

LORD, TEACH US TO PRAY

Luke 11:1-13

Key Verse 11:1, "Now 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.""

Last Tuesday, we had a beautiful homecoming ceremony for the late Dr. James Hong. He was a man of faith and prayer. His family and our church community prayed sincerely and persistently for his recovery. However, God led him to the glorious heavenly kingdom, granting him eternal rest and peace. We felt very sad. Some of us may doubt God's love and the power of prayer. While listening to one of the eulogies, God touched my heart and helped me understand the true meaning of prayer. Dr. James Hong couldn't be healed as we had wanted, but he felt that he was deeply loved by God, his family, his friends, and our church community. He could have deep communion and loving relationship with God through prayer in the midst of sickness. I believe that his family members and many of us also could have a deep loving fellowship with God while earnestly and persistently praying for Dr. James Hong. I believe that our God was very pleased and glorified by our prayers. I believe that this is the true meaning and purpose of prayer. Today's message is about prayer. May God open our minds and hearts to learn and accept the true meaning of prayer through today's message.

I. Lord, teach us to pray (1)

Jesus was praying in a certain place (1a). It seems that this event took place in the neighborhood of Bethany, the home of Martha and Mary, on the eastern slope of the Mount of Olives, where Jesus was accustomed to praying. In Luke's gospel, Jesus prayed continually at the first opportunity. Luke says, "*But he would withdraw to desolate places and pray*" (5:16), and "*In these days he went out to the mountain to pray, and all night he continued in prayer to God*" (6:12). Through prayer, Jesus had a deep, personal relationship with God. Through prayer, he was comforted and empowered by the Holy Spirit. Through prayer, he was guided by God's wisdom to carry out His mission fruitfully and successfully. For Jesus, prayer was his spiritual breath and power source.

When Jesus finished praying, one of his disciples said, "*Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples*" (1b). It is incredible that this disciple had a great desire to learn to pray. It seems that Jesus hadn't lectured his disciples about prayer before this event. But he set an example of praying in his everyday life. When his disciples saw that Jesus was empowered and guided by the Holy Spirit through prayers, they became curious about prayer. They also wanted to be filled with power and wisdom from God through prayer. The best method of discipleship is to set a good example as Jesus did, rather than to give lectures. Therefore, one of his disciples asked him, "*Lord, teach us to pray.*" We can learn three important lessons from this request.

First, we should pray. Why should we pray? To answer this question, we need to know who we are. Genesis 2:7 says that the Lord God formed the man from dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature. We humans have bodies and spirits. As our bodies need to breathe, our spirits also need to breathe. Prayer is our spiritual breath through which our spirits can have communion with the Spirit of God. Our bodies will die if we don't breathe; our spirits will die if we don't pray. If we are not praying daily, our spirits are about to die. Therefore, we should pray so that our spirits can live and be strengthened by the Spirit of God.

What is prayer to you? How do you define prayer? Some Christians have a serious misconception of prayer, thinking it is to convince God to do what they request. They try to influence God to be good to them by responding to their requests immediately. They think prayer is an emergency bell that they push when they have urgent demands. But God is always good to us. God loves us. Our Father God knows what we need before we ask him (Mt 6:8). One author of a famous classic book on prayer defines that *"to pray is to let Jesus come into our hearts."*¹ For him, to pray is to open the door, giving Jesus access to our needs and permitting Him to exercise His power to glorify His name in the midst of our needs. We may wrestle with God in prayer as Jacob did. However, the purpose of wrestling with God in prayer should be to do the will of God, resigning our own will, as Jesus did at Gethsemane before his death on the cross.

Second, we should learn to pray. We know very well that we should learn to study the Bible. But we scarcely think that we should learn to pray. Sometimes, we try to pray; but we can't. In the middle of prayer, a crowd of ideas and worries comes to our minds. While praying, we feel tired and sleepy in less than five minutes. We don't know what to say to God after ten minutes of prayer. Praying is not easy for us because we are not accustomed to praying. We can't pray because our prayer is blocked due to our sins. We feel burdened when we try to pray because we haven't learned to pray. Disciples are those who learn from their masters. Our master Jesus Christ prayed always. Therefore, we should learn to pray from Jesus if we are his disciples.

Third, we should ask Jesus to teach us to pray. Some of us may decide to pray, saying: "Yes, I will learn to pray and pray three times a day from now on." But we cannot learn to pray if Jesus doesn't teach us to pray through his Holy Spirit. By our own efforts, we are never going to reach God. Prayer is not our monologue but our dialogue with God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The initiative to pray comes from God, not from us. Therefore, we should humbly ask Jesus to teach us to pray. In other words, we should pray that we may learn to pray. It sounds weird, but it is true. When we ask Jesus: *"Lord, teach us to pray,"* Jesus will knock on our hearts so that we can open the door and have fellowship with Him in prayer. Revelation 3:20 says, *"Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me."* Jesus is waiting for us, knocking on the door of our hearts. Jesus longs to have a deep relationship with us through prayer. Do you all want to open the door of your hearts to have fellowship with Jesus in prayer? Let's say to Jesus: *"Lord, teach us to pray."*

¹ O. Hallesby, *Prayer*, Translated by Clarence J. Carlsen (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 1994), 14. Kindle.

Upon the request of his disciple, Jesus opened the school of prayer to his disciples and gave them a lesson on prayer. Jesus designed his class around two aspects of prayer: first, the content of prayer, which is about what we should pray for; second, the form of prayer, which is about how we should pray.

II. The Lord's Prayer (2-4)

Jesus taught the well-known Lord's Prayer as the primary content of our prayer. The Lord's Prayer is the key to unlock all riches of prayer, but we are so familiar with it that sometimes we overlook its deep meaning. Luke's version of the Lord's Prayer is shorter than Matthew's version. The Lord's prayer can be categorized into two parts: one is in relation to God, and the other is in relation to us.

First, prayer in relation to God. *"Father, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come"* (2). *"Father"* is *"abba"* in Aramaic, which refers to the intimate relationship between God and his children. *"Abba"* could be translated "daddy" in English. Jesus addressed God as *"Abba, Father"* in prayer (Mk 14:36) and invited his disciples to use that personal form of address. We were not God's children, but children of wrath (Eph. 2:3). But we are adopted into the family of God by the grace of Jesus, the only begotten Son of God. God is described as our Father in many parts of the Bible. One of the most heart-moving stories in the Bible is the parable of the prodigal son. In this parable, God is described as a father who accepted his son's insolent request; waited for his lost son day and night; received him with great joy when his prodigal son returned home; and restored him fully as his beloved son. When we pray, we are praying to this Father who loves us, listens to us, comforts us, provides for us, and protects us. It is extremely important to realize that our Father in heaven knows our needs and is ready to have fellowship with us through prayer.

"Hallowed be your name" is the first prayer topic that Jesus chose to teach us to pray. It means that God's name would be regarded as sacred, treated with reverence, and seen as holy. Our God is the Creator of the universe and worthy of being praised and worshiped by all creatures. Unfortunately, very few Christians today put the hallowing of God's name as the top priority of their prayers. In our secularized society, God's name is blasphemed by impious people. Even believers dishonor God's name due to their shameful sins and immorality. According to Martin Luther, who initiated the Reformation, all Christians are bearers of God's name and represent the holy God. If we Christians are selfish, hypocritical, and self-righteous, unbelievers will defile God's name because of us. Therefore, "hallowed be your name" is our petition that God keeps us from dishonoring God's holy name. Also, it is to pray that our secularized society would honor and praise God's name. Let's pray together, saying "Hallowed be your name!"

"Your kingdom come" follows "hallowed be your name." God's kingdom is wherever God reigns. Since God reigns everywhere, the kingdom of God is everywhere. However, at the heart of God's kingdom is the idea of God's messianic kingdom where God's appointed Messiah, Jesus reigns. Therefore, "your kingdom come" is a prayer that we will participate in God's redemptive work by preaching the gospel message of Jesus Christ. It is an expression of our desire that we will be witnesses of Jesus in our jobs, our schools, our families, and our neighborhood.

Second, prayer in relation to us. *“Give us each day our daily bread, and forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone who is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation”* (3-4). Jesus begins to teach His disciples how they should pray for their own needs. *“Give us each day our daily bread”* is to come to God in a spirit of humble dependence, asking Him to provide what we need and to sustain us from day to day. Daily bread is a metaphor for necessities rather than luxuries. We are living in one of the richest countries in the world. Most of us have food and drink in our refrigerators and freezers. Hence, it is not easy for us to ask God to give us each day our daily bread. But we need to learn to humbly depend on God every day, asking him for our daily necessities. *“Give us our daily bread”* has a social dimension. It is a petition for our neighbor, in other words, for those in need. Therefore, we should pray for those suffering from earthquakes in Turkey and Syria. Also, we should pray for economic justice in our country.

“Forgive us our sins” concerns our relationships, with God and others. When we commit one sin, we fall hopelessly short of the glory of God, placing ourselves under the condemnation of God. Therefore, Jesus taught us to beg God for forgiveness. But Jesus tightly linked our relationship with God to our relationship with others, saying, *“for we ourselves forgive everyone who is indebted to us.”* It seems that God will not forgive us if we don’t forgive others. If this condition is to be taken literally, we are finished, and no one can be forgiven by God. But thank God that this is an aspiration rather than a condition. Jesus teaches us that we need to stand ready to forgive anyone who has sinned against us or offended us when they repent. We will not be able to forgive others if we don’t know the forgiving love of Jesus Christ, our Lord.

“Lead us not into temptation” is a petition that God may spare us from temptations and the spiritual attacks of Satan that can lead us into sin. Temptations such as desires for money, power, and sex are always in us and around us. We cannot avoid temptations because of our vulnerability to sin. But we have the privilege of asking God to lead us not into temptation. We can overcome temptations and be victorious by the grace and power of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The Lord’s Prayer is not simply to repeat without understanding its meaning correctly. It is a model prayer, an example to follow, and principles to apply for our genuine conversation with our Father God.

III. Ask, Seek, and Knock (5-13)

Now, Jesus taught his disciples how they should pray. There are different forms of prayer. The prayer of supplication is to ask God for something. The prayer of praise and thanksgiving is to worship God with gratitude. The prayer of conversation is a communication of our spirit with the Spirit of God. The prayer of meditation in silence is an attitude of our hearts toward God without words. All these forms of prayer are beneficial for us if we let Jesus come into our hearts and exercise His power to glorify His name. In this passage, Jesus taught his disciples about persistent prayer with trust in the love of God our Father.

Imagine that you have a friend who visits you around midnight. Your friend is hungry, but you don’t have any food to offer or money to buy food. What will you do? Perhaps, you will be reminded of your Bible teacher. It is midnight, but you take the courage to call him. He had put

“Do Not Disturb” mode on his iPhone, but he answers: “What’s up?” You say to him: “Shepherd, please lend me three loaves of bread. A friend of mine on a journey has come to me, and I have no food to offer him.” What will your Bible teacher say to you? Will he say, “Don’t bother me. It is too late, and I am very tired”? No! Even though he will not get up and give you the bread because he is your Bible teacher, but because of your shameless audacity or to preserve his good name (NIV), he will surely get up and give you whatever you need. Does it make sense to you? Thus, Jesus tells you: *“Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened”* (9-10).

Now, Jesus uses another analogy to remind us that our Father in heaven will give us the best gift. Many fathers are here. If your son asks for a fish, will you give him a snake instead of a fish? If your son asks for an egg, will you give him a bumblebee? No! Even though you are a terrible person, you know how to give good gifts to your children. Then, *“how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!”* (13b). The Holy Spirit is the best gift from God. We have already learned that our heavenly Father loves us, knows our needs, and provides us with what we need. Therefore, we should trust in the love of God in all circumstances.

Sometimes, we misinterpret and misuse the persistent prayer that Jesus taught us. Some may think that God should respond to all our requests if we ask, seek, and knock persistently. Surely, the promise of Jesus is clear: *“Everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened.”* We should ask, seek, and knock persistently until we receive God’s answer. Many of us have experienced God’s power and glory through persistent prayers. So have I. But we should consider two things when we pray persistently.

First, we should try to find God’s will through prayer. 1 John 5:14 says, *“This is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us.”* This verse teaches us that we should pray according to his will so that our prayer can be heard by God. But how can we know God’s will? The word of God teaches us what God’s will is. For example, to observe the law of God is God’s will. You may pray persistently, saying, “God, please help me to rob a bank successfully.” But God cannot respond to your request. 1 Thessalonians 4:3 says, *“For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality.”* You may pray persistently, saying, “God, please help me to have a one-night stand with that beautiful girl or handsome guy.” But God will not listen to your prayer. However, there is a gray area that is not very clear about God’s will. Therefore, we should try to listen to God’s voice in the midst of prayer while requesting anything from God. Our prayer is a journey to constantly discern God’s will through conversation between God and us.

Second, we should understand the true meaning of prayer. When we pray, we tend to focus on the result of prayer. Sometimes, we think that our prayer is effective when our request is responded to by God, while our prayer is not effective when our request is not responded to by God. Some Christians judge others saying, “Your prayer has not been responded to because you haven’t had faith.” This statement can be true or not. James 5:16 says that the prayer of a righteous person has great power. Who is the righteous person? The righteous person is one who confesses his or her sins and is forgiven by God. When we have deep communion with God, we will discover God’s will, change our desire to accept God’s will, and pray according to God’s will.

Therefore, our prayer will be powerful and effective. When we pray, instead of focusing on the result of prayer, we should focus on God. God Himself is the purpose of our prayer. We pray to enjoy the presence of God, to have a deep friendship with Jesus, and to know him better through experiences.

Apostle Paul shows us a good example of prayer. He had a thorn in his flesh. He suffered a lot from it. Thus, he pleaded with the Lord three times to take it away from him. Was he healed or not? He was not healed physically, but he was healed spiritually. Paul heard the voice of God: *“My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness”* (2 Cor 12:9). When he heard this voice of God, he accepted it and didn’t ask for it any longer. On the contrary, he boasted all the more gladly of his weaknesses so that the power of Christ might rest upon him. He was healed spiritually. God’s healing power was revealed to him. I believe that this is the true meaning of prayer.

Lord, please teach us to pray! Amen.

Pastor John Seo