

Pray!!!
Luke 11:1-13

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My assignment this morning is to encourage you toward prayer. In 1 Thess.5:17 Paul told the church to *“Pray without ceasing.”* Don’t stop praying. Keep on praying. The easiest thing in the world to neglect is prayer. Daily cares and responsibilities of life can crowd it out of our routine so easily. Yet that is what keeps us going as Christians. It’s really the most important thing we can do. Jesus said, *“My house shall be called a house of prayer....”*¹ Most churches in America could scarcely be called a house of prayer. At best they might be a teaching center or a social center. Some are nothing more than an entertainment center. But the real deal, according to Jesus, is a house of prayer. That’s what was happening on the Day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit was poured out on the Church. It was prayer that sustained the early Church through persecutions and prayer that empowered them to evangelize the world. When Jesus drove the money changers out of the temple he said, *“It is written,”* quoting Isaiah 56:7 *“‘My house shall be called a house of prayer,’ but you have made it a ‘den of thieves.’”* You have made it into something it was not supposed to be. We must be very careful that we’re not making God’s house into something other than a house of prayer. Prayer is to be the heartbeat of the Church. And where there is little or no prayer, God’s purposes cannot be fulfilled.

I want to encourage you toward prayer in two ways. First, I want to talk about what happens when prayer is neglected. Then we will explore what happens when we do pray.

I. Alternative to prayer is not good.

In Mark 14 the disciples are with Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. They are facing the ordeal of Jesus’ arrest and crucifixion. Mark 14:33-42, speaking of Jesus, *“And He took Peter, James, and John with Him, and He began to be troubled and deeply distressed. 34 Then He said to them, ‘My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death. Stay here and watch.’ 35 He went a little farther, and fell on the ground, and prayed that if it were possible, the hour might pass from Him. 36 And He said, ‘Abba, Father, all things are possible for You. Take this cup away from Me; nevertheless, not what I will, but what You will.’ 37 Then He came and found them sleeping, and said to Peter, ‘Simon, are you sleeping? Could you not watch one hour? 38 Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.’ 39 Again He went away and prayed, and spoke the same words. 40 And when He returned, He found them asleep again, for their eyes were heavy; and they did not know what to answer Him. 41 Then He came the third time and said to them, ‘Are you still sleeping and resting? It is enough! The hour has come; behold, the Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of sinners. 42 Rise, let us be going. See, My betrayer is at hand.’”*

Of course, we know the rest of the story. When the pressure got on, the disciples were not prepared for the challenge; and they all collapsed. Peter had boasted that he would never deny the Lord; but that’s exactly what he did. All the disciples forsook the Lord. Here, in this passage, we have insight as to why they failed. In verse 38 Jesus told them, *“Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation....”* You have to pray now in order to be equipped for what is coming tomorrow. You can’t neglect prayer now and then think you can play catch up in the crisis. Prayer clothes us for the battle. The last message I preached here was from Ephesians 6 concerning the armor of God. That text began in verse 13 with this exhortation. *“Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand the*

¹ Matthew 21:13; Luke 19:46. All Scripture quotes are from New King James Version unless indicated otherwise.

evil day....” The passage is about preparation for an inevitable battle. The soldier cannot be putting on his armor while the arrows are flying all around him. He needs to be already suited up if he is going to win. Of course, anybody will pray once a flaming arrow hits right beside you. But Ephesians is talking about a lifestyle of prayer that keeps us equipped so that the evil day doesn’t blindsides us. Eph. 6:18 *“praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, be watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication....”* Paul’s message is similar to the one Jesus gave in the Garden of Gethsemane: *“Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation....”*

By and large, we’ve got a prayerless Church in America that is not being watchful in the way Jesus and Paul are talking about. We don’t want to be part of that. The standard is not what everybody else is doing. The standard is the Word of God. And the Word calls us to watchfulness and prayer. *“How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?”*² Neglect can get us in trouble. We don’t have to do something overtly evil to find ourselves ill-equipped and unable to stand. A good excuse is not the same as obedience. I feel like a watchman³ on the wall sounding an alert that very few people pay attention to. The alert is going off; and people are going about their business as if it were only a test. This is not a test; this is the real thing. *“Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation....”*

Then in the rest of verse 38 Jesus says something that explains why it’s so difficult to establish a strong prayer life. *“The spirit indeed is willing,”* (I think that would be true of about everyone in this room) *“but the flesh is weak.”* The problem is that everyone of us has two desire centers. On the one hand, we love the Lord and want to please Him. On the other hand, our bodies want to be pampered. We want to sleep when our body says sleep. We want to eat when our body says eat. And we have to build up ourselves praying in the Holy Spirit so that our inner man is strong enough⁴ to say no to the physical when the call of the Lord requires that. The issue is this for everyone of us. Am I going to follow my renewed spirit and do the will of the Father or am I going to let the desires of my flesh direct my actions?⁵ Here the disciples fail to pray because they are sleepy. Seems like a good excuse; but they fell into temptation and were defeated. The end result was that everyone of them fled when they should have stood strong.

Luke 18:1 says that Jesus, *“... spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint”* (KJV). Some versions say give up or lose heart. The Greek word translated “faint” is egkakeo. It means “to give in to an evil, become weary, to lose heart, behave badly, turn coward.”⁶ So the alternative to prayer is fainting. I have two possible alternatives. I can pray or I can faint. There is not a third alternative. I can pray or I can faint.⁷ That’s true for me just as much as it is for anyone in this room. Don’t think you’re the only exception. Don’t think you the person who can quickly put on his armor during the battle; catch up at the last minute. If you don’t have time to pray; you will have time to faint. I’m sorry that’s the reality; but I’m giving it to you from the Bible.

Now, for the more pleasant side of this

² Hebrews 2:3.

³ Ezekiel 3:17.

⁴ Jude 20; 1Cor. 14:4.

⁵ Romans 8:4-5; Galatians 5:16-25..

⁶ Luke 18:1 Robertson’s Word Pictures in the New Testament, Electronic Database. Copyright (c) 1997 by BibleSoft & Robertson’s Word Pictures in the New Testament. Copyright (c) 1985 by Broadman Press. See also by Rogers & Rogers, *The New Linguistic and Exegetical Key to the Greek New Testament*.

⁷ There are two sides to the issue of fainting in this text. The main point of the parable is to not stop praying; be audacious and persistent in prayer and don’t give up. But it is also implied that we will faint if we stop praying for we will not have the supply (bread) needed to carry on (Luke 11:3; John 15:4-6).

II. Assurances are clear.

In Luke 11 the disciples watched Jesus pray. I would love to have a video to show you what they saw. Of course, they had seen the results of His prayer life. They had seen withered hands restored instantly; they had seen lepers cleansed and the lame walk. They had seen Jesus raise the dead and all of that flowed out of His prayer life. But I suspect it was compelling to see Jesus interact with the Father in prayer. When Jesus finished praying one of the disciples asked Him to teach them to pray.

The request was not teach us “how” to pray, although I’m sure that was implied. But let me begin with the request as it appears in Luke 11:1 “*Lord, teach us to pray....*” I want to learn more about how to pray; but learning “to pray” is essential. I can know how to do something. I can have a nice notebook on prayer techniques. But if that is just head knowledge, it doesn’t do me much good. I have to first and foremost learn “to pray” and most of my progress from there will happen in the doing.

Jesus’ answer to that request gives us good reason to pray and instructs us on how to proceed. First he taught them the Lord’s Prayer. There is a lot that could be said about prayer from those verses. But I want to emphasize the first point. “*When you pray, say: Our Father....*” That sets the whole tenor of prayer. It’s not just God in the distant heaven that we’re praying to; it’s *our Father* in heaven. It is the assurance that comes because of our relationship with God that gives us confidence that the prayer will be answered. This is foundational to praying in faith. The confidence that the prayer will get answered is not found in how hard I pray, how long I pray. It’s not found in how nice I am although Scripture teaches that there are issues that can hinder our prayers. But we must begin prayer with the assurance of goodwill from God as our heavenly Father.

When you begin prayer, don’t run past that address too quickly. Let it soak into your mind and heart. I’m coming to my heavenly Father with this request. Because of what Jesus has done in my behalf I have favor with the One who created the heavens and the earth. I come to my Daddy already having His favor through Jesus—already accepted in the Beloved—already blessed and welcome.⁸

Consider what Jesus says then in Luke 11:9-13

"So I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. 10 For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. 11 If a son asks for bread from any father among you, will he give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent instead of a fish? 12 Or if he asks for an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? 13 If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!"

A father is already favorably inclined to his children. He wants the best for them. He delights in giving good gifts to them. When my children were young, I loved to watch them squeal with delight on Christmas morning as they opened their presents. It was far more fun to enter into their joy than opening my own presents. And this is even more true of our heavenly Father who gave His only Son for our redemption. “*Do not fear,*” Jesus said, “*...for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.*”⁹ God delights in blessing His children. He wants the best for you.

Effectual prayer begins with this understanding. It is foundational to faith. The Accuser of the Brethren will try to rob us of this assurance. Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine. “*If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!*”

⁸ Eph. 1:3-6; Rom. 8:32; Heb. 4:16.

⁹ Luke 12:32

The gift of the Holy Spirit encompasses everything we need because He is our connection with the heavenly supply line. He is our peace. He is our wisdom. Through Him Christ is made unto us wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and wisdom.¹⁰ He supplies the healing for our bodies based on Jesus' stripes. He gives us answers and understanding we could never develop on our own. He helps our infirmities when we don't know what or how to pray. He makes intercession for us.¹¹ The Father will give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him.

The giving of the Holy Spirit is something that happens in our new birth.¹² It's something that happens in the baptism of the Spirit that overflows in other tongues.¹³ It's something that continually happens in our lives. Some of the same people who were filled with the Holy Spirit in Acts 2 were filled with the Spirit in Acts 4:31. Ephesians 5:18 tells us to be continually filled with the Spirit.¹⁴ So what do we need today more than anything else? We need fresh anointing. We need to be filled with the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the key to everything.

So Jesus invites us to ask. Verse 9 "*So I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. 10 For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened.*" Embrace that promise for your need today. Whether it is asking, seeking, or knocking the answer will come—not because we earned something, but because of the Father's heart toward us. There is a sense of increasing intensity in the way Jesus phrased this. Sometimes all we have to do is ask and it comes pretty quickly. At other times there is some seeking involved. Seeking implies a process. A great benefit in the seeking process is that we interact with God and often receive even more than what we were pursuing. We're asking God to give us a good wife and in the process of seeking, He is shaping us to be a good husband. Knocking implies a barrier that has to be removed. The door has to be opened. Some things require some knocking; some persistence in prayer.

In the verses just prior to this (verses 5-8) Jesus gave the story of the man whose friend was coming to his house and he had nothing to feed his guest. So in the middle of the night he goes and wakes up his neighbor and asked him to give him bread to feed his guest. The neighbor tells him to go away; my family and I are already in bed; I can't help you. But then Jesus adds in verse 8 "*I say to you, though he will not rise and give to him because he is his friend, yet because of his persistence he will rise and give him as many as he needs.*" The Greek word (*anaideia*) translated persistence has the connotation of boldness and audacity.¹⁵

So here is a man that only does what is asked because of the guy's persistence and audacity. The persistence pays off. But then Jesus immediately follows this story with a contrast of the heavenly Father who has no reluctance toward answering our requests. It is your Father's *good pleasure* to give you the kingdom. God wants us to understand something this morning. He is longing to give us more. There are not shortages in His storehouse. He is able to do exceedingly, abundantly above all we ask or think.¹⁶ However, we must get about the business of asking—not just a quick drive through order at

¹⁰ 1Cor. 1:30; 2Thess. 2:13.

¹¹ Rom. 8:26-27.

¹² John 3:16.

¹³ Acts 10:44-46; 19:5-6; 1Cor. 14:18, 39.

¹⁴ The Greek word, *pleroo*, is in the present tense which indicates continuous action.

¹⁵ Cleon Rogers Jr. and Cleon Rogers III, *The New Linguistic and Exegetical Key to the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998) p. 136.

¹⁶ Ephesians 3:20.

McDonalds that notifies Him of what we want; but a settled in asking, seeking, and knocking. Life Church, will you or will you not pray? That is the question for you and me.

James 4:2 “...*you have not because you ask not...*” Why does God insist on the asking? Why is prayer even necessary? Because the most important thing you can receive from God is relationship with Him.¹⁷ If you do not engage God in the asking, how are you going to get to know Him? If it all came to you without the asking, how would you know when to give thanks? Everything God has done for our redemption is for relationship. Heaven will be heaven because of your relationship with a loving God. It can’t be had any other way. He is not only the source of all blessings, He Himself is the ultimate blessing.

Last week Denny talked about the presence of God. It is in God’s presence that transformation occurs in our lives. In the presence of a Holy God I discover at deeper and deeper levels my own need for transformation. Coming close to God in prayer exposes the changes that need to happen in our lives. That’s one reason people are reluctant to enter into prayer. The closer you get to light the more junk gets exposed. But it only gets exposed to free you from that which destroys and limits.¹⁸ Then also getting into God’s presence changes you from glory to glory.¹⁹ His glory, His goodness rubs off on us and we emerge from our time with Him with a radiance we could have in no other way. When Moses came down off Mt. Sinai he did not know his face was glowing with the radiance of God. Ex 34:29 “*When Moses came down from Mount Sinai with the two tablets of the Testimony in his hands, he was not aware that his face was radiant because he had spoken with the LORD*” (NIV).

This poem by an unknown author expresses the change that occurs.

Show me Thy face—one transient gleam
 Of loveliness divine,
 And I shall never think or dream
 Of other love save Thine:
 All lesser light will darken quite,
 All lower glories wane,
 The beautiful of earth will scarce
 Seem beautiful again.

Show me Thy face—my faith and love
 Shall henceforth fixed be,
 And nothing here have power to move
 My soul’s serenity.
 My life shall seem a trance, a dream,
 And all I feel and see,
 Illusive, visionary—Thou
 The one reality!²⁰

Everybody in this room is as close to God as he or she chooses to be. But we can choose to draw closer. It will cost our flesh every time. But it is always worth it. Do you want more? It’s available to each and every one of us. James 4:8 “*Draw near to God and He will draw near to you...*”

Pray

¹⁷ Phil. 3:10; 2 Peter 1:2-3 (not just knowledge about, but knowing Him in relationship); John 16:27.

¹⁸ Isaiah 6:5-7; John 3:20-21; 1Cor. 1:29.

¹⁹ 2Cor. 3:18.

²⁰ J. Oswald Sanders, *Enjoying Intimacy With God* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980) p. 131.