

P.R.A.Y.E.R.

Luke 11.1-13

By Mike Elliott at DCC on October 26, 2008

Introduction

As many of you know, prior to moving to Omaha in 2005 I lived in Washington State, on an Island in the Puget Sound where I had my bread baking business. A few years prior to that, indeed prior to me being a Christian, I lived and worked on a farm up towards the mountains.

It was a berry farm with raspberries and blueberries. One of my jobs when I became Assistant Manager was a series of cultivating tasks that took me up and down and up and down and up and down the rows of berries on the tractor. At one end of the field was a stunning view of a high mountain—Eldorado Peak, pictured upper left on your sermon outline). I had climbed it my first year working there so it was encouraging to be able to look at it day to day

At the other end of the field was a small Episcopal chapel, pictured upper right on your outline. I often reflected on how quiet and peaceful that church looked, far at the end of the pasture, tucked away in the trees, with a wall of glass looking back at me and the skyline of Eldorado Peak.

I worked at that farm 4 years and during my last winter God was working on my heart. The following Easter Sunday I decided to go check out the church I had seen so many times. That Sunday morning I walked down to the church wanting to know about God. Lo and behold there was no one there! I checked the sign on the road and then checked my watch. The dilemma was answered when I saw a note tacked to the door—Easter Sunrise service, 7am.

I had missed the boat. I was a bit upset, but since it was a country church the door was always unlocked and I let myself in. After all, I really just wanted to read a Bible and stare out those windows at that fantastic mountain. Lo and behold there were no Bibles! I was sorely disappointed. All I could do was sit there and reflect on what God was doing in my heart... and stare at the beautiful mountain... and pray. Apparently God wanted me to talk to Him. No sermon; no fellowship; no Bibles; all that was left was to talk to God.

I tell you that story because it marked a pivotal time in my spiritual life. I was taking the first baby steps toward a new life that would ultimately lead me here to Omaha and standing here today, opening the Word of God for you. Prayer is the foundation of a Christians life—I learn that more and more as time goes on.

My aim is to present you with a big picture of Prayer as it is taught in the particulars of this passage, that we all might be stirred to pray rightly, frequently, and fervently.

Our text begins with the disciples asking a question of Jesus. But notice that their question is not completely out of the blue. They have a very good reason to ask Jesus this question. Jesus has just been praying. If they had never seen him pray then they would not have thought it a very important endeavor and they would not have troubled him for some instruction.

But the fact of the matter is that Jesus found it VERY important, even crucial, to his ministry. He often prayed, solo, in the company of others, and in front of others. So it is no wonder that the disciples were curious about this and, having seen him put so much focus on prayer, wanted some guidance from him.

Let's begin with where we are to pray: both publicly and privately.

Private & Public—v1

“as He was praying in a certain place, when He ceased, one of His disciples said to Him, “Lord, teach us to pray...”

The scene appears to me that the disciples were standing to the side, observing him praying, and as soon as he was finished, the question is asked. Hence, this was a semi-private prayer. He was not alone but it was observable by others, as was the case when he prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane (Luke 22), for example.

A. All types of places

1. Privately. Lk 5.16; Mt 14.23; Mk 6.46; Mt 6.6

On other occasions he did pray privately: Luke 5.16, **he withdrew into the wilderness and prayed.** Matthew 14.23, **And when He had sent the multitudes away, He went up on the mountain by Himself to pray. Now when evening came, He was alone there.**

Matthew's account of the Lord's Prayer places specific emphasis on the private nature of prayer. There, in chapter 6, the whole discourse is about the private nature of Christian disciplines, be it charitable giving, praying, or fasting. So within that context is no surprise that Matthew emphasizes the private setting of prayer. We are not to think that this is the exclusive setting for prayer. In verse 6 of Matthew 6 when Jesus says, **when you pray, go into your room, ... shut your door**, He is not saying you should *only* pray in a private place. That is one of several proper settings for prayer; but not the only one.

2. Publicly. Jn 6.11, 11.41-42; Num 21.7; 1 Ki 8.22-23, 17.36-37; Ezra 10.1; Acts 20.36

Jesus also prayed publicly. When feeding the 5000 John records that Jesus **gave thanks** (Jn 6.11) before distributing the loaves. At the Last Supper he similarly prayed for the food (Lk 22). He also prayed in front of others for the resurrection of Lazarus (Jn 11.41-42).

Scripture is full of instances of other public prayers. Moses prayed in the presence of the people to avert God's wrath from them (Num 21.7, etc.). Solomon prayed at the public dedication of the temple (1Ki 8.22-23). Elijah prayed publicly on Mt Carmel (1Ki 17.36-37). Ezra prayed in the company of **a very large assembly of men, women, and children** (Ezra 10.1). Paul prayed with a group of church elders in Ephesus before he departed (Acts 20.36). Certainly the prayers Paul wrote in his letters are *extremely* public, having been heard not only by the people of his time but read by millions of people over the intervening millennia.

B. Challenges of Setting

Knowing that a variety of settings are appropriate for prayer, we might wonder, Which is better? To that I can honestly say Scripture gives warnings for each. Both are necessary—we must pray privately and publicly—but both have their challenges.

1. Showiness/Pride/False Humility. Mt 6.5-12; Lk 18.11-13

Praying publicly has the inherent challenge of getting distracted from the central purpose of communing with God, and getting sidetracked into showing off before men. This is the situation Jesus addresses in Matthew 6. When Jesus says to go into the closet and shut the door, he is saying to check your pride at the proverbial door. This sin is also dealt with in the story of the self-justified man of Luke 18 (remember that is the one where the man

says “I do all these good things and I’m glad I’m not bad like that tax collector over there!”).

Note that the tax collector in Luke 18, the one whom God justifies, the one who **would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me a sinner!’** (v13) was being as or more dramatic than the self-justified man that the story condemns. It is not the vocal-ness or public-ness of our prayers that is the potential problem, rather the heart issue behind them.

We can’t retreat from public prayer. The best way to make sure you aren’t doing something to impress people is to make sure they don’t know you are doing it. If you want to be sure your prayers aren’t man-pleasing, say them when no man is around. God knows the heart (Dt 8.2, Ps 44.21). But this setting is not without dangers of its own.

2. Laziness. Lk 22.46

In the Garden of Gethsemane Jesus left his disciples to pray while he went a stone’s-throw away to pray. What happened? They fell asleep. How many of us say to ourselves, “I’ll stay in bed another 15 minutes before getting up. I’ll pray while I’m lying here instead of getting up and praying on the couch, or at my desk.” Yeah right! We fall asleep! I think if Peter Hammond was the leader of the Gethsemane Prayer Team he would have told them to get up and do some jumping jacks or pushups to get their blood flowing... and *then* pray.

I challenge you to look at the reasons and motives behind the success or failure of your private and public prayers. Shyness in public prayer can be from lack of practice, or it can be from pride. Infrequency of private prayer can be due to mistaken priorities or laziness. Success in either venue is due to the Spirit’s work in us—something we all need in greater measure.

Required—v2a

Notice Jesus does not answer the question, “If you pray...” He answers it, “**When you pray...**” He knows that prayer is going to be an integral aspect of his disciples’ lives. But why is prayer a key activity for them (and us)?

C. Commanded as an act of obedience. Phil 4.6, Lk 22.26

First, we are commanded to pray. Paul tells us that we must pray to alleviate worry and anxiety. Jesus tells us we must pray to avoid temptation.

To not do so, to try to approach God or solve our problem some other way, is to go against his revealed will.

D. Assumed as a result of our restored relation to God. Rom 8.12-17, Eph 3.12

We pray not just because we are supposed to, but also because we want to! Prior to being redeemed, we were at enmity with God. Our relationship with him was broken, he was not pleased with us. Our good deeds were worth nothing (Isa 64.6) and our prayers, such as they were, fell on deaf ears (Prov 15.29). But by virtue of being in Christ, adopted into his family, having God as our father and Jesus as our brother (Rom 8.12-17), we can approach Him with boldness and confidence (Eph 3.12). Later I will touch on how we approach him in this way, but for now suffice it to say that we can... and we should... indeed we must. Otherwise we are not living up to our calling as children of God and we are being disobedient.

This is another opportunity to examine why you don't pray as you should. Perhaps deep down you feel like God is not pleased with you. If so, that may be your conscience telling you the truth; don't ignore it. You may not be saved hence you may not be a true son of God whom he delights to hear. Or, you may well be a son yet unresolved sin is blocking the way. Either way, repentance is the answer and following that comes restoration and renewed intimacy with the Father.

Always—vv5-9

In verses 5-9 we see another critical aspect of prayer. Frequency. Jesus tells a story of a man visiting his neighbor at an odd hour of the night to highlight the fact that this neighbor, later compared to our Father in heaven, is always available to hear and answer prayer.

We should Always be praying, along the lines of 1 Thessalonians 5.17: **pray without ceasing** and Ephesians 6.18: **praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit.**

We can access God at any and all times of the day because we are his temple and his Spirit dwells within us. We don't have to wait to go to a specific building, or be enchanted with specific music, or light a specific candle. A spirit-filled life will yearn moment-by-moment to commune with God in prayer.

E. Time-guides. 1 Thess 5.17; Ps 5.3, 55.17; Dan 6.10; Lk 6.12

Narrowing it a bit from this general lifestyle of prayer we do see specific time guides in the Bible. In Psalm 5 David prayed in the morning. In Psalm 55 and Daniel 6 David and Daniel, respectively, prayed three times a day: morning, noon, and night. On at least one occasion Jesus spent an entire night in prayer (Lk 6.12). The point here is frequency no matter the specific schedule.

F. Action of first, not only last, resort. Jer 23.23/Dt 4.7; Ps 50.15; Phil 4.6-7

One consequence of praying frequently and having it be a natural part of our day is that we don't use prayer like magic. God is not a genie in a bottle, accessible when things get really dire and serious.

A writer in the 19th century put it this way,

[As] long as we can fuss and work and rush about, so long as we can lend a hand, we have some hope; but if we have to fall back upon God... ah, then things must be critical indeed! --Arthur John Gossip

Too often we trust in our own abilities UNTIL we feel weak; or we trust in our own plans UNTIL they go awry. Instead of God being our fall back position to fix things once they are broken (or so they seem to us), He should be the beginning of our planning, the source of our comfort.

God is near (Jer 23.23) to his people (Dt 4.7), and we draw near to him through Christ our Lord (Heb 7.19).

Certainly we should turn to God when things get ugly. God promises to meet us there: Psalm 50.15, **Call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you and you shall glorify me.** Philippians 4.6-7, **By prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.**

Those are tremendous promises that give us great assurance. But why wait till life becomes an emergency. Might as well patch the roof before the next rainstorm and not wait till after the deluge to call the insurance agent.

G. Perseverance. Lk 18.1-7

A final aspect of When to pray involves perseverance. Our passage in Luke shows that the pestering supplicator gets what he wants. The well known parable of the Persistent Widow proves the same point. The judge

gives into her request because he doesn't want to get completely worn out by her. Jesus expressly said that he related this story in order **that men always ought to pray and not lose heart.** (Lk 18.1)

I ask you, and ask myself, are we pestering our Father in Heaven with God-honoring requests? Do we come back to him again and again, day in and day out, morning, noon, and evening begging for the good gifts, the justice, mercy, and righteousness he promises? If not, perhaps it is with good reason that he doesn't take our requests seriously. He can see that our hearts aren't in it.

Yahweh—v2b

Next, notice to whom we are to pray. In Athens Paul observed the sorry lot of people who prayed to every god they could think of, even the one whose name they didn't know. Today at public events we hear people praying to a nebulous god whose attributes are supposedly common to all religions. That is not the proper object of prayer as outlined in the Bible. We pray to a God whom we know, and whose name is clearly revealed—the LORD, YHWH. In the third clause of verse 2 it says, “Our Father in heaven...”

H. The Person of God. Jn 17

Jesus was the son of God (Mt 16.16-17; Jn 8.19) and he himself prayed to his father (Jn 17). This makes for an interesting play on the word “our”. We can say “Our Heavenly Father” because we are fellow Christians. We can also say it to include Jesus, since by virtue of our adoption he is our brother and we share the same Father; to whom we are instructed to pray.

There are other examples of praying directly to the Son, the Lord Jesus. (Acts 1.24, 8.24; 2Cor 12.7-9, etc.)

I. The NAME of God, LORD = YHWH (Yahweh)

1. Old Testament examples. Num 11.2; Judges 10.15; 1Sam 8.6; 2Sam 24.17, etc.

Over and over again in Scripture we read of people praying to the LORD. In the Old Testament Moses prayed to the LORD. (Num 11.2) The children of Israel prayed to the LORD. (Judges 10.15) Samuel prayed to the LORD. (1Sam 8.6). David (2Sam 24.17), Solomon (1Ki 8.22-53), Nehemiah (Neh 1.11), Jeremiah (Jer 17.14), Daniel (Dan 9.4), Jonah (Jonah 2.1) [and may others, of course] all prayed to the LORD—Yahweh.

2. Jesus is Yahweh. Mt 8.26b/Psalm 107, Mt 24.30-31/Ps 18.9-11, Mk 1.3/Isa 40.3, Jn 12.38/Isa 53.1, Jn 12.40/Isa 6.10, etc.

The fuller revelation of the New Testament shows us that the Father is Yahweh and the Son, Jesus, is Yahweh. Thus Paul can write to the Colossians that he gives a prayer to God the Father (Col 3.1) and then we see repeated applications of Old Testament Yahweh quotes and attributes to Jesus (Mt 8.26b/Psalm 107, Mt 24.30-31/Ps 18.9-11, Mk 1.3/Isa 40.3, Jn 12.38/Isa 53.1, Jn 12.40/Isa 6.10, etc.). Christ does and is things that only Yahweh can do and be. Further, it is no mistake that we are baptized into the NAME (singular) Yahweh, of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

I conclude then that whether we pray to God the Father, as was the example of Jesus and his instruction in this passage, or God the son, as in the example in several places in the New Testament, we are always praying to the LORD Yahweh, just as the saints of old have always done.

Everyone & Everything—vv11-13

Given that we are to pray in all types of venues, public and private; that we do it because we are told to and because we want to; that we do it frequently and persistently; and we do it to the one true and living God; What are we supposed to do all this praying about?

J. Friends & Enemies, Individuals & Groups. Eph 6.18-19; Mt 5.43-44; 1Tim 2.1-2

Our prayer list can and should be quite broad. Paul tells the church at Ephesus to make requests to God on behalf of *all* the saints (Eph 6.18). That may be all the saints in Ephesus or all the saints Paul knows, or all the saints in the whole world, we don't know for sure; but at least it is broader than our immediate family.

In the following verse of that Ephesian letter Paul asks them to pray for him, so we can heed this example and include church leaders and missionaries that labor in distant lands.

In Matthew 5 (v43) Jesus tells his listeners to pray for those who use and persecute you. So we are to pray for our enemies.

In the second chapter of Paul's first letter to Timothy (vv1-2) Paul says to offer prayers of supplication, thanksgiving, and intercession for all men, then he makes special note of people who are in authority. In his time the kings were not perfectly favorably disposed to Christianity so he is

telling them to pray for ungodly rulers. We have plenty opportunity to heed this instruction.

With this breadth of people to bring before the Lord in our prayers, we should not lack for material. But if you feel like you are always going through a laundry list try breaking it up somehow. Perhaps your morning prayer time will be devoted to international concerns: missionaries and foreign governments. Or perhaps Mondays will be for missionaries, Tuesdays for the totally lost, Wednesdays for the Worship Team, and Fridays for Friends and Family.

K. For God's glory. v2d

However we go about it, remember the over-riding concern is for God's glory. He will get done what he promises to get done and it is ok to ask him for that.

Should we pray for unsaved relatives / co-workers to be converted? Definitely; God desires that all men be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth (1Tim 2.4). Should we pray that our children walk more closely with the Lord? Certainly; God's will is that his children be sanctified (1Thess 4.3). Should we pray for our car to not break down, or, as the case may be, to be fixed? Surely; he gives all things (Rom 8.32)—including material things—more specifically all good things: bread not a stone, fish not a serpent, an egg not a scorpion (v11). Should we pray that rebels against God, whether individuals or nations, would be judged? Without a doubt; David often pleaded for God's name to be vindicated among those who blasphemed.

Note that we are not fighting for our glory, but for God's glory. Jesus told us to bless those who curse us and pray for (not against) those who spitefully use and persecute us. We pray for their souls, just as God has mercifully rescued our souls. We pray against their God-hating ways; not so that we may be proved right but that God's will would be done, his name would be exalted, that it would be hallowed.

Respectfully—v2c

L. Who is He?

The Lord's Prayer, in our section spelled out in vv 2-4, says we should address him with honor: to hallow his name. At one of my recent Hebrew classes we were reviewing vocabulary and the word "ab" came up, which means father. I recalled in the New Testament Jesus says, "abba,

father.” I asked the teacher about “abbuh” and he explained the “uh” at the end is how Aramaic adds the article “the”. So *abba* means “The Father”. Another student quickly commented, “or Daddy, right?” The look on our instructors face was one of calm bewilderment with a hint of irritation. He very nicely said, “No, not exactly. Ask me about that later.” I could tell he believed we should not casually toss around Gods name and casually call him Daddy. God is the ruler of the universe. Yes, we are his children, but that does not entitle us to use a casual modern American nickname to address him.

M. Who are we?

Thus, keeping in mind who God is, as we are addressing him in prayer we must remember two things about ourselves.

1. Forgiven. Eph 3.12; Heb 4.16; 2Cor 5.17

First, we are forgiven. As I have alluded to several times already, by virtue of our justification and our adoption we have a profoundly elevated status in God’s eyes. This allows us to access him with boldness and confidence (Eph 4.12). We can come boldly to the throne of grace (Heb 4.16). This is an awe-inspiring reality! It cannot be over-emphasized enough that In Christ we are a whole new creation, the old has passed away and all things have become new (2Cor 5.17). If we deny or undermine this fact and engage in self-flagellation we are denying the power of the cross, and if we deny its power we have no other hope.

It’s like your father gave you a refurbished car and you go around telling people in an aw-shucks kinda way that you’re driving a beater. Your father would say, “Wait a minute! That thing has a new engine. The tires have been replaced and hey, it just got the wheels aligned. The body has some dents but the ding-repair shop is working on it bit by bit. The transmission is a bit clunky but a new one is on order—be patient.” Right?

When speaking of our position before God we must be wary of false humility and understating the gift of grace we have received. False humility thinks we are better than we are, and understating the situation minimizes how great we are. Truth be told we WERE totally beat up, a complete wreck. BUT now we are cleaned up on the inside and progress is being made on a day-to-day basis. To make the first error (false humility) is to say God’s grace wasn’t really necessary and that is a huge insult to God (in addition it is heresy). To make the second mistake (underestimating grace) is to tell a lie about the greatness of Christ who stands in our stead and the

power of the Holy Spirit who sanctifies us. Those are places we should fear to tread.

So in our prayers we need to see ourselves how God sees us once Christ's blood has washed us clean.

2. Continually repentant. Prov 3.41; Peter 3.7; Eph 4.27; 1Jn 1.9

Yet we cannot presume upon his grace. Scripture says that a saint's relationship with God, and his vulnerability to the Devil, is affected by unconfessed sin. To restore the relationship with God and resist the Devil we must be continually repentant. If we are prideful and lack humility Scripture says God resists us (Prov 3.4). If we are sinfully angry Scripture says Satan has a foothold (Eph 4.27). If a husband is not honoring his wife Scripture says his prayers will be hindered (1Pt 3.7).

We can be confident that we can find mercy and that he is faithful to forgive our sins (1Jn 1.9).

So, when we address God in prayer we need to keep in mind who we were (in the past), who we are (because of his grace), and who we would become if we are lax and fall away. That will give us proper perspective to have proper joy and proper gratitude.

This perspective will prevent us from being overly morose in our prayers of confession, cause us to be openly exuberant in our prayers of adoration and thanksgiving, and allow us to be openly honest in our prayers of supplication.

Conclusion—v13b

The final part of our passage in Luke pulls everything together quite well. v13: **How much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him.**

The Holy Spirit is the center of all of this. It is the Spirit that checks our pride, strengthens our voice, wakes us from slumber in order to pray in a variety of settings. It is the Spirit who works in us the desire to obey Scripture's command to pray and seals us in right relationship to God, giving us a standing from which to pray rightly. It is the Spirit who makes us yearn to pray always, without ceasing. It is the Spirit that lifts our prayers to the true God and intercedes for us when we don't know what to pray (Rom 8.26). It is the Spirit who gives us proper awe for who God is and proper perspective for who we are.

Our text says the Spirit is available for the asking. What more could we want and need, He is the beginning and the end with everything included in-between.



P.R.A.Y.E.R.

Luke 11.1-13

By Mike Elliott at DCC on October 26, 2008

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- B. Challenges of Setting
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 - 2. Laziness. Lk 22.46

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- C. Commanded as an act of obedience. Phil 4.6, Lk 22.26
- D. Assumed as a result of our restored relation to God. Rom 8.12-17, Eph 3.12

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Yahweh—v2b

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