

Luke 11:1-13  
Lord, Teach Us  
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I want to invite you to take a moment to think about your life. Think of the hopes and dreams, the gratitude, perhaps the struggle with which you've had to endure. Maybe it's a longing that continues to evade, something you wish would have happened but still has not. Take a moment to reflect on whatever though came into your mind, perhaps recently or over the many years. Ready set go.

Our journeys are an adventure in learning to trust God instead of the securities that the world has taught us to trust (bread, bags, money, etc.) God is shaping us into a people whose life and journey is a sign to the world around us that God is still Emmanuel, He is with us. Will Willimon writes: Being a Christian is not just a certain set of beliefs that people like you or I adhere to, but it is the journey of a particular people.

Because this journey can be dangerous. We are all living proof of this. We all reveal the scars and road-weariness of how dangerous this journey can be. Our testimonies speak to the raw and real danger/beauty/vulnerability/and possibility of life.

That's why we need a language, a means of expressing what our hearts. Jesus reveals what a heart and mind open to the Father's voice looks like and sounds like, we call it prayer. But we have a strange relationship with prayer, don't we? We think it's important...it's an essential practice of the Christian life. We even think that we need to learn more about prayer...it doesn't come easily to us. We aren't sure how to pray or what to expect when we pray. We might think that God has more and bigger things to do than be concerned with our own desires.

Luke's passage begins with these interesting words: **Now Jesus<sup>[a]</sup> was praying in a certain place.** over and over in the Gospels Jesus is either coming from or going to a place of prayer, and along the way what does he do? Stops to pray. There is nothing static about our lives. Think about the last week, and all you did, and everywhere you went. We are constantly moving. I can resonate with this right now.

So how do we pray? I want to suggest that we should learn to pray like Jesus did.

Jesus simply said, "When you pray, say. . . ." It's good to have this kind of structure, isn't it? I mean, we could go crazy with 'wishing' for things. That would be a never-ending list. That's why John Calvin said that this prayer "guides and restrains our wishes. Or, we could get lost in sentimental emotionalism or spirituality. Then our feelings become the focus of our prayer and there is no room for any thought of God. That's why we need this model for prayer to guide us.

That's why Jesus tells us to pray, "Father, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come." In other words, we pray that God will be treated as God. This means, among other things, that we acknowledge the things that come from God. They don't come to us as a matter of luck or coincidence, or because we deserve it, but from the gracious hand of God. And we need to say so.

Hallowing God's name means that we recognize everywhere and all the time the presence of God. Walter Luthi, in his book on the Lord's Prayer says: "God has a name. The misery on this earth is nameless; the evil among men is nameless, for the powers of darkness love to be without a name. Nameless, anonymous letters, letters without signatures are usually vulgar, but God is no writer of anonymous letters; God puts his name to everything he does, effects and says; God has no need to fear the light of day. The Devil loves anonymity, but God has a name.

And Jesus tells us to honor it.

### **Persistent and often**

GK Chesterton has a wonderful quote where he says: Anything worth doing is worth doing badly. Anything really good is worth doing badly. I feel like that is such a honest outlook on parenting. It's the most worthy thing in the whole world, and yet I often feel like I'm fumbling my way through it. Prayer is so important that the mechanics of it are secondary to the

Jesus goes on to tell this little parable about the friend who comes to the door of another at midnight. The other says, I'm sorry it's late, my children and I are in bed already, so the other person pounds on the door and pounds on the door, waking up the whole neighborhood, and if he weren't a friend you'd be tempted to call the cops. Finally, he says OK, and puts on his robe and comes down stairs, flips on the light and opens the door. What is it? he says.

Can I have three loaves of bread? A friend of mine has come and I don't have any food for him. And by the way do have any suggestions of late night entertainment for my friends?

Here is the lesson we learn about prayer from this text, prayer is something that is so important, something so valuable for us, that even if we do it clumsily and at strange times. You don't have to have the right words (fortunately he does give us words), you don't even have to have the right mental attitude, or be in a holy place of life. That's why the bible gives so many different examples of people who pray in different situations.

The point is that with time and repetition our lives become bent toward God's presence—which is not our natural inclination. Like this man who kept pestering and pestering, as we follow Jesus' command to pray our lives will become...Christian.

The point is that prayer, our act of conversing with God, is something we can do anytime, and you don't need to be an expert in it, in fact it works just the same even if you do it badly.

There is a quote by Thomas Merton that I have on my desk that brings me comfort. It reads: "My Lord God, I have no idea where I am going. I do not see the road ahead of me. I cannot know for certain where it will end. Nor do I really know myself, and the fact that I think that I am following your will does not mean that I am actually doing so. But I believe that the desire to please you does in fact please you. And I hope I have that desire in all that I am doing. I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire. And I know that if I do this you will lead me by the right road though I may know nothing about it.

### **Honestly**

You don't need to come before God with anything other than your honest you. In fact, that is the only way you can encounter God. I love the way the Author Anne Lamott expresses the bare

honesty of prayer when she says that the three most frequent prayers of her life are simply: “Help, Thanks, Wow.”

Our age of interconnectivity and information inundation is both a blessing and a curse. It is a curse in that we are able to sort of anesthetize ourselves with information and entertainment, keeping us content and disconnected from certain realities. Those of you who remember the movie from the late 90’s called The Matrix will remember, this is exactly what was predicted of our dystopian future would look like, isolated individuals plugged into their autonomous worlds where they could surround themselves with nothing other than their preferred way of seeing the world.

However, at the same time information and access have also opened our eyes to corners of the world never before available to us. And that is a sobering reality to look with our own eyes upon the brokenness, the poverty, the injustice happening right now. And at the same time, have access to the ineffable beauty of our world, that reminds us of God’s creative that is still around us.

Whether you look through your television screen or your smart phone to be reminded of the struggle of the journey, or you need only look at the road immediately before you (which is what my experience has been like these last years), these should send us to our knees in search of one who will join us in our longings and help us make sense of the confusion. Jesus frequently interrupted his journeys with the disciples to step away and pray, because the journey itself can be utterly overwhelming.

These speechless moments of wondering how to pray for things that are beyond our comprehension. God takes great care in listening to our prayers when we’re in trouble. What kind of God would he be when we pray for fish, if he gave us instead a serpent? Will he immediately give the fish we ask for? Maybe, prayer does work that way, but it doesn’t always work that way. Look again at the last line, **“how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!”**

Learning to pray doesn’t mean that now our lives will benefit from the resources and blessings of God while others who haven’t learned, or who pray differently than us remain helpless. That is a misunderstanding of prayer. Salvation, Christian salvation, is not some individual relationship between me and God. Rather, salvation is being drafted into the adventure of having our lives commandeered by God to go on the journey of Christian faith. Prayer is simply our means of testifying to God and to anyone else who will listen, how God has dealt with us. And salvation is this delightful surprise of having our little lives caught up in the purposes of God for the whole world.