

May 11, 2025

Sermon Text Lk 11:1-10 (NLT)

1 Once Jesus was in a certain place praying. As he finished, one of his disciples came to him and said, “Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples.”

2 Jesus said, “This is how you should pray:

“Father, may your name be kept holy.

May your Kingdom come soon.

3 Give us each day the food we need,

4 and forgive us our sins,

as we forgive those who sin against us.

And don’t let us yield to temptation.”

5 Then, teaching them more about prayer, he used this story: “Suppose you went to a friend’s house at midnight, wanting to borrow three loaves of bread. You say to him, **6** ‘A friend of mine has just arrived for a visit, and I have nothing for him to eat.’ **7** And suppose he calls out from his bedroom, ‘Don’t bother me. The door is locked for the night, and my family and I are all in bed. I can’t help you.’ **8** But I tell you this—though he won’t do it for friendship’s sake, if you keep knocking long enough, he will get up and give you whatever you need because of your shameless persistence.

9 “And so I tell you, keep on asking, and you will receive what you ask for. Keep on seeking, and you will find. Keep on knocking, and the door will be opened to you.

10 For everyone who asks, receives. Everyone who seeks, finds. And to everyone who knocks, the door will be opened.

SERMON “A Rhythm of Life: Feeding Roots”

What did it mean to have a friend for you as a child? Try to think back to those days What did friendship mean then? When I think of friendship in my childhood, it meant those kids I could go to their door, call out their name, and they would show up at the door, and after asking their mom if they could go outside, and then we’d find something to do together for the rest of the day: riding bikes, shooting baskets, making leanto’s out in the woods, playing a board

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game on the patio or back porch. My friends at that age were the ones I could literally call on at the last minute, and they would jump at spending time together.

Now fast forward to today – what does friendship mean to you now? Today it often means those you hold common interests with, people you can share life events with, people who you trust to hold confidence in what you share with them. But, it still includes spending time together – eating out, playing cards, going to an event together. For those friends that just never seem to have time to spend with you – they always seem to have something else scheduled, don't have the time to commit to focused time together, well ... those are the friendships that fade away over time.

Friendship takes time.¹ And likewise, if we want to grow our friendship with God, we need to cultivate a rhythm of spending time with God. We are offered a gift – God, the Creator of all things, invites us to have this friendship. Sharing time with God should never be seen as a duty: the response should be “I get to spend time with God,” not “I have to spend time with God.”

The rhythm of spending time with God is what we commonly call “prayer.” Continuing our metaphor of the trellis we started last week, it's another of the “roots” of our spiritual practices that supports every other part of our life. In fact, it may be the most central part of our life in and with Christ.

How can say it is the central spiritual practice? Because Jesus himself made it central to his spiritual practices. It was part of the rhythm of his human life. In the Gospel of Luke, we have many examples of the importance of prayer in Jesus' life. Early on in Luke's gospel, Chapter 3 tells us that the Holy Spirit came upon Jesus while he was praying, and later in Chapter 5, he withdrew in the early hours of the morning, to desolate or wilderness places, to pray through the dark hours. He prayed before big decisions, or at key events in his life: before he called his 12 closest followers, the disciples; after Peter's confession of his belief in Jesus as the hoped for Messiah; he prayed at his transfiguration on the mountaintop in the presence of Peter, James and John. And, Jesus' prayed at the lowest points of his

¹ These thoughts are paraphrased from the work of Ken Shigamatsu's book on modern Rules of Life *God in My Everything* (Zondervan Publishing: Grand Rapids, MI, 2013)

human life: in the Garden of Gethsemane; during his suffering on the cross; and before the meal in Emmaus after his death which helped two of his disciples recognize him, and realize they were in the presence of the resurrected Jesus. One of the key themes that the writer Luke brings out in his gospel is that prayer defined Jesus. Jesus modeled prayer as part of his spiritual life, as part of his relationship to God.

And so in the 11th chapter of Luke, as Jesus and his disciples began their walk to Jerusalem, we again hear that Jesus was praying. After respectfully waiting for him to finish his prayer time, an unnamed disciple approaches Jesus and says “John the Baptizer taught his disciples a prayer. Can you give us a prayer?” This was something very familiar to Jesus and his Jewish companions – they were raised to recite by memory set prayers to begin and end the day, prayers at the beginning and end of a meal, prayers to start the Sabbath Friday evening and to end it with the break of dawn on Sunday. This disciple wasn’t asking Jesus to teach them to pray – they were raised with prayer being a constant in their lives. What this disciple was asking was an answer to what his followers should say – what and how should they pray as disciples of Jesus?

This passage of Luke gives us a much shorter version of the prayer that we now call “The Lord’s Prayer.” You recognized it in the reading; but, compared to what we recite almost weekly, it seemed to be missing elements. The same prayer found in the Gospel of Matthew, as part of the Sermon on the Mount, seems a little more complete to today’s version, having seven parts versus the five that Luke recorded. Neither of these include the traditional benediction that concludes it: “For yours is the kingdom, the power, and the glory, forever and ever, Amen.” The earliest recording of the prayer with the benediction as we now pray it is from the third century, in an early worship liturgy book called *The Didache*.

So is there a “right” version? I don’t think that would have been Jesus’ point – rigid rote legalism was what he kept teaching to avoid. Most scholars believe the Lukan version is probably closest to the original form Jesus taught, with the later versions expanding on the prayer to include other elements of the

teachings of Jesus. But the simple directness of Luke's Lord's Prayer refocuses on the main point of it: it's not the specific wording, but the teachings and intent behind the words that Jesus' taught us that is the point. And what Jesus was teaching was prayer is about relationship, to God and each other.

So, who IS the Divine Being we are in relationship with, and how do we express this when we pray the Lord's Prayer? In the first line of this prayer, we acknowledge God as Father. This isn't a gender thing – it's acknowledging the role of God and God's nature. We have a Creator who still cares for us, as an ideal earthly father should do. And as a child with a good parent, we should be completely dependent on God, not ourselves, in our lives and hearts. However, this prayer makes clear: our God is NOT an earthly father, but one that is outside of our current existence and sovereign over all of it, and this outsideness we conceptualize as "heaven."

And so we next express who we are in relationship with, by acknowledging God as sovereign, totally ruling over us: "Hallowed be thy name." Another way to phrase this: "Holy is your name." God rules over us; we are subject first to God and not any earthly leader or ruler. We are proclaiming this with this prayer, and in voicing God's holiness we are also expressing a longing for the day when all people will also revere God as holy and sovereign. "Father, may your name be kept holy. May your Kingdom come soon." When we sanctify God's name, then we are bringing God's sovereignty and dominion into this world with the speaking of those very words – saying it out loud brings that hope into reality.²

The third line begins the petitions of this prayer while also naming another quality of God: God as Provider. "Give us each day the food we need." It echoes the provision of manna in the wilderness, the "daily bread" the Israelites received as they wandered for forty years, being prepared to enter the Promised Land. Just enough to get through the day – and if they gathered more than a day's worth, except in preparation for the Sabbath day, it rotted and was inedible. And as our Holy Provider, there is another element of trust we are expressing: give us only what we need. Proverbs 30:8 states "Feed me with the food I need." Not

² New Interpreters Commentary, Luke.

everything we want, but in God's own judgement what we need. In this relationship we are praying about, we are expressing the ultimate trust: giving up our control over what WE think we need, and entrusting our care and survival to our Creator.

The first lines of the Lord's Prayer that Luke records speak to the nature of who we are in relationship with. The final two are petitions that speak to our relationship with this God. It starts with: "... and forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us." We could spend several sermons unpacking this one petition. The Aramaic word can be translated as either sin or debt or "trespasses." Of the three, neither is right or wrong – we usually use the debt translation in Presbyterian services – but they are slightly nuancing different theological aspects of how our relationship with God and others is negatively impacted when we fail to show forgiveness in a reciprocal way. A trespass is a violation – picture stepping onto private property that has a "Do Not Trespass" sign in front of it, a line that shouldn't be crossed. Our sin injures our relationship with God, and many sins injure our neighbor. This has historically been explained as creating a debt, a deficit in our relationship with God that Jesus' "paid" on our behalf with taking on our human suffering. This gift of God's forgiveness of our debts, when not reciprocated with our own forgiving nature, creates an unbalanced relationship. Jewish teaching in Jesus' time acknowledged the harm this did to both the sinner and those sinned against – the channel, or the pipeline, of forgiveness should flow both ways. So, those who can't give forgiveness cannot receive forgiveness. This isn't meant to describe a transactional way of relationship, a quid pro quo – "I'll forgive you IF you forgive me." It's an acknowledgement that being forgiven and being able to forgive are one and the same. We're not just in need of daily/continual sustenance, our "daily bread." We are also in need of daily/continual forgiveness – both in being forgiven, and forgiving others.

The final petition in Luke's Lord's Prayer speaks to the support that a relationship with God gives us in times of difficulty. In our traditional version, we recite "And lead us not into temptation." That translation, classic as it is, can create the feeling that it can be God tempting us. It is biblical that God allows

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temptation to happen. But James' Letter in the New Testament is adamant: God tempts no one; it is evil forces and Satan – our own sinful nature – that places the temptation in front of us. The Bible does tell us God doesn't eliminate those temptations, and that temptation tests us. So we see in the Luke version a little more clarity – the wording is more a request for help: "And don't let us yield to temptation." An acknowledgement that the yielding happens on the human side of the relationship. An acknowledgement that it is only through God's strengthening, through God's sending of the Holy Spirit, that we can resist the temptations of human existence. Only through God's support can we hold up against our whims and selfish actions that injure our relationship with God, and with each other. This also connects us again to our own continual need for forgiveness – the temptations barrage us daily. This final petition is a climactic one – it underscores our relationship to God, our God who is a providing father who is also holy, to whom we can appeal for help from all that threatens our life. And so in this model of prayer Jesus provided for his disciples a guide to our conversations with God. Using this model, we acknowledge in our prayer time with God our need for him in all our physical, emotional and spiritual needs.

The parable that immediately follows the Luke version of The Lord's Prayer is not coincidental. It's not an abrupt pivot – the two are connected. For Jesus immediately left the words of the set prayer he was providing his own disciples, and then gave them a story with a teaching point. His Parable of the Persistent Friend speaks further to the "how to pray" part of the disciples question. The one word answer: Constantly. 1 Thessalonians 5:17 states succinctly: "Pray without ceasing." Never stop. And Jesus is saying the same thing in concluding this lesson on what to pray about, what to talk to and ask God for, and how to do this thing called prayer. We talk to God daily – asking daily for what we need. Whether we are alone in our room, or together at a meal or in worship. God wants us to be persistent in reaching out to him, the God who reaches out to us first, who first provides for us before we know what we really need, who forgives us first. And because we trust in God's Word, we can be "shamelessly persistent." There is to

be no shame in asking God anything – we just need to trust we will be given, not necessarily what we want, but what we need.

Paul wrote in his letter to the Colossians, “And now, just as you accepted Christ Jesus as your Lord, you must continue to follow him. Let your roots grow down into him, and let your lives be built on him. Then, your faith will grow strong in the truth you were taught, and you will overflow with thankfulness.” (Col 2:6-7) The spiritual practices or habits that we plant in our lives need to start out with strong roots: time of rest with, and focused on, God – Sabbath. Time with God speaking to us through his Word – reading and meditating on Scripture. Time in conversation with God, which Jesus modeled for us in word and deed – prayer. Of these, prayer is what nurtures and feeds these roots of the faithful life. Conversation with God is the plant of our faith reaching up from the depths of our heart and up into the air and sunlight. It pulls us to the Son, Jesus Christ, in the relationship that God created us to have, planted within us from the moment we first breathed in air. The practice of prayer helps make manifest within us the hope expressed in Ephesians: “Then Christ will make his home in your hearts as you trust in him. Your roots will grow down into God’s love and keep you strong.” (Eph 3:17) May you nourish those roots in a rhythm of life that feeds and nourishes you daily. Jesus gave an answer to his disciple’s request: “Lord, teach us to pray.” How are YOU answering Jesus' request to be in conversation with you? Amen.