

## **“Lord, Teach Us to Pray” (Luke 11:1–13)**

**March 17, 2019**

**Brian Watson**

Have you ever wanted what someone else has? Of course, you have. At some point in our lives, all of us have probably wanted someone else’s money, house, car, or job, or perhaps their popularity or celebrity. But I’m not thinking of those kinds of things. I’m thinking more about abilities or personalities. Have you ever seen someone do something so well that you thought, “I wish I could do that”? Have you ever met someone who has a certain personality trait and you thought, “I wish I was more like that”? Perhaps the ability is something practical like the ability to cook well, or to fix a car. Perhaps the character trait is something like kindness, or perhaps you wish you were funnier or more intelligent.

A lot of times, when we want something that someone else has, it’s a sin. It’s envy. Or, we might call it coveting. But there are times when we see someone able to do something, and we think, “I want to learn how to that.” That’s not coveting; it’s emulating. It’s not necessarily a bad thing, depending on our motivation. It’s not wrong to see someone who is able to cook a great meal or fix their own car and think, “I would like to learn how to do what they do.” It’s not bad to see someone who acts calmly under pressure, or who treats everyone with grace and kindness and think, “I want to learn to be more like them.”

So, let’s say you know someone who has an ability or a characteristic that you desire to have. What would you do? Perhaps you would try to copy them. But, if you really know that person well, you might simply ask, “Could you teach me how to do that?” Or, you might say, “I’ve noticed that you always act this way, and I really admire that. What’s your secret?”

I imagine that Jesus’ followers had a similar experience. They were around Jesus, the greatest man who ever lived, and they saw how unique he was. He was an incredible teacher. He possessed great power—he could miraculously heal and feed people. He was able to handle stress and pressure without breaking. He never got his feathers ruffled. He was able to answer difficult questions in the most brilliant ways. He was the most spiritually mature person they ever met. He had a remarkable combination of qualities: he was selfless yet self-assured, tender yet tough, humble yet confident. There simply was no one like him.

And Jesus’ disciples must have realized that Jesus often prayed. It’s something that Luke in his Gospel brings up again and again. Jesus prayed when he was baptized, and the Holy Spirit

came upon him (Luke 3:21–22). He prayed alone and then people sought after him. The result was that he taught in many synagogues (Luke 4:42–44). Jesus prayed before healing a paralyzed man (Luke 5:16ff.). He prayed before he chose his twelve disciples (Luke 6:12–16). He was praying right before Peter confessed that he is “The Christ of God” (Luke 9:18–20). Jesus went with three of his disciples to pray when he was transfigured, appearing in all his glory (Luke 9:28–29). He urged his disciples to pray that more people would do the work of God and then he prayed to God with joy when his disciples returned successfully from their mission (Luke 10:2, 21–22).

So, prayer was an important part of Jesus’ life, and he often prayed at critical times. I’m sure his disciples noticed that when Jesus prayed, big things happened. Perhaps they connected his power and his abilities to his prayer life. It’s only natural for them to observe Jesus and say, “Hey, how do you do that? What’s your secret?”

And that’s what we see today, as we continue to study the life of Jesus. We’re now in chapter 11 of Luke. We’ll see what Jesus has to say about prayer.

First, let’s read verses 1–4:

<sup>1</sup> 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.” <sup>2</sup> And 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> and forgive us our sins,  
for we ourselves forgive everyone who is indebted to us.  
And lead us not into temptation.”<sup>1</sup>

Once again, Jesus was praying, and when he was done, one of his disciples asked Jesus to teach them to pray the way that John the Baptist taught his own disciples. We don’t have any record of John the Baptist teaching his disciples how to pray, but we know he had disciples, and he must have taught them something about that. At any rate, Jesus gives his disciples a model prayer.

What follows is often called “The Lord’s Prayer.” It’s not an accurate description of the prayer, because it sounds like it’s the prayer that Jesus often prayed. But Jesus wouldn’t need to

---

<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are taken from the English Standard Version (ESV).

pray that God would forgive his sins—he never sinned. A better title might be “The Disciples’ Prayer,” because it’s meant to be used by the disciples. But since the old title is so common, I’ll use that.

If you’re familiar with the Lord’s Prayer, you’ll notice that what appears in Luke is a bit shorter than the traditional version you’re used to. It’s shorter than the version found in Matthew. In Matthew’s Gospel, Jesus presented it in the Sermon on the Mount. Here, he’s teaching it privately to his disciples. Jesus must have taught the same things in slightly different ways over the course of his ministry. And the differences show us that the prayer is meant to be used as a framework, a skeleton that we fill out with the body of our own words, our own particular petitions. I don’t think Jesus intended for this prayer to be repeated word for word, without thinking, as if it’s some kind of mantra.

Before we look at some of the things Jesus teaches his followers to pray for, I want to note a couple features of the prayer. The first is that it’s a communal prayer. It’s not an individual prayer. The prayer mentions “us” and “our,” not “me” and “my.” This teaches us that we should pray together. Of course, we can and should pray alone. But praying together is important. We do that as a church on Sunday and Wednesday evenings. If you’re coming to those meetings, I would encourage you to do so.

The prayer begins “Father . . .” That’s another important feature of the prayer. Jesus teaches his followers to address God as Father. That’s one of the stunning things about Jesus’ teachings. There were times in the Old Testament when Israelites were referred to as God’s children or son (Deut. 14:1; Ps. 103:13; Hos. 11:1). And there were times in the Old Testament when God was referred to as Father (Isa. 63:16; 64:8). But those times were relatively few. According to David Garland, “The term ‘Father’ for God appears twenty-one times in the Old Testament, while it appears 255 times in the New Testament.”<sup>2</sup> That’s significant given the fact that the Old Testament is about four times as long as the New Testament. What that means is that Jesus taught his followers to know God intimately as their Father. We can come to God as his beloved children and know him as a loving Father. God is not some distant, terrifying being—at least not to those who put their faith in his Son, Jesus.

---

<sup>2</sup> David E. Garland, *Luke*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 471.

But because God is Father and can be known intimately doesn't mean he's not the transcendent Creator. So, Jesus teaches his followers to ask that God's name be "hallowed," or sanctified. God's name is his identity, and it refers to his reputation. God himself can't be made more holy, righteous, powerful, or perfect. God cannot improve. He already is perfect. But the prayer asks that God would make himself known for who he is. It asks that people would see that he is holy, that he is great. When we ask that God would be glorified, we're asking that we and other people would see how great God is.

There's a point in the Old Testament, in the book of Ezekiel, when God tells the sinful nation of Israel, which has gone into exile because of their idolatry, that he will act to vindicate his reputation. This is what Ezekiel 36:22–23 says:

<sup>22</sup> "Therefore say to the house of Israel, Thus says the Lord GOD: It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for the sake of my holy name, which you have profaned among the nations to which you came. <sup>23</sup> And I will vindicate the holiness of my great name, which has been profaned among the nations, and which you have profaned among them. And the nations will know that I am the LORD, declares the Lord GOD, when through you I vindicate my holiness before their eyes.

Because of the way Israel acted, they brought God's shame upon his reputation. They acted as if he was less valuable than their false gods. If they had seen how great God was, they would have lived differently. And they would have let the nations around them know how great their God was. When we live as if God is the greatest being there is, then we make his name "hallowed."

In a similar way, Jesus taught us to pray that God's kingdom would come. God has always been King, so there's a sense in which his kingdom has always been present. To use, once again, a definition that we recently learned, God's kingdom is "God's people in God's place under God's rule and blessing."<sup>3</sup> But since Jesus would have us pray for God's kingdom to come, it means that it has not come in its fullest yet. Israel often lived as if God were not their King. And today there are many people who live as if God is not King. When Jesus came the first time, he came to establish God's kingdom. He is the King of kings, and all who turn to him enter into God's kingdom. They are his people and he is their God. To pray that God's kingdom would come is to pray that everyone on Earth would bow the knee and worship God and live as if he were their ruler. God is a loving Father, but he's also a King who must be obeyed. One day,

---

<sup>3</sup> Vaughan Roberts uses this definition, based on one created by Graeme Goldsworthy, repeatedly in his book, *God's Big Picture: Tracing the Storyline of the Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002).

when Jesus returns, the whole world will become God’s kingdom. On that day, it will be said, “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever” (Rev. 11:15).

Jesus also teaches his disciples to pray for their daily needs. We are to pray for our “daily bread.” In the ancient world, having enough food to eat each day was no small thing, and it was no guarantee. They couldn’t go to the supermarket and buy that week’s food. Bread needed to be baked on a regular basis. But the prayer isn’t just for bread. It’s a request that God give us what we need each and every day. This implies that this prayer should be prayed daily. We should ask God to glorify himself, for people to enter into God’s kingdom, for Jesus to return, for God to give us everything we need, for God to forgive us our sins, and to protect us—all on a regular basis.

And that leads us to the next petition: forgiveness of sins. Again, this is why this isn’t the prayer that Jesus prayed for himself. Jesus needed no forgiveness because he never sinned. But forgiveness from God is exactly what we need. Luke compares this to being in debt. We owe God love, worship, and obedience. And the fact is that all of us have not loved, worshiped, treasured, and obeyed God—not all the time, and not perfectly. The fact that the first humans sinned means led to a terrible reality: we are separated from God, and God put the world under a partial penalty, or a curse. Instead of living in a garden paradise, we live in a world that is fallen. It’s still beautiful, but it has cracks in it. We can still experience goodness and love, but not perfectly. There is harmony, but there are often discordant notes that interrupt our peace. We’re not at peace with God, not at peace with each other, not at peace with our environment, and we’re not even at peace with ourselves. The only way to be restored to God and to have hope of living in a paradise once again is to seek forgiveness from God.

Forgiveness always comes at a cost. To borrow an illustration from Tim Keller, if you were to damage my property, you would enter into my debt.<sup>4</sup> You would owe me, at the least, the price of repair or replacement of my property. And if I am to forgive you of that debt, I would have to pay the cost. The damage doesn’t go away unless someone pays. So, I can choose to forgive you but then I accept the cost of the damage. In a similar way, for God to forgive us, he can’t simply forget that we’ve done wrong. For our sin to be repaired, someone must pay the

---

<sup>4</sup> See the discussion of forgiveness in Timothy Keller, *The Reason for God: Belief in an Age of Skepticism* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2008), 194–200.

price for the damage. And that's what Jesus came to do. He came to pay the price for our sin, which is a debt so large that we could never repay it. Because he is righteous, he had no debt. Because he's God, he is infinitely wealthy. He can pay for everyone's sin. But first, you must come to him and trust that he is the only one who can make us right with God. You must trust him personally. And a good way to do that is to take this prayer that he taught and make it your own. Say it to God, but don't repeat it as empty words. Adapt it with your own words. And mean it.

The prayer teaches us that we are completely reliant upon God, the way that young children are completely reliant upon their parents. We need God to provide for us. And he does. Every good gift we have comes from God (James 1:17). The Bible teaches us that God gives us the power to work and to earn money (Deut. 8:18). God sustains our lives at every moment. Without God, we wouldn't exist. And without God's mercy and grace, we couldn't be reconciled to him, forgiven of our sins, and adopted as his children.

If we are forgiven, we will forgive others. Jesus makes that clear. If we are not forgiving of those who seek our forgiveness, we must not have experienced God's forgiveness. If you truly know how awful your sin is, and how amazing it is for God to forgive you, then you can and will extend forgiveness to others, even when it's hard. For there to be true forgiveness, there must be confession of sin and repentance. If someone comes to us, admitting their wrong and seeking reconciliation, we must forgive. We must be like our Father.

We are also supposed to ask for spiritual protection. We are supposed to ask God that he would not lead us into temptation. We should pray that God would deliver us from sinning. We shouldn't view God's forgiveness as a blank check to keep on sinning. We shouldn't think that just because God pays our debt, we can keep running up a huge bill at his expense. We should desire not to sin. Though God gives us trials, these are meant to refine us. We should pray that we would endure the trials. But our Father knows our weaknesses, and we should ask him to strengthen us, not to overwhelm us with temptation. In 1 Corinthians 10:13, the apostle Paul says, "No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it." We should pray to that end.

So, Jesus teaches us to pray that God would be glorified, that God would provide for our needs, that God would forgive us our sins, and that God would spiritually protect us. This gives us a framework for how to pray.

But Jesus doesn't just give us that model prayer. Jesus also taught us about why we should go to our Father in heaven. He is a good Father who gives his children good things. To see that, let's look at the rest of the passage, verses 5–13:

<sup>5</sup> And he said to them, “Which of you who has a friend will go to him at midnight and say to him, ‘Friend, lend me three loaves, <sup>6</sup> for a friend of mine has arrived on a journey, and I have nothing to set before him’; <sup>7</sup> and he will answer from within, ‘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’? <sup>8</sup> I tell you, though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, yet because of his impudence he will rise and give him whatever he needs. <sup>9</sup> And I tell you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. <sup>10</sup> For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened. <sup>11</sup> What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will instead of a fish give him a serpent; <sup>12</sup> or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? <sup>13</sup> 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!”

The first part of that paragraph is a bit of a parable. Jesus has us imagine two men living in a village. One has a friend come to him at night. The problem is that this man has no food to give his visiting friend. The friend is probably tired and hungry and, again, there is no way to simply go to the grocery store or call for late night delivery. If the man doesn't feed his friend, his friend doesn't eat. More than that, the man would experience shame for being a bad host. So, he goes to his friend in the village at midnight and asks for three loaves of bread. The other man in the village may be bothered. He lives in a one-bedroom house. The first man has interrupted his sleep and is in danger of waking up his children. But even if that man is put out, grumpy, and half asleep, he will give his friend what he needs. The point Jesus is making is that if such people are willing to answer the bold request of their friends, how much more does God the Father give good things to his children.

God is always listening. He never sleeps. He knows all. He can process billions of prayer requests at the same time. And God is not some grumpy man who gives begrudgingly. So, Jesus encourages us to go to God, to ask for what we need. We are to ask God, and what we need will

be given to us. We are to seek God, and we will find him. We should knock on the door of his kingdom, and the gates will be opened.

Jesus then gives us another reason to go to our Father in verses 11–13. He asks what kind of human father would give his child a serpent instead of a fish. The serpent might have been a water snake used for bait.<sup>5</sup> We might paraphrase this statement by saying, “What kind of father would give his son a worm when he asked for salmon?” If the child asked for an egg to eat, no father would give him a scorpion. Now, I suppose there are some pretty terrible parents who might give their children something bad when they asked for something good, but most parents wouldn’t do this. Most parents give their children what they need, even if it’s not what their children want. And Jesus’ point is that if humans, with all their sin, manage to give their children what they need, how much more will the perfect Father give his children what they need when they ask him.

We shouldn’t miss the fact that Jesus refers to his followers as “evil.” God doesn’t flatter us. He doesn’t sugar coat things. Even the followers of Jesus have their sins. Christians don’t earn their way to God through good behavior. No one is good enough to be in a right relationship with God. Even the best people are evil because of the power of sin. That’s why all of us need to go to God for forgiveness, and the only path to God is Jesus himself (John 14:6). Jesus does not teach us that we are deserving of God’s good gifts. He teaches us that God gives to those who are undeserving. God even adopts bratty kids into his family and makes them his own children.

So, if sinful people know how to give good gifts to their children, how much more will the perfect Father give good gifts to his children. And the chief good gift is the Holy Spirit. It’s interesting that Jesus says that at the end: “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!” That seems to come out of the blue.

Well, if the mention of the Holy Spirit seems to come out of the blue, it’s because we’re not thinking of asking God for the right things. Remember what Jesus taught us to pray for: God’s glory, God’s kingdom, what we need, forgiveness of sins, and protection from sin and evil. This is what we need to pray for, and the answer to our prayers is the Holy Spirit.

---

<sup>5</sup> Darrell L. Bock, *Luke: 9:51–24:53*, vol. 2, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1996), 1061 n. 36.

Earlier, I quoted a passage from the prophet Ezekiel, where God says that he will act to vindicate his name. These are the verses that immediately follow:

<sup>24</sup> I will take you from the nations and gather you from all the countries and bring you into your own land. <sup>25</sup> I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. <sup>26</sup> And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. <sup>27</sup> And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules. <sup>28</sup> You shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers, and you shall be my people, and I will be your God (Ezek. 36:24–28).

How does God sanctify his name? How does God vindicate the holiness of his great name? He gives the Holy Spirit to his people. The Holy Spirit causes us to be born again, to see and enter into the kingdom of God by faith (John 3:3–8). Without the work of the Holy Spirit, we wouldn't trust Jesus, we wouldn't seek forgiveness from God. Without the Holy Spirit, we couldn't be protected from sin and evil. We may ask God for all kinds of things we want, all kinds of things we think we need. But what we need most is God himself. And God gives himself to those who seek him. The Holy Spirit is the third person of the triune God. God is one being who exists in three persons: the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. So, when Jesus says that God will give the Holy Spirit to those who ask, he's saying that God will give himself. God is the greatest gift. He is what we need, and he can be found and received if we would only ask.

Jesus teaches us today to seek God. Part of our problem is that we don't seek God for himself. We want things from God, but we don't want him. You might say that's the root of sin. Our failure to regard God's name as "hallow," or holy, our failure to see that he is greater than his creation, leads us to make created things our gods. We treasure the things of this world more than the "God who made the world and everything in it" (Acts 17:24). This doesn't mean that we utterly reject God. Instead, we often treat him as a cosmic butler. When we really want something or when we're in a bind, we may call on God to give us what we want, or to get us out of a jam. But we don't come to God and seek him above all else. That's because we're evil.

Without the Holy Spirit, we wouldn't be able to treasure God above all things. Without the Holy Spirit, we wouldn't be convicted of sin. If you're here today and you feel that you haven't been seeking God for who he is, and you're coming to see that you haven't loved the Father the way a good, loving child should, then the Holy Spirit is working on you. If you're in that place, then ask God for forgiveness, seek him with all your heart, knock on the door of his

kingdom. He promises to open that door, to accept you as his child, to forgive you of anything bad that you've ever done. His love, his goodness, and his grace are infinite. If you want to know how to follow Jesus, I would love to talk to you.

If you are already a Christian, consider how you normally pray. Are you praying the way that Jesus taught? Do you pray above all that God would be glorified? Do you pray that God would give you what you need, instead of what you want? Do you pray that God would help you to grow in your love for him, your knowledge of him, and your obedience to him? Do you pray that God would help you to grow in your love for others?

If you haven't prayed for these things, there's good news: God forgives us, and we can boldly seek forgiveness from him, because Jesus is our great high priest (Heb. 4:14–16).

God always answers prayer, and he always gives us what we need. He doesn't always give us what we want, or the things that we ask for. Sometimes, his answer is no. Sometimes, we're asking God for a serpent, and he gives us a fish. But if we ask things of God that line up with his will, we can be sure that he will give us what we need. The apostle John wrote this toward the end of his first letter:

<sup>13</sup> I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life. <sup>14</sup> And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us. <sup>15</sup> And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked of him (1 John 5:13–15).

Let us go to our Father in heaven and pray the way his Son taught us.