guests.

The friend in Jesus' story was understandably upset by the late night request. His kids weren't asleep in the upstairs bedroom; the family was likely all in the same bed in their tiny first-century home. For him to get up and get some bread would have disturbed the whole household. He had every reason to say in verse 7, "Don't bother me." And yet he does get up to answer the door and fulfill the request, but not for the reasons we might think. Jesus says that he doesn't do so out of friendship, but because the guy at the door had the nerve to ask at such an inconvenient time and in such an imposing manner.

What was Jesus' point? Was he saying that we can come to God in prayer like an annoying neighbor, and God will eventually give us what we want so we'll stop bugging him? Not quite. Let's look at the rest of the parable to understand Jesus' point.

In the second half of the parable, verses 11-13, Jesus asks a rhetorical question. Would any parent intentionally give bad things to their kids? If your kid asked for something to eat, would you slip them something dangerous, either as a joke, or worse, with an intent to harm them? No!

By the way, we all know that parents don't give bad things to their kids, grandparents do. Grandparents don't give their grandkids snakes and scorpions, but they do like to give out loads of candy, and let kids have ice cream for dinner. That's the risk parents take sending the kids to grandma and grandpa's for the weekend. They hop them up on sugar and send them home.

Anyway, Jesus gets to the point in verse 13,

"If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!" (11:13).

Jesus wasn't giving his disciples a lesson in what prayer is, how it works, or how to get the most out of prayer. Jesus, the Son, wanted to make sure their focus was on the Father.

We tend to think about prayer as the means by which we ask the Father to give us what we need. That's not necessarily false. Jesus does say in verses 9-10,

"So I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened" (11:9-10).

The Lord's Prayer is a series of petitions, asking the Father for specific things. The Father does want his children to ask, seek, and knock, and they should expect him to answer and give good things, not bad.

But we must never reduce prayer simply to the means by which we get God to give us what we need. Prayer is more than a child asking a parent to get something off a tall shelf that they can't reach. If we habitually treat prayer this way, it will distort our view of God. If prayer is a self-serving means to an end, then God becomes a genie who miraculously makes things happen for us. We'll see God as our personal assistant who helps us become more productive. Worse yet, we may view God as our servant, one who is obligated to not only give us what we need, but also to give us what we want.

Prayer is not the means by which we get God to give us more of what we want. Prayer is the means by which we get more of God, the one who loves to give good gifts to his children.

It's interesting that in verse 13, Jesus says that the good gift the Father loves to give is the Holy Spirit. The best gift God gives is more of himself. By the way, notice how trinitarian that verse is. Jesus, the Son, teaches his disciples to pray to God the Father, who promises to give his children the Holy Spirit. Jesus, the Son, puts the focus of prayer on the Father.

That covers the passage, but there's just one problem. Prayer is impossible. You might agree that prayer is difficult, and even unnatural, but am I crazy for saying that prayer is *impossible*? Let me explain.

The Bible teaches that "all [human beings] have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23). As a result, our sin against God has alienated all people from him. That's what happens when we willfully rebel against a holy God. Scripture describes this alienation from God as *enmity* with him. Unless reconciliation is made, our sin makes us God's enemies, and he ours.

What this means is that it is *impossible* for unreconciled sinners to pray the Lord's prayer. It's impossible to pray the Lord's Prayer apart from knowing Christ.

The Lord's Prayer says to address God as Father. But apart from Christ, we have no right to call him Father, no standing as children of God.

The Lord's Prayer says to hallow God's name, to honor him as holy. But by definition, sinful rebellion does the exact opposite.

Jesus said, "When you pray, say [to God]: ...Your kingdom come." But as unreconciled rebels, sinful men and women are excluded from God's kingdom.

Apart from Christ, we have no grounds to ask for God's favor or for his forgiveness, nor do we have any motivation to forgive others.

Those who are alienated from God have no hope and no power to resist the devil or to reject temptation.

That's what I mean when I say that apart from Christ, it is impossible to pray the Lord's prayer.

But here's the good news: **Jesus, our Savior, makes prayer possible.** I don't just mean that as Christians, Jesus, our Teacher has given us a pattern for prayer, though he has. I don't just mean that in Christ, we now have a Father in Heaven who hears our prayers, though we do. I'm saying that the gospel shows us that because of Jesus' perfect obedience and sacrificial death on our behalf, he has made a way for us to pray. Another way to say this is that Jesus doesn't just teach us how to pray; Jesus has fulfilled every phrase of the Lord's prayer on our behalf. Let me show you as we wrap up.

In Christ, we become children of the Heavenly Father. The Apostle John emphasized this in both his Gospel and his letters. John 1:11-12 says,

"He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God."

And in 1 John 3:1 he says,

"See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him."

In Christ, we belong to God's kingdom, and await the return of Christ, our King. The Apostle Paul declares in Philippians 3:18-20,

"For, as I have often told you before and now tell you again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is set on earthly things. But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ."

In Christ, we can boldly approach the throne of grace. We read in Hebrews 4:14-16,

"Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest

who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin. Let us then approach God’s throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.”

In Christ, the Holy Spirit, our Helper, now dwells within us. Before Jesus went to the cross, he said to his disciples,

“If you love me, keep my commands. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever—the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you” (John 14:15-17).

Apart from Christ, it is impossible to pray the Lord's prayer. But the good news of the gospel is that Jesus, our Savior, makes prayer possible.

I can think of no better way for us to close this message than by praying the Lord's Prayer together. Will you pray with me?

"Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy Name,
thy kingdom come,
thy will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory,
for ever and ever. Amen."