

Pray, Pray, Pray!
Luke 11:5-13

If you fly frequently, you know that most passengers ignore the pre-flight safety demonstration. It's basically considered something they have to do, but I likely don't need any of it. Of all the times each of us in this room have flown, it's likely the only time we've seen the oxygen mask is in that pre-flight ritual. We never expect to actually need it, but if the occasion ever arises, we'll be glad to use it.

A lot of us view prayer in the same way: it's a back-up plan. It's something that's pulled out only in case of emergency. But if we take Jesus seriously...

"Prayer is more like oxygen than an oxygen mask." Gary Inrig

Prayer is more than a ritual. It's our conversation with our Father in heaven. It's the chance to let go of your burdens, ask for help with temptation, receive forgiveness when you've blown it, and it's the greatest thing you can do for someone else—pray for them.

Seeing prayer more like our oxygen than an emergencies-only oxygen mask comes from seeing Jesus' own prayer life. The gospels are peppered throughout with mentions of Jesus praying.

- He habitually prays early and alone.
- He prays before meals with his friends.
- Jesus prays late into the night on the cusp of important decisions.
- He lets his dearest friends listen in as he prays to his and our Father in heaven, giving us an ear for how he prays, what's on his heart and mind, what burdens him and what delights him.

Clearly for Jesus, prayer was like oxygen, not merely an emergency air mask.

So this morning, let's get into how Jesus can help us in praying. For example:

- We wrestle with what we should we pray about.
- We wonder how we should pray, what's the right or best way?
- We wonder why we should continue praying when an answer is slow in coming.

All of that and more, Jesus addresses in Luke chapter 11. In this series on the secrets of God's Kingdom hidden within Jesus' parables, we come today to his Kingdom secrets concerning prayer. I'll tell you right up front that the heartbeat pulsing throughout Jesus' own prayers and his teaching on prayer is less about what to say and how to say it. It's much more about helping everyday people to rightly see and appreciate who it is that we're praying to. Because that is what can totally transform how you think about prayer, and your motivation to pray.

Open your Bible to Luke chapter 11. Before we come to the parable Jesus teaches about prayer, I want you to see what prompted the parable. Again, context is King! Luke chapter 11:1 starts with Jesus giving a pattern for prayer.

Jesus' pattern for what we're to pray about (Luke 11:1-4)

One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he finished, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples."

John the Baptizer had apparently taught his followers ways to pray. Rabbis in that time did so, just as pastors do today.

The obvious principle is that if you want to learn a new skill—how to play an instrument, learn to code, learn to drive or become effective in sales—the best way has always been to learn from someone who does it well. Hanging around Jesus 24/7, the twelve disciples got to see Jesus' prayer habits, and it attracted them. He obviously had something they didn't, and they wanted it. So this time as soon as Jesus said, "Amen," one of the twelve asked, "Lord, teach us to pray." It's worth nothing that...

The only time Jesus' disciples ever asked him to teach them anything was how to pray.

There was something in Jesus' prayer life that drew them, that inspired them, that made them want to get this for themselves. They wanted in. So Jesus gives a pattern for prayer.

*He said to them, "When you pray, say:
"Father,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come.
Give us each day our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins,
for we also forgive everyone who sins against us.
And lead us not into temptation."*

In less than half a minute, our Lord introduces a way of praying that has carried people through for the past couple thousand years. It's astounding: so brief, yet it covers so much ground. For today, we're going to focus on just one key secret from the prayer pattern Jesus gives us. The secret that so many don't know or don't rest in, is that...

When you receive Jesus as your Savior, you gain God as your Father.

*"To all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God— children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God."
John 1:12-13*

John never loses a sense of marvel that we can go from separated from God due to our sin, to adopted by God as sons and daughters. When you receive Jesus as your Savior, you gain God as your Father!

Leonard Sweet tells of a native American tribe's ritual for training young braves. On the night of a boy's thirteenth birthday, he was placed in the forest to spend the night alone. Until then he had never been away from the security of his family and tribe. But on this night he was blindfolded and taken miles away. When he took off the blindfold, he was in the middle of the woods, with no indication of where he was in relation to home. He was by himself. All night long.

Each time a twig snapped, his mind pictured a wild animal ready to pounce. Every time an animal howled, he anticipated a wolf leaping out of the darkness. With every gust of wind, he wondered what more dangerous sound it masked. The whole experience must have been terrifying.

After making it through that long night, when the first rays of light illuminated the forest, the young brave would discover, to his astonishment, just a few feet away, armed with bow and arrow, stood his father. His father had been there all night long, watching over and guarding his son.

(Source: Leonard Sweet, SoulSalsa, Zondervan, 2000, pp. 23-24)

The first and most important insight Jesus patterns for us in prayer is that you have a Father in heaven. Everything else in this pattern for prayer flows from the awesome reality that when you receive Jesus as your Savior, you gain God as your Father. From that point on, he stands with you.

You and I were designed with a deep inner longing to know a father's love. I have been on discipleship weekends where grown men from their twenties to their seventies sobbed unconsolably over the approval of their father that they never received. Not receiving a father's love may be the deepest of wounds.

You were made to know a father's love. And so the very first thing Jesus patterns in prayer personally, and teaches as a pattern for us praying, is that you have a Father in heaven. Prayer begins at the level of the deepest human longing. When you receive Jesus as your Savior, you gain God as your Father. That is the background to Jesus then telling a parable about prayer. He shifts from giving a pattern for what to pray about, to giving a parable on who it is we're praying to.

Jesus' parable on who we're praying to (Luke 11:5-8)

5 Then Jesus said to them, "Suppose you have a friend, and you go to him at midnight and say, 'Friend, lend me three loaves of bread; 6 a friend of mine on a journey has come to me, and I have no food to offer him.' 7 And suppose the one inside answers, 'Don't bother me. The door is already locked, and my children and I are in bed. I can't get up and give you anything.' 8 I tell you, even though he will not get up and give you the bread because of friendship, yet because of your shameless audacity he will surely get up and give you as much as you need.

This parable gets a whole range of interpretations, because friend who won't get up and help because of friendship, the friend who essentially gripes, "Go away!"...seems in some sense to represent...God! What's that about?

I told you week one in this series that a lot of Jesus' parables are built around shock value. There's this seemingly common and simple story, when all of a sudden the whole thing gets turned on its head! The hero in the parable about being a neighbor is the last person any Jew would call good—a Samaritan! That was shocking, unsettling. Same here with the neighbor who can't be bothered, but gets up because of the shameless audacity of the one asking for bread.

Here's the idea: when a door to door salesman keeps ringing your bell or hammering on the door while you're eating dinner with your family, all he's going to get is an angry demand to hit the road. But take that same kind of shameless audacity in a different setting—a parent calling the after-hours doctor's office phone service because their child has a fever of 105 degrees. In that setting, that person showing the same kind of shameless audacity, calling at two or three in the morning, they will receive a call back.

Jesus' point is not that God is like that grouchy neighbor. This is a parable not of comparison, but of contrast. His point is that when you pray, you are not bothering a reluctant neighbor. You are asking for what you need from your heavenly Father. That's his point! That's the Kingdom secret in this parable.

The disciples ask Jesus to teach them to pray. He teaches them that they're praying to their Father in heaven. He immediately follows that with this parable to drive home how powerful it is that God is not bothered, pained, or reluctant to hear you and give you what you need. The whole point is to contrast the grumpy neighbor with your generous Father in heaven. God hasn't "gone to bed." He isn't "unavailable until some more convenient time." His "door isn't locked." God is not like that. He is...your Father in heaven. So come boldly. Come shamelessly, any time of day or night, for whatever you need. When you receive Jesus as your Savior, you gain God as your Father. So ask! Tell him what you need. God is never too busy for you!

We've touched on Jesus' pattern for prayer.

We have heard a parable on prayer.

Next we hear Jesus' principles on why we're not to give up in praying.

Jesus' principles on why we're to not give up

"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. For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened." Luke 11:9-10

The first principle Jesus teaches is the principle of persistence.

Ask, seek, and knock convey not giving up. You keep on asking, seeking, and knocking, until you receive what you need, until you find what you're looking for, and until the door is opened for you.

Each of them is in the present tense, conveying continuous action.

- Keep on asking: believe that God hears you.
- Keep on seeking: if you're seeking something that's worth seeking, it's worth continuously seeking.
- Keep on knocking: don't let silence on the other end keep you from persisting. It's an easy image, even if we don't understand all the whys: knock until the door is opened.

When Amy Carmichael was a child, her mother told her that if she prayed, the Lord would answer. So one night Amy prayed for her eyes to become blue instead of brown. The next morning she jumped out of bed and ran to the mirror, where she wailed in disappointment because her eyes were still brown. Her mother explained that "no" is an answer, too, that God meant her to have brown eyes for a reason.

Amy went on to become a missionary first to Japan, but the cold bothered her health such that she had to return to England. Friends urged her to stay in England because of the nerve disease that left her exhausted and achy for weeks at a time. But she sensed God's leading to go as a missionary to India.

There she discovered young children being rented as prostitutes in Hindu temples, and so she started a rescue work for these children. Along the way, Amy Carmichael came to a crucial realization: dressed in an Indian sari, with her brown-not-blue eyes, she could pass for being Indian. And with that, she finally understood why God had not answered her earlier prayer—for the greater cause of his Kingdom coming, through her ministry in India!

We don't understand all the whys of unanswered prayer. Of course not. But William Temple put it well when he said...

“When I pray, coincidences happen, and when I don’t, they don’t.” William Temple

So pray. And don’t give up. Keep asking. Keep seeking. Keep knocking. Until you receive, find, and the door is opened.

Jesus continues by returning to where he began in teaching about prayer—that God is your Father in heaven. Luke 11:11-13 he asks...

“Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, 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!”

Isn’t this wonderful? Of course any decent father will give his child good gifts instead of harming them! Jesus goes from there to a lesser to greater argument. If the lesser is true, then you can easily see how the greater is true as well. So here, if even sin-stained humanity, average Dads, are good enough to only give their children what is good for them, how much more must that be true for your heavenly Father!

Come to God confident that he will give you what you need. If you have received Jesus as your Savior, you have gained God as your Father! He loves you! He gladly gives you what you need. So ask.

That’s the second principle on prayer that Jesus teaches here: pray with confidence.

- Don’t worry about saying ‘just the right words.’
- Don’t worry whether you’re asking for the right thing.
- Don’t sweat it.

Just pray. Talk to your Father in heaven. Tell him what you think you need. He will give you what is good. Come confident, because he is your Father in heaven, who loves to provide for his kids.

Pastor Thomas Watson way back in the 1600s caught the spirit of what Jesus is saying here, noting that...

“Prayer delights God’s ear; it melts His heart; and opens His hand.” Thomas Watson

Like any decent Dad loves to protect and provide for his children, your heavenly Father loves to hear from you. So pray! Talk to him!

One final story. When his son was about a year old, Greg Gilbert decided to start teaching him how to swim. He wanted his son to be safe around water. At first, his little guy didn't even like getting water in his face in the bathtub. Any parents remember that with your kids? I sure do, both with our daughter and with our foster children!

At first, teaching his son to “swim” in their pool meant getting him to splash around a bit on the top step, maybe putting his lips in the water enough to blow bubbles if he was feeling really brave.

Eventually Greg convinced his son to hold on for dear life while Dad walked around in the water, in the shallow end of the pool.

Once they mastered that, it was time for the Big Show—Jumping Off the Side. Fulfilling his duty as a daddy, Greg lifted his little guy out of the pool, stood him on the side, and said, "Come on, jump!"

The look on his son's face went from confusion to dawning understanding, to rejection, to outright contempt. He pouted and said, "No. I go see Mommy."

Fast-forward some unknown length of time and tries, they eventually came to the moment of truth. Greg jumped into the water and stood in front of his son with my arms outstretched, watching him bob up and down in his swimmy-diaper as one-year-olds do when they kind of want to jump, but not really.

"Come on, kiddo," he said. "I'm right here. I'll catch you. I promise!" His son looked at him skeptically, did one more little wind-up, bouncing at the knees, and then fell into the pool with what was more a flop than a jump.

And his Dad caught him.

After that, they were off to the races. "Doot 'gain, Daddy! Doot 'gain!"

So commenced half an hour of jump, catch, lift, reset, jump, catch, lift, reset.

When it was over, Greg and his wife started to worry aloud that maybe their son had gotten a bit too comfortable with the water. What if he wandered out to the pool when no one was there?

Over the next few days Greg watched his son around the pool. What he saw both comforted him as a parent and touched him deeply as a father. Never once did his little boy think about jumping into the water—not unless his Dad was standing beneath him with arms out, promising to catch him. And then he would fly!

You see, despite all his son's apparent successes, his trust was never in his own ability to handle the water. His trust was in his father, and in his father's promise: "Jump. I promise I'll catch you."

(Source: Greg Gilbert, *What Is the Gospel?*, Crossway, 2010, pp. 71-72)

Friends, if there's anything God wants you to know about prayer, Jesus makes it abundantly clear in the pattern he gives for prayer, in the parable about who you're praying to, and the principles for praying and not giving up. The secret, the Kingdom of God secret concerning prayer, is that when you receive Jesus as your Savior, you gain God as your Father. That's who you're talking to. So pray. Pray. Pray!