

Teach Us to Pray: A Series Through the Lord's Prayer

Motives to Pray (Luke 11:1-13)

Preached by Pastor Jason Tarn at HCC on June 5, 2016

Introduction

- ❖ I'm excited to introduce our new summer sermon series going through the Lord's Prayer. For the next two months we'll be walking through Matthew's version of the Lord's Prayer line by line, petition by petition. Now Luke also has a version of the Prayer, but since Matthew's is more familiar and more comprehensive, we'll stick with his.
 - ▶ But I do want to dedicate at least one message to Luke's version mainly because of the context around it. In the beginning of Luke 11, Jesus returns from one of his regular times of prayer. That prompts his disciples to ask Jesus to teach them how to pray. And in vv2-4, he teaches them the Lord's Prayer.
 - Then in vv5-13, Jesus, foreseeing the discouragement they'll face when their prayers don't always seem to be answered, offers his disciples encouragement to pray. **He supplies us with the right motives to pray.** He does it by pulling from examples that were very relatable to his audience. That's going to be the heart of our message this morning.

- ❖ But before we go into v5, I want us to stop and appreciate the fact that here in Luke 11 we get a peek into a private lesson taking place between a master and his disciples. This is a great privilege, but for those of us familiar with the Bible, the significance can be lost on us. It's a blessing to be privy to private conversation with Jesus – to a Q&A with the Lord of all creation. And what do they ask Jesus? “Lord, teach us to pray.”
 - ▶ That's pretty significant. **The only thing Jesus' disciples are recorded to have asked him to teach them is how to pray.** Not how to lead, how to preach, how to heal, how to perform miracles, etc. No, teach us how to pray.
 - What would you have asked? **If you had a chance to ask Jesus to teach you anything – to give you a private lesson – what would you ask?** Teach me how to change water into wine? How to multiply loaves of bread? How to walk on water? There are plenty of things we'd ask Jesus to teach us how to do. But I have a feeling “how to pray” is not very high on that list.

- ❖ But the disciples knew something because of their firsthand experience. **They knew that all of his leading, preaching, healing, and miracle-making – all derived from his prayer life.** From his intimate, personal relationship with his Father who art in heaven.
 - ▶ The disciples noticed how Jesus would often slip away to pray in private. **Matthew 14:23**, “*And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up on the mountain by himself to pray.*” **Mark 1:35**, “*And rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark, he departed and went out to a desolate place and there he prayed.*” **Luke 5:16**, “*But he would withdraw to desolate places and pray.*” **Luke 6:12**, “*He went out to the mountain to pray, and all night he continued in prayer to God.*”
 - So when Jesus returns in Luke 11:1 from “*praying in a certain place*”, his disciples want to know how he does it. How do you pray?

- ❖ One more thing before we dive into v5. When Jesus responds to their request in v2, when it says, “*And he said to them, ‘When you pray, say’*” – he’s not giving them a mantra. **He doesn't intend for us to simply parrot these words.** To just repeat these words. Of course there’s nothing wrong with praying these exact words. Some churches do that when pray together. Many Christians repeat these words when they pray alone. That’s a great practice.
 - ▶ But Jesus didn’t intend for the Lord’s Prayer to be it. It doesn’t include all you should say in prayer. You’re probably going to say more than this. **But in all that you say in prayer, you should be able to detect the general pattern of the Lord’s Prayer.** In other words, our prayers should include more than what’s said here but not less.
 - **If you’re trying to learn how to pray, then using the Lord’s Prayer as a model, as a pattern for prayer, is wise.** It’s what Jesus intended all along. So that’s why, in the weeks to come, we’re going to consider each petition in the Prayer. The goal here is that our prayers will begin to naturally reflect the same attitude and priorities as found in Jesus’ Prayer.

- ❖ But first let’s consider the right motives that ought to be fueling our prayer lives. After giving us the Lord’s Prayer, Jesus tells a parable and draws an analogy. I see three examples that we can learn from. **First**, we’ll consider the example of a shameless petitioner at midnight. **Second**, we’ll look at the example of an honor-conscious neighbor at midnight. Those are found in the parable. **Third** we’ll conclude with the example of a good earthly father.

The Example of a Shameless Petitioner

- ❖ So we begin with the parable Jesus tells in vv5-8 of a shameless petitioner. But look first at v9. Here Jesus is telling his disciples to persevere in prayer. “*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.*”
 - ▶ Now all three verbs here are in a particular tense that suggests a continuous action. In other words, Jesus is saying, “*Keep asking. Keep seeking. Keep knocking.*” He wants us to persevere in prayer. To pray unceasingly (1 Thess. 5:17).

- ❖ **I wouldn't be surprised if many of you have been praying the same requests for some time, and you're still waiting for an answer.** Maybe you’ve been praying for the salvation of a family member or close friend. Or you’ve been praying for healing for yourself or a loved one. For a certain door to open up in your career path. Some of you have been praying for God to bless you with a spouse or with children.
 - ▶ **Whatever it is – you need encouragement in your prayer life.** Perhaps you’ve stopped praying because you feel like there’s no use. Or maybe you’re still asking but you’re discouraged. Your prayers are sounding more mechanical and mindless. They just roll off your lips. They’re no longer filled with faith and hope.

- ❖ **What you need this morning is a reason to keep asking, to keep seeking, to keep knocking.** Your knuckles feel raw. It’s starting to hurt. Disappointment and disillusionment is starting to set in. So let’s hear what Jesus has to say. He tells us in vv5-8 a parable commonly known as the Parable of the Friend at Midnight.

- ❖ There are three characters, and one of the keys to rightly interpreting this story is getting them all straight. First we have man who is at home late one evening when a friend unexpectedly arrives in the middle of the night. Now being a good host, this man – let’s call him **Person A** – prepares a meal for his weary friend but discovers he’s out of bread.
 - ▶ So Person A walks next door to neighbor’s house – let’s call him **Person B** – to borrow three loaves. But remember it’s midnight, and Person B has already put his kids to sleep and is in bed himself.
 - Now understand that most homes back then were simple one-room structures where the whole family slept in the same room and usually on the same mat. And doors were typically locked with an iron bar. So to remove the bar would have been quite noisy. **All that to say, once he finally got his kids to bed, the last thing Person B wants to do is get up and open that door.** If you’re going to bother me and my family, it better be a life or death situation or else it’s going to quickly become a life or death situation.

- ❖ So understandably we read in v7, Person B telling Person A, “*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.*” So at first there’s a resistance on Person B’s part to help his neighbor, but he eventually gets up, risks waking the kids, and gives Person A the bread. And the big question is, “*Why?*” ***Why did Person B get up and grant Person A’s request?***
 - ▶ Jesus gives us the answer in v8. “*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.*”

- ❖ **So the reason behind Person B’s willingness to answer the request lies in “his impudence”** (ESV). Now you might not be familiar with that word. To be impudent means to not show proper respect for another person. Some translation says because of his “boldness” (NIV 1984) or his “shameless audacity” (NIV 2011).
 - ▶ It’s the Greek word *anaideian*. It’s a notoriously difficult word to translate because of its varying usage and the fact that it only appears here in all of Scripture. **Greek scholars would say “because of his shamelessness” is the most literal rendering of v8.** That’s why the bread is eventually given. That’s why the request is answered. But there’s an exegetical challenge here.
 - **Commentators have yet to decide conclusively whose *anaideian* Jesus is referring to?** Person A’s or Person B’s? In other words, who’s the focus on in this parable – the person doing the asking or the person being asked?

- ❖ **The majority view among commentators would interpret Jesus as focusing on the Person A, the man doing the asking.** So the reason why the request for bread is answered is because of Person A’s impudence, his shameless audacity, to keep knocking on his neighbor’s door at such an inopportune time.

- ❖ **But then there's a minority view that says the *anaideian* belongs to Person B, the one being asked.** That leads commentators who hold this position to translate *anaideian* in a related but different sense. They say the request is answered because of Person B's desire to avoid shame or his desire to preserve his honor.
 - ▶ That's definitely a different interpretation. Of course the application is still the same: Keep praying! But between the two interpretations are two related but different motives. Now since I see validity in both views, I want to offer both as encouragements for you to keep lifting your long-term requests to the Lord.

- ❖ **So in the majority view, the right motive for Jesus's disciples to pray is found in the example of the shameless petitioner at midnight.** Because Person A was willing to approach his neighbor with such shameless audacity, believing his request would not be refused – he therefore received what he asked for.
 - ▶ **The point then is that Jesus is encouraging his disciples to approach the throne of God with the same kind of shameless audacity** – knowing your Heavenly Father won't refuse if you pray with such boldness.

- ❖ This is a safe interpretation because the same point is made elsewhere in the same gospel. In Luke 18, Jesus tells the **Parable of the Persistent Widow**, and there he's clearly teaching us to be bold, to be shameless and audacious in prayer.
 - ▶ It's about a widow who keeps bothering this unjust judge until he finally gives in and gives her justice against her adversary. She kept coming to his court every day. It says in v4, *“⁴For a while he refused, but afterward he said to himself, ‘Though I neither fear God nor respect man, ⁵yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will give her justice, so that she will not beat me down by her continual coming.’”*

- ❖ **So here we've got an unjust judge, lacking in compassion, who eventually wears down if you bother him enough.** Jesus goes on to make the connection to prayer. He says, *“And will not God”*. Look at what this judge does *and will not God* do abundantly more? A God who is perfectly just and deeply compassionate. It's an argument from the lesser to the greater.
 - ▶ Jesus is saying, "Keep praying. Go ahead, keep bothering my Father. He really doesn't mind." **In fact, I'd go so far as to say he commands us to bother him.** I get that idea from passages like **Isaiah 62:6-7**.
 - *“⁶On your walls, O Jerusalem, I have set watchmen; all the day and all the night they shall never be silent. You who put the LORD in remembrance, take no rest, ⁷and give him no rest until he establishes Jerusalem and makes it a praise in the earth.”*

- ❖ Did you hear that? **The Bible is telling God's people to never be silent, to give God no rest.** He apparently wants to be bombarded, bugged, badgered, and bothered by our prayers. **You might be tired of that same prayer you've been praying day after day. But God isn't.** He never tires of your prayers. He delights in them.

- ❖ **Now look, you have to face the possibility that maybe your prayers are not being answered in the way you want because what you want is wrong.** It's for sinful purposes, for selfish gain. That's what James says in James 4:3, "*You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions.*"
 - ▶ But let's assume your request *does* reflect the revealed will of God and it *is* for the glory of God or the good of others, then even if it's taking longer than you expected, the point of Jesus' parables is to keep praying, keep seeking, keep knocking on God's door. Keep going. Go beyond that point where it gets awkward. God doesn't mind. He's not bothered in the slightest.

- ❖ **George Mueller**, a 19th-century pastor known for his prayer life, said one day he started praying for the salvation of five friends – and he never stopped. After two years, one of them came to accept Christ. After ten, two more came to the Lord. Twenty-five years later, the fourth was saved. As for his last friend, he kept praying for a total of 52 years. He actually died with his fifth friend still unsaved. But as the story goes, a few months after Mueller's death this man also came to trust in Jesus.
 - ▶ **Christian, why have you stopped praying?** Why are you thinking about giving up? Don't say it's pointless. Don't say God's heard it enough times already. God says, "Keep it coming." I don't know how long it'll take or why it's taking so long. **But I do know that God welcomes you to pray with shameless audacity.** To keep knocking until he answers the door.

The Example of an Honor-Conscious Neighbor

- ❖ That's the most common way to understand this parable. It's the majority view. But as I said, I think there's validity to the minority view. I think it's worth considering because it offers a different nuance as we're looking for motives to pray.
 - ▶ As I explained earlier, this view places the focus not on the person doing the asking but on the person being asked – on the honor-conscious neighbor. **So the reason the request gets answered is not because of Person A's *anaideian* but Person B's *anaideian* – because of his desire to avoid shame, to preserve his honor.**
 - Commentator Joel Green (who takes this view) translates v8 this way, "*even if he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, in order to avoid dishonor he will get up and give him whatever he needs.*"

- ❖ Now the reason why it's argued that the focus is on Person B's *anaideian* is because Jesus is asking a rhetorical question in v5. **It's a question his audience already knew the answer to because it's based off a common cultural assumption as to how Person B would react to such an inconvenient request.**
 - ▶ Look at v5 again. He asks, "*Which of you who has a friend...*" [NIV makes it a statement, "Suppose one of you has a friend". You lose the sense that Jesus is posing a question.] He's asking, "Which of you who has a friend will go to him at midnight asking for bread to feed a traveller and have that friend of yours turn you down because it's inconvenient?"

- ❖ That question is clearly rhetorical because all his disciples and every other 1st-century Jew already knows the answer: none of us. **None of us would have such a friend. None of us could even imagine such a friend that would do such a thing.**
 - ▶ It's like if I were to ask, "Which of you who has an immigrant dad will not see him fight over the bill in a restaurant and make a scene?" All of us with immigrant dads know the answer: none of us. **None of us could even imagine our dads sitting back and not put up a fight.** Because he'd consider it shameful if he didn't at least try.

- ❖ Why is that? Because we're well aware that our immigrant parents grew up in a shame-based culture where such things were expected. You have to realize that 1st-century Jewish culture was shame-based as well. **So in Jesus' day, no one could imagine such a friend, in such a scenario where you're trying to practice hospitality, who would tell you, "Don't bother me. I can't get up and help."**
 - ▶ In that culture, the act of rejecting a neighbor in his attempt to be a good host was inconceivable. It would've been utterly shameful. So everyone knows Person B will get up and give the bread – not necessarily for the sake of friendship – but for the sake of avoiding shame and preserving the honor of his name. **He doesn't want the entire village to learn that he failed in his duty to be hospitable by denying the needs of a visitor.** That would bring shame to his family name.
 - The point is Person A knows this about his neighbor. He knows how his friend will likely react to his inconvenient request. That's what gives him the confidence to go over and ask in the first place.

- ❖ Do you see how this interpretation adds an important nuance in our motivation to pray? **Like the man confidently knocking on his neighbor's door, we can confidently knock on the door of heaven – knowing that we're praying to a God who's committed to preserving the honor of his name.** He'll never let his reputation fall into disrepute. He'll never let anyone think he's not strong enough or loving enough to answer the prayers of his people.
 - ▶ **So God will answer our prayers – not because we've been friendly towards him.** Actually we've been horrible towards him. We've ignored him. We've rebelled. We were his enemies. **But God hears our prayers because, through the death of his Son, he has turned his enemies into his children who now bear his family name.**

- ❖ The gospel says that while we were enemies, God reconciled us to himself through the death of his Son (Rom 5:10). Christ died in our place on the cross as a substitute, so that the penalty of our sin fell on him, while the right to be called children of God came to those who believe. **Through Christ, believers are not only set right before God the Judge, we're adopted into the family of God the Father.**
 - ▶ And as a child of God, you bear his family name. He's entrusted you with his reputation. So from this angle, the point is that God will answer our prayers – but not for our sake, not for the sake of our righteousness, our performance, or even our persistence to pray every day. **No, God answers for the sake of his Name that we bear as His children.**

- ❖ **This explains why the first petition in the Lord's Prayer is for God to hallow his Name – to set apart his Name as holy.** We want the world to know that the God who answers our prayers is holy, that he alone is God. And remember, he wants the same thing. God is the one who tells us to pray for his name to be hallowed.
 - ▶ If you know this about God – that he's committed to hallowing his Name – **then you can approach his throne with confidence even if you feel like you've been distant and unfriendly to him lately.** I tell you, it's not because of friendship that God answers prayer but because of his commitment to preserve the honor of his Name and never let it be shamed.

The Example of a Good Earthly Father

- ❖ That's a huge motive to keep asking, seeking, and knocking because it's a motivation rooted in God and his immutable nature. That's so assuring. Now there's one more motive in this text. Jesus explains it in vv11-13 using the example of a good earthly father. Here Jesus makes another argument from the lesser to the greater.
 - ▶ He starts by giving two examples of how good earthly fathers can be counted on to give good gifts to their children. If a son asks for a fish, his father won't give him a snake. If he asks for an egg, his father won't give him a scorpion. **Experience teaches us that good fathers only give their children what's good for them.**
 - Now if that's true for good earthly fathers (who are evil compared to the goodness of God), then how much more true is the fact that our Good Heavenly Father will only give his children what is good for them?
- ❖ Think about how encouraging this is. **Not only is God committed to his glory, he's just as committed to our good!** He not only answers prayer to glorify the Name we bear, but he answers prayer because he loves us as children and always seeks our greatest good.
 - ▶ **God's passion for his glory and his desire for our good are never in conflict with each other.** They're one in the same, and God is always working in our prayer lives to accomplish both ends.
- ❖ So the point of this example of a good earthly father is that when we come to God in prayer, we know that – not only will he answer for the sake of His Name – **but no matter what answer our Heavenly Father provides, we know it's ultimately for our good.**
 - ▶ When God says “No” to your persistent prayers, or when he says “Wait” or when he says nothing at all, I know it feels like he's giving you a snake or a scorpion, but according to Jesus, his silence is actually a good gift. It's really a fish or an egg.
 - It's for our good. It may not feel like it yet. **We may not understand it yet, but we know it's true because we know the character of God.** We know he's a Good, Sovereign, All-Wise, Father in Heaven.

- ❖ **And I can confidently say that he will eventually answer every prayer of every one of his children – but the answer may not be what you expected, even if you had pure motives for his glory.** What you were so sure would be '*for his glory*', may not be so. And what you were so sure would 'for your good' may not be what you asked for.
 - ▶ **God's ways of advancing his glory and providing for our good may not be evident to our feeble, fallible minds.** But Jesus' whole point is that even more than a good earthly father – our Good Heavenly Father can be trusted to know what's best.

- ❖ **Just think about it, children instinctively expect their fathers to do things they don't understand.** "Big people are always doing things that us kids don't fully understand. Why are you feeding me vegetables? Why do I need to brush my teeth? Why did I need to put on sunscreen?" Most toddlers aren't going to comprehend the importance of beta-carotene in your diet, or the effects of cavities, or the danger of skin cancer. **They end up going along with Daddy (some more reluctantly than others) because they trust Daddy knows best.**
 - ▶ That's not ignorance. That's not being childish. That's being childlike in your faith, which is exactly what Jesus desires of us (Mk. 10:15). **Children may not understand everything their fathers do, but they still trust their father because they believe he has their best in mind.**

- ❖ I realize some of us grew up with bad fathers or absentee fathers, and so you might have lost that childlike instinct to trust at a very young age. But by adulthood, most of us have lost them anyways. We're easily skeptical of God and far too impatient towards him. We demand to know exactly what he's thinking and doing in our lives.
 - ▶ **But growing in your faith means to recover those childlike instincts.** It means no matter how long it takes or how discouraged you get – you keep praying with shameless audacity, trusting him as you would a Good Heavenly Father who always does what's best for his glory and your good.