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Ask, Seek, Knock
Luke 11:1-13

Jesus was praying in a certain place, and after he had finished, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples." ² He said to them, "When you pray, say:

Father, ^[a] hallowed be your name.

Your kingdom come. ^[b]

³ *Give us each day our daily bread. ^[c]*

⁴ *And forgive us our sins,*

for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us.

And do not bring us to the time of trial." ^[d]

Perseverance in Prayer

⁵ *And he said to them, "Suppose one of you has a friend, and you go to him at midnight and say to him, 'Friend, lend me three loaves of bread; ⁶ for a friend of mine has arrived, and I have nothing to set before him.' ⁷ And he answers from within, 'Do not bother me; the door has already been locked, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot get up and give you anything.' ⁸ I tell you, even though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, at least because of his persistence he will get up and give him whatever he needs.*

⁹ *"So I say to you, Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. ¹⁰ For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. ¹¹ Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for ^[e] a fish, will give a snake instead of a fish? ¹² Or if the child asks for an egg, will give 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 ^[f] to those who ask him!"*

Have you ever had **problems praying**? Ever have **doubts** about your prayers?

What were you **concerned** about--

Whether it **works**?

Whether God is **listening**?

Whether you were using the **right words**?

What part makes you most **nervous** about prayer?

Is it the **calling** on God? The **words**? Do you ever feel **selfish**—or think your problems are too big or small?

I think we've ***ALL had our doubts*** about prayer!
 I mean, we are ***ALL children of God***—you, me, all of us.
 We are ALL able to call upon God, and Jesus and the Holy Spirit,
 With ANY words, or requests, or praise,
 ANYTHING for ourselves, or others.

But ***we don't always believe that***, or feel that way, do we?

How and where do you usually pray right now?
When do you pray the most?

Do you remember ***who taught you*** to pray?
 Or when you learned the ***Lord's Prayer?***
 Or maybe another ***bedtime or mealtime*** prayer?

What if the ***Lord's Prayer can help us*** with prayer doubts and problems?

It might sound strange,
 because for many people that prayer is ***so familiar***,
 it's kind of like driving somewhere for the millionth time, and not
 remembering how you got there, right?
 We get so used to saying the words each week, that we no longer think about
 what we're saying and doing, right?

But what if we ***look again*** at the Lord's Prayer?
 The prayer that millions have memorized.
 That unites us with every follower of Jesus Christ?

For all of us who have ***wondered if we said the right thing*** in a public prayer,
the Lord's prayer is a help! (and a good prayer to use out loud!)
 Because, it's ***simple, straightforward, and honest!***
 Some people might even say it's a bit ***pushy***,
 because it doesn't even have the word, ***PLEASE*** in it!
 It just says to God: ***Give to me, Forgive me, Deliver me!***

This simple prayer—
 Jesus' answer to his disciples when they said "Teach us how to pray"
 It's so ***honest and real***—that it reminds us of ***our need*** for God.

This little prayer is **powerful**—**without heaping up empty words** designed to make other people think we know what we're talking about!

Jesus **warns about 'prayers for show'**

in his Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 6: 7-8:

⁷ "When you are praying, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do; for they think that they will be heard because of their many words. ⁸ Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

That's the preamble for the Lord's Prayer in Matthew!

The Lord's prayer is definitely **not for show**.

It's simple, and brief!

It **acknowledges who God is, and who we are**,

And it has **three** main requests:

For God's **provision, forgiveness, and deliverance**.

And it's not just about us and God.

It really follows the **Great Commandment**—

to love God and our neighbors as ourselves.

It guides our relationship to God, and to one another.

Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors---

In other words---forgive our sins, as we forgive those who have hurt us.

The Lord's prayer is also great,

because it's in the **context of a relationship**.

Even if you feel distant from God,

When you pray this prayer, **you are entering a relationship** with God.

You are **talking as one of God's kids**.

Just like I was telling the kids today,

when it says "**Our Father**" that original word **Abba, means Daddy**.

Wow. Think about that for a minute.

What do you call God when you pray?

God? Heavenly Father? Jesus? Daddy? Holy Spirit?

There's **not a right answer**.

Have you *ever considered a name* for God that draws you into a *closer relationship*?

Because when we approach God in relationship, and honest conversation, we really start to recognize our *need* for God, our *dependence* upon God.

Which brings us to the *strange parable and sayings* of Jesus in Luke 11.

At first Jesus tells a story about hospitality:

“Suppose one of you has a friend, and you go to him at midnight and say to him, ‘Friend, lend me three loaves of bread; ⁶for a friend of mine has arrived, and I have nothing to set before him.’ ⁷And he answers from within, ‘Do not bother me; the door has already been locked, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot get up and give you anything.’ ⁸I tell you, even though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, at least because of his persistence he will get up and give him whatever he needs.

Now, you do have to know the *context* of these words.

In Ancient Near Eastern culture, *hospitality was next to godliness!*

If someone arrived at your home, it was *expected* that you would feed them, or at least give them bread, regardless of the hour!

Jesus is basically saying---*we need to approach God*

like we would a friend or family member in the night, seeking what we need!

Think about someone you can call on in the middle of the night—

God is even more ready to help than that friend, or family member!

Let that soak in for a minute—because all too often we call upon people before, or more than, we call upon God!

Jesus also tells us how to talk to God--we need to be *persistent*.

We need to *keep praying, and never give up! Ask, Seek, Knock!!!*

Luke emphasizes this even more in chapter 18 when Jesus tells the parable of the *widow and the judge*—he finally grants her justice, because she won't quit bothering him for justice! She is relentless.

So, he responds to her persistence!

Just like God responds to ours!

Are *you persistent* in prayer?

It's *not easy*, is it?

I have some prayers I have been praying, literally for years, some for decades, and they appear to be unanswered---so, I just keep on praying.

Jesus says we ***should be persistent, like banging on the door of our dear friend*** in the night! Why? Because when we ASK, we receive, SEARCH we find, KNOCK, the door is opened!

God responds to our persistence!

We ***don't always believe that*** though, do we?

We are sometimes ***quick to give up*** on our prayers, thinking that God isn't ***listening***, or God doesn't ***care***, or God has ***better things to do!***

None of that is true.

Sometimes ***our picture of God gets in the way***—

God seems distant, or cold, or judgmental.....

But as followers of Jesus, we need to ***remember*** this:

When we look at Jesus, we are looking at God!

When we experience the power of the ***Holy Spirit***, we are experiencing the power of God!

Pastor Cynthia Jarvis wrote:

*If we pray, we will find ourselves in **conversation with a friend***

*Who knows our every **weakness**, because he himself has cried out in anguish...*

*A God who will **come after us** when we are **lost**,*

***Dine** with us when we are cast out...*

***Welcome** us home when we have wasted our lives,*

*Who **keep us from falling** too far....*

*We can talk to God, through thick or thin, come hell or high water, no holds barred, because **nothing** in all creation...*

*will be able to **silence the Word that answers our prayers, in his flesh.***

Cynthia Jarvis, Feasting on the Word, Year C, Vol.3, pg. 290.

Jesus answers our prayers---in Himself!

Our awesome God is not somehow separate or distant or aloof,

God responds to our prayers,

Or Jesus wouldn't have taught us to pray!

Jesus wouldn't have ***prayed so much in his own life***, right?

Jesus is our model for a life of prayer.

He prayed before every major event or decision in his life.

We see him going away to pray, praying in front of the crowds, praying with his disciples, praying before starting his ministry, before feeding the 5,000, or his disciples at the Last Supper. He prayed when he knew he was going to the cross, and he even prayed from the cross!

Luke's Gospel especially emphasizes the prayers of Jesus.

Why?

Because we need it.

As Christians, we need to be people of prayer. (silent and aloud!)

So, whatever is impeding our prayer life,

We need to ***ask God*** for help with it!

Our women had a mini retreat on prayer recently, and the theme was A.S.A.P.—Always Say a Prayer.

Which may sound trite, but it's not.

We are called to pray—

always, at all times, places, with all words, or no words at all!

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 reminds us to rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances.

And Paul reminds us in ***Romans 8:26-27*** that

the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes^[a] with sighs too deep for words.²⁷ And God,^[r] who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit^[s] intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.^[t]

Do you realize that?

That, when you do not have the words to pray, you can ***call upon the Holy Spirit to pray for you?***

I find great ***comfort*** in that.

There are those times we don't have words, right?

I also find great comfort in the fact that we can ***say anything to God.***

We're studying the Psalms on Wednesday nights now,

and in them, you discover the **power of honesty** before God—
in prayer, praise, lament, confession, and worship.

People say absolutely everything on their hearts and minds in the Psalms,
And so should we.

It doesn't matter if we are praying scripture, the Lord's Prayer,
or we are simply saying '*Hey God, help me!*'

One of the powerful prayers in the Bible is

"I believe; help my unbelief!"

In Matthew 9, Jesus is asked by a Father to cure his son with an evil disabling
spirit, and Jesus says--*All things can be done for the one who believes.*"

And the Dad then cries out, "I believe; help my unbelief!"

Presbyterian Pastor Frederick Buechner once said:

*If you have never known the power of God's love,
then maybe it is because you have **never asked to know it....
expecting an answer...***

go to God the way the father of the sick body did and ask...

if this little voice inside says, "But I don't believe",

don't worry too much. "I believe, help my unbelief",

is sometimes the best any of us can do really, but thank God it is enough.

Presbyterian author **Anne Lamott** says that she has two basic prayers:

"Thank you, thank you, thank you", and

"Help me, Help me, Help me!"

There are **breath** prayers, like I've taught the kids,

or **arrow** prayers, with simple phrases, like Come, Lord Jesus.

Some prayers are **silent, or meditative, while others are spoken.**

Praying is really **like breathing.**

We can all do it.

And most all people do it at some time or another.

You know the term, **no atheists in foxholes?**

The idea is that everyone prays to God in times of need!

Well, what if that's true?

What if we all know how to pray, the way we know how to breathe?

I think there's a lot of truth in that.

What if prayer is JUST as important as breathing?

But with breathing, there are ways to make it better, you know?
 Ways to make it more disciplined and helpful to us.
 Think of people who do *yoga*, and learn how to breathe deeply.
 Or *singers*, or *public speakers*, pastors,
 who learn how to breathe from the diaphragm,
 because taking such deep breaths helps us to *sing well, or speak clearly?*

Prayer comes naturally,
 but we can *practice* it to make it *even more powerful* in our daily lives.

Which brings us to something really important about prayer:
 Sometimes *we don't ask for enough*.
 Sometimes we *sell God short*.

In my favorite devotional, *Streams in the Desert*, the July 27th entry said this:
*God's ability to perform is far beyond our prayers—even our greatest prayers! I have recently been thinking of some of the requests I have made innumerable times in my prayers. And what have I requested? I have asked for a **cupful**, while God owns the entire **ocean**! I have asked for one simple **ray** of light, and God hold the **sun**!*

God's ability to give is so far beyond our ability to ask!
Are you asking for a cupful, when God is able to give you the ocean?
 Are you asking for a ray of light, when God is able to give you the sunshine?

Alexander MacLaren says in *Streams in the Desert*: *Christ puts the key to the **treasure chamber** in our hand, and bids us take all that we want. If a man is admitted into the vault of a band, and told to help himself, yet comes out with one cent, whose fault is that?*

What if this is *another reason* Jesus offered the parable and saying after teaching his disciples the Lord's Prayer?

What if Jesus wants us to be *bold, brave, even pushy* in our prayers?
 That friend knocking on the door at night,
 Did you notice that he doesn't stop until he gets what he wants?

And the parent who is asked for a fish or an egg—doesn't give a snake or a scorpion!

Jesus says ASK, SEARCH, KNOCK! God will respond!

God wants to give us far, far more than bread or fish or an egg!

The Lord's Prayer itself is **BOLD**—

Give us our daily bread---give us EVERYTHING we need today God!

Wow. Think about that.

Forgive us ALL of our sins, as we forgive others.

That's bold.

And a tall order, isn't it—for us to be forgiving others, as we ask for God's grace?

Lead us not into temptation, and deliver us from evil.

Ok, God---don't put us in bad situations without your help, and keep us away from evil!

That's expecting a lot, isn't it?

How bold are we in our prayers?

Are we asking God for EVERYTHING we need?

For EVERYTHING that God can give?

If not, why don't we ***start asking for everything*** we need?

Today!

Friends, our ***Good News of our Gospel*** is very simple:

Pray.

Because our God responds!

Ask, and you will be answered.

Seek, and you will find.

Knock, and the door will be opened.

And for that, all God's people said, Amen.