

PRAYING FAITH

Leader pages on pp. 150-153

THE POINT:
FAITH LOOKS TO GOD TO
PROVIDE WHAT WE NEED.

LUKE 11:1-13

¹ He was praying in a certain place, and when he finished, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray, just as John also taught his disciples." ² He said to them, "Whenever you pray, say, Father, your name be honored as holy. Your kingdom come.

³ Give us each day our daily bread.

⁴ And forgive us our sins, for we ourselves also forgive everyone in debt to us. And do not bring us into temptation."

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⁵ He also said to them, "Suppose one of you has a friend and goes to him at midnight and says to him, 'Friend, lend me three loaves of bread, ⁶ because a friend of mine on a journey has come to me, and I don't have anything to offer him.'

⁷ Then he will answer from inside and say, 'Don't bother me! The door is already locked, and my children and I have gone to bed. I can't get up to give you anything.' ⁸ I tell you, even though he won't get up and give him anything because he is his friend, yet because of his friend's shameless boldness, he will get up and give him as much as he needs. ⁹ "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.

¹⁰ **For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.**

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¹¹ What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead of a fish? ¹² Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion?

¹³ 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?"

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MEMORY VERSE

KEYWORDS

"... our daily bread" (v. 3)—The prayer's focus shifts from the Father to His children. Possible meanings of daily bread are "the bread necessary for living" or "the bread that suffices for each day."

Ask . . . Seek . . . Knock (v. 9)—The form of these three Greek verbs indicates continuing action. Repeatedly admit your

need and depend on the Father's love and goodness.

Holy Spirit (v. 13)—The Third Person of the Trinity convicts people of sin, calls them to the Savior, and effects regeneration or the new birth.

HOW DO WE PRAY IN FAITH?

Since the pandemic, we have sharpened a peculiar set of skills all under the umbrella of watching. In fact, many research studies have concluded that Americans spend more time in media (TV, streaming services, social media, messaging, and gaming) than they sleep. Binge watching has become a national pastime. I have to admit that I'm disappointed when I watch a series that makes me wait a whole week to find out if the guy in the series will discover that his wife is a Russian spy.

Yet, binge praying never really caught on. If it did, some amazing things would happen. Most believers don't set aside time to pray each day. Only 31% of believers claim that they set aside time for prayer¹⁶. What's wrong with this picture? Throughout the Gospels, we read that Jesus spent large blocks of his time praying. If the Son of God needed prayer that much, we too must pray in faith.

Pray Daily // Luke 11:1-4

The disciples saw Jesus control and command the weather, heal chronic illnesses, send demons running to the far regions, and feed multitudes, but the disciples asked Him to teach them one primary skill: prayer. They knew from Jesus's mode of operation that prayer was the key that unlocked all the other doors of empowered living. Think about

it. We get an audience with the One who created everything from the rings of Saturn and the beasts of the Serengeti. He created my wife. If she weren't around, I don't think I'd ever find my keys! Seriously though, the chance to kneel before the Father and have a conversation is the greatest thing this side of Heaven. It's an opportunity for deep growth. As Soren Kierkegaard put it, "Prayer doesn't change God, but it changes him who prays."¹⁷ While the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7 expands Christ's teaching on prayer, let's begin with a brief examination of the model prayer.

Right from the start we see that the focus isn't a laundry list of fears, needs, concerns, and obsessions. The focus is on the Father. Our culture knows the Lord's Prayer from movies, locker rooms, hospitals, masses, and a million other locations. It's a cultural default prayer that we use when we want to pray, but we don't have the words to pray conversationally.

WHAT DOES JESUS'S PRAYER REVEAL ABOUT HIS PRIORITIES?

We often forget that the Lord's Prayer reveals a powerful outline and a radical message about prayer that we tend to forget. Most Christians pray for God to work, but prayer is God working on you. That's what the Lord's Prayer does. It is intended



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to help us refocus our priorities around the movement of God. It reframes our attitude and our focus away from the chaos of daily life. It centers us on God's heart. The Lord's Prayer reminds me that in Christ I have the resources to face anything.

A good friend that I work with grew up in the Roman Catholic church. He was a "Catholic in name only," but he did pick up on some core Catholic beliefs. When he was invited to a Baptist church, the idea of praying directly to God perplexed him. He always believed that there had to be an intermediary agent who would go to God for you. When he decided to follow Jesus, prayer just seemed to mean a little more to him than most. It's easy for longtime believers to take prayer for granted. Jesus invites us to come to Him as the resource for everything we need. Through the years, I've come to understand that the Lord's Prayer is really about releasing:

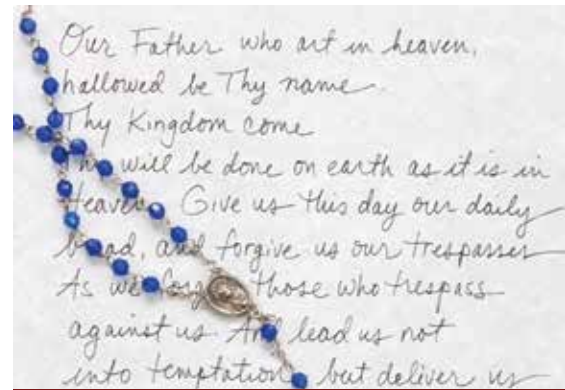
Our Father in heaven, your name be honored as holy. **(I release my urge to play God with my circumstances.)** Your kingdom come. **(I release my kingdom to embrace yours.)** Give us today our daily bread. **(I release the desire to be a self-made provider.)** And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. **(I release forgiveness to those who have wounded me, and I recognize and repent for the wounds I have caused to others and even to myself.)** And do not bring us into temptation. **(I release my long-held belief that I am more powerful than my sins and addictions. And I release my personal possessions, properties, fame, and strength to embrace all that is You.)**

Life becomes a celebration and a conversation with our Creator if we are willing to surrender everything to Him. The other option is to keep striving when transformation and rest is waiting at arm's length if we would only surrender.

Pray Persistently // Luke 11:5-10

Jesus taught us with humor and stressed the power of persistence in prayer. He weaves a story about a late-night knock at the door of a friend. The friend refuses to come to the door. Why? The door is shut and locked. They're asleep, and the kids will be frightened. He pleads with the needy friend to go away with his breadless predicament, but the friend on the other side of the door refuses to quit knocking. Finally, because of the persistence of the needy friend with the embarrassingly bare cupboard, the sleepy friend relents. To be sure, Jesus wants us to focus on the persistence in the story. We should never think that Jesus is saying that God is like a groggy friend in bed. That's not the point of the story. The point is persistence.

Some of our prayers are answered in minutes, others in days,



DIGGING DEEPER BIBLICAL PRAYERS

The Lord's Prayer, also known as "Our Father," Latin "Oratio Dominica" or "Pater Noster," can be found here in Luke, or a longer version of the prayer appears in Matthew as part of the Sermon on the Mount. While this may be the most well-known prayer found in the Bible, there are 650 prayers with 450 recorded answers. There are approximately 25 recorded accounts of Jesus praying during His earthly ministry, including Luke 6:12-13 before choosing His disciples and in John 6:11, giving thanks before feeding the five thousand. Scripture also highlights five postures we can take while praying: sitting (2 Sam. 7:18), standing (Mark 11:25), kneeling (Acts 7:60), lying prostrate or with one's face to the ground (Mark 14:35), and with lifted hands (1 Tim. 2:8). Finally, we find several types of prayers in both Old and New Testaments, including prayers of agreement or corporate prayers (Acts 2:42), prayers of intercession, (Ex. 32:30-33) and prayers of petition or supplication (Phil. 4:6).

Is prayer as important in our lives as it was for those we find in Scripture?

and indeed, some of our prayers will be answered long after we leave the earth to celebrate with the angels. How much patience do you have in prayer? Can I tell you a secret, just between the two of us before you go to the Bible study? I've been fervently praying for my prodigal son for twenty-five years. I've prayed for him every day. For years I saw no progress, and I started to cop an attitude about it in prayer. Was I doing it wrong? How does this even work? Only recently, we've started to see the mysterious pull of the Holy Spirit bear the fruit of curiosity and faith. It's happened slowly, but I've learned so much through the process of intercession. The long and short of it is that persistence in prayer builds spiritual muscles and supernatural faith.

WHAT OBSTACLES GET IN THE WAY OF US PERSISTENTLY ASKING, SEEKING, AND KNOCKING?

God is on a different schedule, and many times He won't respond with an update. For years I served as an editor. We lived and died by the almighty production schedule. It was concrete. It was great if you needed to figure out who was dragging their feet. You could just point at the schedule and say to the artist, "See, it says right here that you were supposed to finish the magazine design yesterday." God has a schedule, but we don't get to see it and we certainly don't get to create it.

Jesus knows what it's like to stand at the door and knock. He's been knocking on the doors of churches for years. For some churches, I would imagine that He's been knocking for centuries with no entry yet granted. However, He's knocking, still knocking patiently.

WHAT DOES BEING PERSISTENT IN OUR PRAYERS LOOK LIKE PRACTICALLY?

Pray Believing // Luke 11:11-13

Jesus follows up his challenge to persistence by reminding us about the true nature of a father. He asks a series of unusual questions. Would a good father give his son stones instead of fish or scorpions when the son asks for an egg? Jesus is using exaggeration to make his point. The implied

answer is a caps lock, NO! What kind of irrational person does a father have to be to pull a stunt like that?

Then Jesus turns the tables on us again. If you, 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!" This statement contrasts our kind but deeply flawed nature to the perfect loving



Heavenly Father. From the moment we begin our journey, we are enrolled in spiritual rehab. It's where we live. Jesus leads the program, and our quest is deliverance. Everyone you know is in recovery from something. If they think they are fully recovered, then count them as a recovering Pharisee. We never know how deep the love of the Heavenly Father is until we hit rock bottom. Sometimes it takes a catastrophe for us to get a view of the astronomical love of God. Some of the most godly men and women I've ever known faced gigantic obstacles, illnesses, and setbacks. It's evidently a part of the deal. In our moments of greatest desperation, we discover the depth of love we would have never known otherwise.

I'm often curious and marvel about the depth of God's love for us, especially when I think of earthly fathers whose love pales in comparison to that of Christ. We enter into a careful observation of God's plans when we join Him in prayer. We are seeking and paying close attention to His details for our lives. To seek as a praying believer allows us never to lose our curiosity in the movement and mystery of God.

"...You will find Him if you seek him with all your

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heart and with all your soul "(Deut. 4:29).

All faith has an element of curiosity to it. Think about Peter on the boat. He must have been curious about the whole "water walking" business. Think about Zacchaeus. He must have been very curious about the dinner guest to decide to give away such glorious tax refunds. Faith is often a unique mixture of curiosity and desperation. I would argue that Thomas's doubting was caused by a curiosity deficit. He wanted hard facts when Christ offered a comfortable mystery. Curiosity may have killed the cat, but it has saved many a sinner. How much more does God love us? We'll never completely know, but we will get closer to the mystery when we ask, seek, and knock.

HOW DOES OUR VIEW OF GOD IMPACT OUR PRAYER LIFE?

There is a mysterious peace when you have been left with only Jesus. He is the faithful friend who is ever beside you when all others forsake you. When you enter the throne room, you begin to realize that He is enough to fill your empty cup and to calm the storm within. He can be heard if you allow Him into your silence. Even still, He will be closer to you, pulling you closer into His grace. With every struggling moment in prayer, when you ask, seek, and knock, He will be more than you imagined. You would have never known the depth of His love so deeply if you had never suffered so greatly.

DID YOU KNOW?

According to a 2014 online survey of 1,137 Americans conducted by Lifeway, thirty-one percent of those surveyed said they pray several times a day, while seventeen percent said they never pray. Most prayers tend to be personal with eighty-two percent of Americans praying for their families and friends; seventy-four percent focusing on their own problems, and thirty-seven percent focusing on God's greatness. Participants tended not to pray for celebrities, public figures, or government leaders. Additionally, twenty-five percent of Americans who pray believe all their prayers are answered; twenty-one percent believe most of their prayers are answered; thirty-seven percent believe some of their prayers are answered; three percent believe none of their prayers are answered, and fourteen percent said they didn't know if their prayers were answered.¹⁸

Biblical Truth: Praying in faith demonstrates our trust in God (Mark 11:24).

Are you exercising faith in all areas of your prayer life, believing that God will answer your prayers?

LIVE IT

How can you strengthen your prayer life and receive all the blessings that await you?

Jesus invites us into the throne room of prayer. It's an open invitation into His presence. Maybe this will be a breakthrough week for you as you focus on praying in faith to our Heavenly Father who is waiting with good gifts and unending grace.

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- **Meditate.** Pick a Psalm and use it as a guide to worship God. Allow a phrase from that Psalm to carry you through the week ahead.
- **Write.** Pen a prayer card to a friend. Let that person know that you are praying and share with them a specific prayer that you are praying.
- **Practice.** In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus asked his disciples, "Could you not pray with me one hour?" Would you take time one day this week and pray for one hour? Map out a plan and strategy for that hour that will guide the time. With a plan, you'll be amazed how quickly the hour will pass.

DAILY READINGS

1. CONSISTENT PRAYER // JAMES 5:17-18

Elijah prayed for the rain to stop and it stopped. He then prayed for the rain to return and it returned. Elijah's faith was not in his praying prowess but in the one he made his requests to. Elijah's faith in God was cultivated through a life of consistent, genuine prayer. He learned God's faithfulness through prayer and, therefore, developed the faith to ask boldly what he knew to be God's will. Prayer not only changes situations, it changes us and allows us the privilege to get to know God in ways beyond our greatest hopes and desires. Praying faith moves us into alignment with God's will and causes what is impossible with man to manifest.

Pray regularly, as if everything about your life depends on God - because it does.

2. IN AND OUT OF SEASON // EPHESIANS 6:18

Prayer is just as important when the sun is shining as it is when the storms of life are raging. Praying during times of little to no adversity is what prepares us for times when adversity attempts to overwhelm us. Prayer is needed in every season of life. It keeps our relationship and dependence upon God strong so that when challenging times come we know that we can trust and rely upon God to continue to take care of us. We know that His Word is true through experience and not just through knowledge. Prayer causes what we read in the Bible to come to fruition in real life which ultimately increases our joy in God and love for prayer.

Prayer is a lifestyle not an event.

3. PRAYER LIKE JESUS // LUKE 5:16

Jesus our Savior portrayed the greatest example of what heartfelt, persistent prayer looks like. Jesus prayed all the time. When he could not be found, he was found praying, Mark 1:35-37. Jesus oftentimes drew away to pray because He wholeheartedly understood his total depravity without God. He understood that without God's strength, wisdom, and guidance that He would

not successfully complete the assignment He had been sent to accomplish in the earth. He understood that prayer was the most precious gift and privilege given to mankind. Jesus lived to show us the vast benefits of prayer and how more productive and focused our lives can be as a result when we put our faith in God alone.

Prayer is a classroom where we learn to communicate and do what pleases God.

4. BELIEVE BEFORE SEEING // 2 CORINTHIANS 5:7

Physical sight is a blessing but if leaned upon as an indicator of God's faithfulness to us, we can be greatly deceived. The physical may not necessarily look like what God promised but by faith it will in season. The world teaches us to believe when we see but this principle is the reverse in the Kingdom of God. The Bible teaches us that whatever we ask according to His will, believing, we shall receive (Mark 11:24). We must believe God over what we see because nothing is more powerful than His Word. No human situation is beyond the reach of God's power. We must only keep believing no matter what it looks like.

God's Word is what determines the outcome, not what we can perceive through our physical senses.

5. CONFIDENT IN GOD // PROVERBS 3:5-6

God's Word provides us an understanding of God's nature and His unconditional love for mankind. This understanding reveals why it is so beneficial to trust His perspective on life versus our own. When we lean on our own understanding, anxiety and fear tries to grip us and run away from truth. But when we place our confidence in God, we run towards truth - the Way, the Truth, and Life (John 14:6) and are relieved and delivered from what tempts us to fear. To acknowledge God in all our ways demonstrates our confidence that He will handle us securely. God is love and love never fails (1 Cor. 13:38).

Trust and lean on the infinite wisdom of God.