

## Shameless Prayer

### READING

**Luke 11:**<sup>1</sup> One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he finished, one of his disciples said to him, “Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples.” <sup>2</sup> He said to them, “When you pray, say:

“Father,  
hallowed be your name,  
your kingdom come.

<sup>3</sup> Give us each day our daily bread.

<sup>4</sup> Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us.  
And lead us not into temptation.”

<sup>5</sup> Then Jesus said to them, “Suppose you have a friend, and you go to him at midnight and say, ‘Friend, lend me three loaves of bread; <sup>6</sup> a friend of mine on a journey has come to me, and I have no food to offer him.’ <sup>7</sup> 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.’ <sup>8</sup> 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.

As the old saying goes, “Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime.” Many come to Jesus looking for something - healing, forgiveness, freedom from sin - and he is always sure to deliver. But often the frustrating part is that Jesus then invites us into more maturity so that we might also do the same.

This morning we’re continuing our series on the BASICS of the Christian journey by reflecting on one of THE MOST BASIC practices that all Christians undertake - Prayer. And yet, as simple as it is - just this 2 way conversation between us and the Lord - we can often feel lost.

HOW are we supposed to pray?

That’s exactly what the disciples are asking in the passage Sue just read for us.

They’re looking for something simple - they want a prayer to pray. They have been genuinely inspired by Jesus, and they want to learn to pray like him - just like the followers of John the Baptist were able to learn from him. Jesus starts by giving instruction on words to pray.

You may recognize the prayer as the Lord’s prayer, but you probably also noticed that it sounds a little off. We are more familiar with the version of this prayer shared in the Gospel of Matthew. The prayer here is shorter, lacking some nuanced wording. You may ask - was Matthew just a better note-taker than Luke? I’d suggest that this is actually one of many times that Jesus taught about prayer. He’s constantly on the move and gaining new followers all the time. It only makes sense that he’d need to teach some important lessons more than once!

If you've ever worked in youth ministry, you know that sometimes you need to repeat things multiple times even for those who have been around for years!

On this occasion it seems as if Jesus is reading his crowd and decides, "no, they asked *this* but what they really need is *this*." They asked for words to pray. They want to honor God so that their prayers will be heard. What they needed was a whole new posture.

Jesus cares more about *how* we pray than *what* we pray.

So *how* DO we pray, according to Jesus? Jesus explains through a somewhat strange parable.

Just to recap - (1) a person has an unexpected visitor in the night, hospitality culture at that time is such that it's unacceptable NOT to let him in and even worse not to have anything to give them. (2) Unexpected host needs some bread, so they go to their neighbor to ask for some, but the neighbor has already put the kids to bed and locked up for the night. (3) The host KEEPS asking and knocking at the door, so the neighbor finally relents and gets up to help.

If you're anything like me, this story is confusing to you. First of all, I rarely have visitors in the middle of the night. If I did, I would not feel all that bad about turning them away if I didn't have anything for them. I might feel a little sad and worried for them - perhaps even go so far as to recommend somewhere else - but the thought of bringing them in and then going to wake up my neighbor for help seems foreign. Without getting bogged down in details, I think we can notice one truth - this host is desperate for bread. Desperate enough to wake up his neighbor in the middle of the night and beg for some help.

And what is Jesus saying? The parable explicitly states that the neighbor didn't help out of friendship, but because of the hosts "shameless audacity." Some translations say "persistence," "importunity," "shamelessness." The point is that the host pestered his neighbor and got what he needed. So what are we supposed to learn from this? - If we annoy God enough, we'll get what we want? Our sense of decency would call that selfishness and entitlement.

What we see here instead is Jesus using an example to illustrate a deeper truth. Later in Luke 18 we see Jesus tell a similar story:

- A widow keeps coming to a judge trying to get justice for her case, but the judge is known for caring nothing about God or the poor or what anyone thought of him.
- The widow keeps coming, however, and eventually the the judge gives her justice so that she'll stop pestering him.

The point is not that we should annoy God. The point is that God is not an unjust judge, and God is not an inconvenienced neighbor. God is the maker of the heavens and earth, both infinitely capable and infinitely invested the good of those He has created and redeemed.

Jesus is saying, "Look, you'll trust people who aren't even your friends to come through for you in your time of desperation...why don't you trust God enough to come to Him?"

So there's a few things this parable teaches us about how Jesus wants us to pray:

We are to pray SHAMELESSLY, PERSISTENTLY, and EXPECTANTLY. *[REPEAT]*

- Shamelessly because Jesus has already removed all our shame. Our sin, no matter how rank or grotesque has been forgiven once and for all on the cross. There is now no condemnation that stands between you and God. He sees and knows you perfectly, and loves you perfectly. He wants you to repent of your sin for YOUR good, but there is no need for shame.
- Our prayer should be persistent because it matters. The things we bring to God in prayer matter to Him BECAUSE it matters to us. And if it matters, then it is worth repeating. Praying persistently isn't a lack of faith, it's an affirmation that the request is important. And even if you don't have a specific request, it's important to keep communication open with God. To discover what matters to His heart.
- Finally our prayer should be expectant, because God is both loving and capable. Our God is living and active in our world and He has said that He longs to answer our prayers. Sometimes that answer is "No" to what we're currently asking, but even in those cases, God longs to tell us and show us why. God wants us to SO know His character that we can pray with confidence that He will answer that prayer, because it's the kind of prayer He'd want us to pray. [That's what it means to pray in Jesus' name]

Another way of summing all that up is to say:

**PRAY AS IF GOD IS WHO HE SAYS HE IS.**

Because if God really is as loving as He says He is, and interested in us as He says He is, and as capable as He says He is - there is no reason we shouldn't be bringing everything to Him that we can.

Jesus goes on to say in Luke 11:9 ... if you keep on asking, keep on seeking, and keep on knocking, you will receive, you'll find, and the door will be opened.

You may have heard this passage before. But when read together with this parable, I think the phrase "knock and the door will be opened to you" has new meaning. We're back in the shoes of the host at midnight, desperate for bread and unsure of the response we'll get on the other side of that door.

When Lydia was pregnant with Deacon, we learned far more about health insurance than we ever cared to. Leading up to the delivery, we were pleased that our insurance was paying the lion's share of the costs for our prenatal check-ups.

Most of the bills we received were \$15 or less after insurance - which was within our budget. However, somewhere along the way it was determined that because Lydia's blood type (O-) could react negatively with the baby's blood type, she needed to get something called a Rhogam shot. It turns out that since not all women need to undergo this procedure, it was not considered "standard" or "necessary" and our insurance did not cover it the same way.

We ended up with a bill that was way more expensive than we could afford. And with student loans, a mortgage (this was before we moved here and into the parsonage), and all sorts of unknowns about other birth costs, I was scrambling to figure out what to do.

Months prior to this, my dad had mentioned that he was going to give me some money for my birthday - for one reason or another, that money never really got to me. I didn't really think much of it - it was a gift, and he didn't have to give it to me, so I wasn't going to make a big deal about it.

But with this bill, I figured that money could really come in handy - so I called my dad and let him know about the situation, asking if he could send that money so that the bill would be more manageable.

He agreed. A few weeks went by and we still hadn't seen or heard anything about the money.

After several calls back and forth, my dad informed me that he was having a little trouble coming up with the money.

Somewhat exasperated, I finally confronted him. "I understand, but I would not have even expected the money if you hadn't said you planned to give it to me that money months ago...I feel like you should've just not said anything."

My father was confused. His confusion confused me. "You never got that birthday money?" he asked.

As it turns out, my dad and stepmom had been dealing with an issue with their previous bank and identity fraud. In the process, they never noticed that the money they intended to send months back apparently never went through.

He thought I already had that money, and that I was asking for help with this bill. He'd been spending the last several weeks trying to figure out how to pay our whole bill, while I was busy stewing about the small sum of money I thought he was making excuses for.

*If I hadn't asked, we'd have both gone on talking past each other. And I almost didn't!*

I was so afraid of what would happen if I opened that door. Would this strain my relationship with my dad? Money stuff is never fun to talk about. Would there be awkwardness and resentment between us? As it turns out, working through the awkward conversation brought us even closer.

What's your door?

- Where do you feel desperate in your life? Where do you need help?
- Why is it that you're afraid to knock? What are you afraid to find behind the door?
- Do you think God will be angry and inconvenienced by you? Will God be annoyed that you could not handle this by yourself? Will God be saddened and disgusted by your humility?

The profound beauty of the Gospel is that when we come to God's doorstep, whether at our most vulnerable and desperate or with the smallest amount of need, God responds by opening the door with gladness. He has taken away all our need for shame. He already knows your deepest insecurities and your smallest wants.

Would you just ask Him?

Shameless, Persistent, Expectant prayer is an act of trust in God's goodness.

And He. Is. Good.

Now, we're going to close with something a little bit differently this morning - but I want to make one final note about this passage...

One of the most interesting turns of the passage is that Jesus does not simply promise that the Father will give good gifts.

Jesus says, "Hey which of you dads if your kid asks for a fish would give him a snake? Or if he asks for an egg would you give him a scorpion?"

Kinda weird examples, but his point is, you're not going to give your kid something dangerous when they're asking for food.

And if WE can manage to know how to give good gifts...Jesus says, then how much more will God give...the Holy Spirit.

You may wonder like I did when I read this initially - Why are we all of a sudden talking about the Holy Spirit? That seems like it came out of nowhere.

For Jesus, however, this was the entire point. The disciples wanted a set of words to pray so that their prayers would be heard. Jesus wanted them to learn the heart of God by receiving the Holy Spirit.

When we pray, we don't have to worry whether our words are enough.

God's goodness is not contingent upon the quality of our words in prayer.

God's goodness is realized in the gift of the Holy Spirit.

#### CONCLUSION

God invites you to come to Him simply, as you are, without shame, persistently, expectantly.

And when we do, He gladly opens the door and fills us with the power of His Holy Spirit.

I'm going to invite the band back up to sing our final song, but as we sing, I want to invite you to make this both a time of praise and prayer.

This song is called Came to my Rescue - I love the chorus - "I called, and you answered - you can't to my rescue - and I just want to be where you are"

I want to invite you to get comfortable this morning - I intentionally planned my sermon to go a little shorter - we're not in a rush. Just spend some time talking with Jesus as we sing this song.

What's keeping you from coming to Jesus this morning? Is there some sin that's causing you shame? Jesus has already taken care of it. Bring it to Him.

Ask. Seek. Knock.

Jesus is ready and waiting to answer the door.