

Our Father

Luke: Certainty of the Truth

Luke 10:38-11:13

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Please open your Bibles to Luke 11. Our main passage this morning is on the Lord's Prayer. But before we look at that passage, I want to spend about ten minutes looking at the context. I think it will help us understand why Luke's teaching on the Lord's Prayer is especially relevant for us, as Christians in the twenty-first century.

Distracted and Anxious

Before Jesus teaches his disciples to pray, Luke tells us the story of Mary and Martha (10:38-42). Mary is sitting at the feet of Jesus listening to his teaching (v. 39). She's a model disciple. She's a contrast to her sister Martha, who was distracted with much serving. Martha goes to Jesus and says, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her to help me" (v. 40). Jesus answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her" (vv. 41-42).

This passage is so relevant for us. Martha's a picture of our culture—anxious, troubled, distracted, and busy. Doesn't that perfectly describe us today?

Did you know that anxiety's the most common mental illness in the US? It affects forty million adults in the US. It costs us more than \$42 billion a year. That's one third of the total mental health bill in this country.¹ And those statistics only account for those who are diagnosed with anxiety, and say nothing about children and youth.

One Christian psychologist says that the fifties and the sixties were known as the "age of anxiety." But that generation couldn't have imagined the anxiety-producing stresses of the early twenty-first century. Our culture is an anxiety factory! We produce anxiety through overscheduling, the disappearance of family routines, over-exposure to information, peer pressure, and the fading of clear moral guidelines.² Another factor is our smart phones. "Scientists and psychologists offer statistical proof in study after study that the more addicted you are to your phone the more prone you are to depression and anxiety."³ Outwardly, our youth appear vivacious, carefree, and full of potential, but inwardly they're scared.⁴ We live in an attention-deficit culture. We live in a hyperactive culture that's "crazy busy."⁵ We're distracted; we're troubled, and anxious about many things.

On his new album the secular songwriter Jason Isbell describes the anxiety many experience in our world today.

It's the weight of the world
But it's nothing at all
Light as a prayer, and then I feel myself fall

¹ "Facts & Statistics." Anxiety and Depression Association of America, updated August 2016.

² Collins, Gary R. *Christian Counseling: A Comprehensive Guide*. Nashville, Tenn: Thomas Nelson, 2007, 140.

³ Reinke, Tony. *12 Ways Your Phone Is Changing You*. Wheaton, Ill: Crossway, 2017, 43.

⁴ Collins, 140.

⁵ DeYoung, Kevin. *Crazy Busy: A (Mercifully) Short Book About a (Really) Big Problem*. Wheaton, Ill: Crossway, 2013.

You got to give me a minute
 'Cause I'm way down in it
 And I can't breathe so I can't speak
 I want to be strong and steady, always ready
 But, I feel so small, I feel so weak

Anxiety, why do you always get the best of me...

How should we, as disciples of Jesus, respond to the distraction and anxiety we feel and experience? Well, we must be like Mary. We need to sit at the feet of Jesus and learn from him. We need to saturate ourselves in the Word of God. But that's not all. We must also learn to pray.

I believe that's why Luke places Jesus' teaching about prayer directly following the story about Mary and Martha. Luke knew that if we want to learn how to be free from anxiety we need to learn how to pray. Paul certainly saw the link between anxiety and prayer. He says, "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." (Phil. 4:6-7)

Do you want to know the peace of God in the midst of anxiety? Then you must learn to pray. Thankfully, Jesus teaches us how to do just that in our passage this morning.

Luke 11:1-13⁶

¹Now 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."² And he said to them, "When you pray, say:

"Father, hallowed be your name.
 Your kingdom come.
³Give us each day our daily bread,
⁴and forgive us our sins,
 for we ourselves forgive everyone who is indebted to us.
 And lead us not into temptation."

⁵And 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, ⁶for a friend of mine has arrived on a journey, and I have nothing to set before him'; ⁷and 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'? ⁸I 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. ⁹And I tell you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. ¹⁰For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened. ¹¹What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will instead of a fish give him a serpent; ¹²or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? ¹³If 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!"

This is the Word of the Lord.

The same Christian psychologist I quoted earlier says the number one way Christians should deal with anxiety is by learning to trust God.⁷ And learning to pray, at its core, is really learning to trust God.

⁶ Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version[®] unless otherwise noted.

Why do I say that? Well, when his disciples ask Jesus to teach them to pray, what does he do? He spends more of his time teaching them about who the Father is than he does on the mechanics of prayer. Also, in chapter 10, verses 21-22, Jesus prayed to his Father in heaven and thanked him that he had hidden the things of the kingdom from the wise and understanding and had revealed them to little children (v. 21). He also said that no one knows who the Father is except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him (v. 22).

So, in chapter 11, what's Jesus doing? He's revealing the Father to his disciples, so they can learn to depend on him like little children.

Here's my sermon in a sentence. Knowing the Father, should lead us to childlike prayer. That's the Christian antidote to anxiety. Sure, there's help to be found in Christian counseling and even in medication. But the fundamental help we need is only found in a childlike trust of God the Father which expresses itself in dependent prayer.

Do you want to know how to pray? Then you need to get to know the one to whom you're praying. Thankfully Jesus has revealed the Father to us in our passage this morning.

This morning I want to look at two fundamental things we learn about the Father in this passage. Then I want to consider what knowing the Father teaches us about childlike prayer.

THE FATHER

What do we learn about the Father in this passage? We learn something about his purpose and his person.

The Father's Purposes

We learn that the Father will be glorified through his relationship with his children. Where do I get this? The Lord's Prayer gives us a *pattern* for prayer. It's not necessarily meant to be repeated verbatim. It's more like a tuning fork that helps us know if our prayers are on pitch, so to speak.⁸ And this pattern for prayer starts with the Father's purposes. If we want to pray in tune, we have to be mindful of the Father's purposes. They come to us in two declarations.⁹ "Hallowed be your name" and "Your kingdom come."

The first petition—for the Father's name to be hallowed (or glorified)—is more than a prayer request. It's fundamental to God's purposes in redemption.

It's an explicit reference to Ezekiel 36.¹⁰ In Ezekiel 36, the Lord starts out by reminding Ezekiel that Israel had defiled the land by their ways and their deeds. They were unclean (v. 17). That's why the Lord brought judgment upon them and scattered them among the nations (vv. 18-19). And when they were hauled off to the nations, Israel profaned the Lord's holy name (v. 20). But the Lord had concern for his holy name, which the house of Israel had profaned among the nations (v. 21).

⁷ Collins, 165.

⁸ Garland, David E. *Luke*. Zondervan exegetical commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids, Mich: Zondervan, 2011.

⁹ Bock, Darrell L. *Luke Volume 1: 1:1-9:50*. Baker exegetical commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Books, 1994.

¹⁰ Garland; Green

Green, Joel B. *The Gospel of Luke*. The new international commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids, Mich: Eerdmans, 1997.

So the Lord made a promise to Ezekiel. He was about to act for the sake of his holy name (v. 22). He said, “I will vindicate the holiness of my great name, which has been profaned among the nations” (v. 23)—or, my name will be hallowed. And how would he do this? He would do it by bringing Israel out of exile (v. 24).

But that wasn’t the end of it. He envisioned a time beyond the return from exile. He goes on to say, “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. 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. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules. . . . you shall be my people, and I will be your God” (vv. 25-28).

My daughter Ruby is kind of a spaz. Sometimes, when she leaves the house to go to church, I jokingly say to her “don’t defame the family name.” To which she replies, “There’s not much to defame.” That’s partially true.

But with God it’s different. His name *is* famous. And he intends for it to be famous among the nations. But not only that, he wants his name to be glorified *through* his relationship with his children. We were meant to live in a relationship with God under his rule and blessing. As we live in relationship with God under his kingly authority, we will bring glory to his name and experience his good gifts. But in our sin, we defame his name and forfeit his good gifts.

But God was intent on being glorified through his relationship with his people. So he promised to provide the only way that would ever be fully possible; he promised to provide cleansing from sin. And he promised to provide his Holy Spirit. We know that these promises were fulfilled in Jesus’ death on the cross and at Pentecost after Jesus returned to the Father.

If we’re going to learn how to pray, we need to remember the purposes of the Father. When we address God as Father, we’re praying out of respect *and* out of intimacy.¹¹ God isn’t our buddy; he’s our heavenly Father. We need to respect him as glorious. But even though he’s glorious, he also desires an intimate relationship with his children. And it’s actually *through* relationship with his children that he’s glorified. This relationship is the beginning of prayer, the foundation of prayer. And God’s glory is the end, or the goal, of all our prayer. If we want God to be glorified through our relationship with him, we must pray, “Father, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come.” That’s the Father’s purpose.

The Father’s Person

And what about his person? We learn that the Father is gracious and generous to his children. Following the pattern for prayer in verses 2-4, Jesus gives us two parables that teach us who the Father is and, therefore, teach us how to pray. These two parables are lesser to greater stories.

In the first one we’re introduced to a man who has an unexpected guest show up at his house at midnight. He’s unprepared to show his guest proper hospitality; he doesn’t have anything to eat. So he goes to his next door neighbor in the middle of the night and asks for three loaves of bread. This is a complete bother to his neighbor. The door’s shut and his children are already asleep. He doesn’t want to get out of bed, trip over his kids, unlock the door, and give the man the bread. But because

¹¹ Garland

he's banging on the door during the middle of the night, he does it anyway. The lesson is implied. If your neighbor's willing to give you bread, then how much more will your Father in heaven. The neighbor's grouchy; your Father in heaven is gracious.

The second parable compares an evil father with the heavenly Father. "What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will instead of a fish give him a serpent; or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? 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!"

When Jesus teaches us that God is our Father, we're prone to paint a picture of God that's similar to our earthly fathers. But that's misguided, because even the best earthly fathers are imperfect. I sometimes wonder (tongue-in-cheek) what negative effect my parenting is having on my children, and how much counseling they're going to need after they leave my house.

This year when we were getting ready to go buy fireworks for the Fourth of July, some of my kids reminded me how I got mad last year when we were at the fireworks stand. That stung. If their view of God is at all informed by my example as a father, they're going to have a pretty skewed view of how to approach God. And my example is mild compared to the experience of many people, who have absent fathers, uninvolved fathers, or even abusive fathers.

Jesus says God is our Father. But he makes an important qualification—he's much better than our earthly fathers. Earthly fathers are good, *some* of the time. God is good, *all* the time. Earthly fathers are generous, to a degree. God the Father is generous, without measure. Paul says it this way. "He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?" (Rom. 8:32).

When you think of the goodness of God the Father—when you think of his grace and generosity—don't think of your earthly fathers (as good or bad as they may be). Think of the one who sent his only Son to die for your sins to give you new life and an eternal inheritance. That's the Father you're praying to. He's gracious and generous to his children beyond all that you could ever imagine.

CHILDLIKE PRAYER

If God's our Father, then implied is the fact that we're his children. And it's no surprise that when Jesus teaches his disciples to pray, he teaches them to be childlike. But what does it mean to offer God childlike prayer? Last week there was a great article on The Gospel Coalition's website by Susan Yates titled, "The Unlikely Measure of Spiritual Growth."¹² She says:

One of the reasons our problems [or anxieties?] grow while our faith wanes is because we approach spiritual growth the same way we approach natural growth.

From the time our children are young, we teach them to become independent... Our goal is to raise confident adults who will be a blessing to society. Becoming increasingly independent is the pathway way to maturity.

Spiritual growth is completely different. Spiritual growth...occurs when we become more dependent on God, not less.

¹² Yates, Susan Alexander. "[The Unlikely Measure of Spiritual Growth](#)." Blog post, The Gospel Coalition, July 14, 2017.

That's really helpful. Becoming like *spiritual* children involves becoming more dependent on God, not more independent. So here's the first thing we learn about childlike prayer. We should pray with childlike dependence upon our heavenly Father.

Remember what we learned in the parable of the Good Samaritan last week? We're prone to justify ourselves (10:29). We naturally try to earn God's approval. We think we're self-sufficient. We're prone to a do-it-yourself kind of religion. We elevate strength and gifts; we denigrate weakness and poverty. But the only way to inherit the kingdom of God is through becoming like a child. The only way to be lifted up is to have humble hearts. The only way to pray is to realize we're dependent on our good and gracious God. And when you're completely dependent on God, you'll be shameless in prayer.

The best book I've read on prayer is Paul Miller's *A Praying Life*. He says, "We all know that to become a Christian we shouldn't try to fix ourselves up, but when it comes to praying we completely forget that. We'll sing the old gospel hymn, "Just as I Am," but when it comes to praying, we don't come just as we are."¹³ Children come to their fathers with snotty noses and bruised up knees. Adults want to put on their Sunday best. Do you pray like a child or an adult? If we want to be childlike, we have to realize that we don't have it all together. We need help. That's what makes prayer dependent. And the truly dependent will be shameless.

The man in the parable who needed bread was shameless. It would've been humiliating to knock on his neighbor's door in the middle of the night asking for bread. But he was shameless. Verse 8 says, "I tell you, though he [speaking of the next door neighbor] 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." That word "impudence" should read "shamelessness." His neighbor responded to him because of his shamelessness. If we want to pray like dependent children, we have to pray like this. We have to remember that we have nothing to offer. We're in desperate need of God's help. And when we're desperate we'll be shameless.

There's a lot to be learned about how to pray. And Jesus certainly gives us a great pattern for prayer in the Lord's Prayer. But more important than learning the pattern of prayer is learning about the posture of prayer. Prayer is relational, between a gracious Father and his dependent children. I've spent almost all of my time on this one truth because if we don't get this one truth we'll miss the heart of prayer. I don't want prayer to simply become a formula or a way to be super religious. It needs to be relational.

The Specifics of Prayer

If we get the relational nature of prayer then we're ready for the specifics of prayer. We're ready to ask, to seek, and to knock. And we can do so with confidence knowing that every child of the Father who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened (vv. 9-10).

But what are the things we should ask for? Or, in other words, what should we be dependent upon God for. I think Luke 13 gives us four things.

First, we should pray for daily provision. "Give us each day our daily bread" (v. 3). God wants us to be dependent on him for everything, even the daily food that we eat. This is counter-intuitive for a

¹³ Miller, Paul E. *A Praying Life: Connecting with God in a Distracting World*. Colorado Springs, Colo: NavPress, 2009, 32.

culture that is self-sufficient. We believe we have the basic things that we need because we work hard. And those who don't have the basic things they need are lazy. The heart behind this attitude runs contrary to childlike dependence.

Everything we have is a gift from God. And therefore, there's nothing that is off limits for prayer. In fact, we should be praying for more of our basic needs and cultivating an attitude that we're dependent on God for everything. Paul Miller says, "If you're not praying [even for your basic needs], then you're quietly confident that *your* time, money, and talent are all you need in life."¹⁴ I hope we don't believe that. Let's pray, "Give us each day our daily bread."

Second, we should pray for pardon. "Forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone who is indebted to us." If our prayer for daily bread is a prayer for our most basic needs, the prayer for forgiveness is a prayer for our most urgent need. In our sin, we stand in judgment before a holy God. And our moral bank account is empty. There's nothing we can do to pay our debt. We're completely dependent upon God to pay for our sins. He has done that in the person and work of Jesus Christ. Our only hope of forgiveness is to depend on Jesus. And so we must pray to God to forgive our sins through Jesus. This is how we enter into a relationship with God the Father. And this is how we maintain fellowship with God when we continue to sin. We're debtors to God's mercy.

Third, we should pray for protection. "And lead us not into temptation." We are not only dependent on God for salvation from sins. We're also dependent on him for keeping us from sin. We need protection from the world, the flesh, and the devil if we are to live lives that bring God glory. We can't save ourselves. And we can't sanctify ourselves. We need God for the whole package. Therefore, we must be dependent. And our prayers should mark this childlike trust.

Fourth, we should pray for power. In verse 13, Jesus says, "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!" When I say that we should pray for power, I mean that we should ask God to give us the Holy Spirit. There are at least two reasons for this.

1. It's the Holy Spirit who teaches us to pray with childlike dependence. It is only by the Spirit of adoption as sons that we're able to cry out "Abba! Father!" (Rom. 8:15). We don't even know how to pray without God's help. We don't understand the heart of prayer. We have access to pray to God the Father through God the Son. But we're only able to pray to God the Father through God the Holy Spirit. So we should ask for the Holy Spirit to work in our hearts to teach us who the Father is, what it means to be a dependent child, and what exactly to pray for.
2. The only way we'll ever glorify the Father's name in our lives is as the Holy Spirit fills our hearts and transforms our lives. Ezekiel 36 taught us that. Remember, God's glory is the purpose of prayer. And God is glorified in us when we're transformed by him. And it's only through the Holy Spirit that will happen. So we must pray for Holy Spirit power.

A Springboard to Bend Our Hearts to God

Anxiety is a major problem in our culture. Most people want to get rid of anxiety. And there are many ways we're trying to rid our lives from this debilitating handicap. There're drugs to take. There's therapy. And these have helped many people, including me. But the search for

¹⁴ Miller, 49.

a happy pill or happy thoughts won't stop the restlessness we experience. It runs too deep.¹⁵ So what should we do? Paul Miller gives us a suggestion. "Instead of fighting anxiety, we can use it as a springboard to bending our hearts to God."¹⁶

Our anxiety gives us an opportunity to lean into the gracious heart of our heavenly Father and become dependent on him through childlike prayer.

¹⁵ Miller, 69.

¹⁶ Miller, 69.