

# Understanding Prayer

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Preacher: Samir Massouh

[0:00] Good morning to all of you. One of the most important things that we individuals, individually and collectively as a church do, one of the things that the Lord has taught us to do is to pray.

So because we want, as elders and spiritual leaders of this church, because we want us all individually to become better prayer warriors, and because we want the church as a whole to become a better praying church, we're going to spend the next several weeks looking at the subject of prayer from here, from the pulpit.

And so this is where we're going to be heading in the next five, six, seven weeks. I thought I would begin this week with what is probably the greatest prayer in all of the Bible, the prayer that the Lord Jesus taught us, what we call the Lord's Prayer.

And you are familiar with the version in Matthew, but we're going to look again at the version in Luke. So please take out and look at the back.

I wrote a fairly detailed outline to make sure that none of you get lost. And if you want to fill in the spaces, that's fine too.

[1:31] If you want to fill them in Arabic, you need me to tutor you a little bit before you can do that. Or Greek for that matter. So we're going to start with verse five.

But before we get to verse five, I want you to see what the quick context is. So chapter 11 in Luke, verse one. One day, Jesus was praying in a certain place.

When he finished, one of his disciples said to him, Lord, teach us to pray, just as John the Baptist taught his disciples. He said to them, when you pray, say.

So Jesus sets an example. The disciples want to follow his example. And he teaches them to pray. That's the background to what we're looking at.

What we're going to be looking at are two parables in relationship to prayer. Two parables that are designed to help us understand prayer.

[2:36] The first parable is about friends. The other parable, the next parable, is about teachers. I mean, parents. So let's start with the first parable, verses five through eight.

In verse five. Then he said to them, suppose. I got to tell you, that's a long, complicated Greek sentence.

You know, when you're reading it and you're trying to subordinate clauses, it's like doing the maze. And you don't know where you're going to come out. It's a complicated Greek sentence.

So what I'm going to do is to divide it into smaller parts so you can manage it. At the heart of this parable is the questions.

And so let me ask you. Do friends act like this? Okay, I need an answer. Do friends act like this? Well, you ask me, act like what?

[3:41] You know, what kind of behavior about friends are you asking me about? And Jesus says, do friends act like this? And then he describes how friends act or don't act.

So to modernize the parable, to help you understand it, I'll update it and say there are three friends. Daniel, myself, and Mike. And the least of those is naturally myself. So Daniel is traveling. And he's been traveling all day long.

And he hasn't had a chance to eat anywhere. And he arrives at my town. And it's almost midnight. All the hotels are closed. All the restaurants are closed.

You know, all the public parks are closed. So he remembers that I live here. So he comes to my house and knocks at my door and says, Samir, can I stay in your house?

[4:45] And I say, of course, Daniel. You're my friend. Of course. You know, come in. Stay in my house. I'll take care of you. I know he hasn't eaten all day. So I go to the cupboard to fix him a meal.

And I find out that I don't have any food at all. I haven't gone shopping anytime soon. The cupboard is completely empty. And I can't fix him a meal.

So what am I going to do? I can't let my friend go to bed starving and tired. I need to take care of him. So I think, well, I got to get food from somewhere.

But I can't go to the stores because the stores are closed. So where am I going to go? I remember that Mike and I are friends. So I go to Mike's house.

It's midnight. And I'm knocking very hard on the door. And I keep saying, come on, Mike. Wake up. Open. Open. Come.

[5:47] And Mike, from the inside, says to me, you're making too much noise. You're going to wake up the whole kids. All the kids. You're going to wake up the whole neighborhood.

You know, go back home. Leave us alone. Well, I happen to be rude. So I keep knocking at the door. And then Mike eventually decides to get up.

And this is the really important point. So let's take a look at the text and find out what is Mike going to give me and why is he going to give me.

So let's do the simple one first. What is Mike going to give me? Verse 8. Look at verse 8 carefully. I tell you, even though he will not get up and give him the bread because of his friendship or because he is his friend, yet because of the man's boldness, he will get up and give him.

[6:53] Listen to the last part of that verse. He will get up and give him as much as he... What's your word there?

As much as he needs. I really would like it to be as much as he wants. But he isn't going to give me what I want.

He's going to give me what I need. You know what I need? I need a car to get me from Kenosha to my job at Trinity.

That's what I need. You know what I want? Lamborghini. I may be wrong.

I saw the movie Back to the Future, and it was love at first sight. And if I can't afford a Lamborghini, I want a Jaguar.

[7:58] What Jaguar is for cheap people? Rolls Royce. Facil Vega. Porsche.

That's what I want. But God doesn't give me what I want. God gives me what I need.

The problem between me and God is that we don't always agree on whether it's I want or whether it's I need. I think what I need is essential.

He thinks it's want. And so he trims it and simplifies it. And I want to buy a, you know, \$5,000 stereo equipment.

And he says, go to Goodwill. There is one sitting there for \$25. God will give us what we need.

[9:04] God does not commit himself to give us what we want. I did a simple experiment this weekend.

Yesterday, I was visiting my granddaughter, who is five years old, and whose birthday is next week. So as a grandfather, I should have known better.

I did something very stupid. I said, Grandpa loves you a lot. Your birthday is coming. What do you want? And then I said, honey, I'm not Rockefeller.

You know, can we reduce the list? You know, just one under \$2. God will give us what we need, not what we want.

But why will God give us what we need? Look at that verse. Verse 8. I tell you, though he will not get up and give him the bread because he is his friend.

[10:11] So he's not motivated by friendship. He's motivated by something else. Yet because of the man's, and then there is a word. That word is very difficult to translate in Greek.

Very difficult. There are approximately 3,960 words in the New Testament. They're used 138,000 times.

There are 138,000 words in the New Testament, you know, based on these 4,000 words. Do you know how many times this word appears in the New Testament? Once.

Only once is it used in the New Testament. Just once. The word God is used 1,300 times.

The word Lord is used 800 times. The word wisdom is used 52 times.

[11:23] This word is only used once. Because it's only used once, it's very hard to know what it means.

So if you look at the English translations that came out right after World War II, in the end of the 40s and 50s and early 60s, almost all the translators said, well, what is happening here is that I am standing outside and I am knocking at the door, and so Mike will give me food because I am persistent.

I don't get discouraged quickly. I don't give up right away. I keep knocking. I stick with it. And so most older English translations translated because of his persistence.

persistence. I hate to tell you, it is not persistence. So even though translators thought it meant persistence, it's not.

Since then, a lot of work has been done. And if you want to find out what words mean, you don't, you know, here I am shooting down my own colleagues.

[12:42] You don't ask some PhD who has a PhD in biblical studies or in New Testament geography or in theology or in church history.

You know who you need to ask? You need to ask people whose expertise are English. I'm sorry. Well, English too. But also Greek or Hebrew.

You want people who are expert and specialist in classics. In case you're wondering where my training was, since I have multiple personalities, I decided to train in two areas.

I'm a biblical theologian, but I'm also an expert in languages. And so what you need is you go to someone whose specialty is languages and you say, tell me, did Pythagoras ever use this word? How about Aristotle? How about Plato? And so there has been a lot of shame, a lot of work done on this word. My mentor, my teacher, a very, very dear friend at Trinity by the name of Walt Leifeld was a language expert rather than just New Testament theology expert or New Testament history or New Testament customs.

[14:05] I remember I was speaking on this passage 25 years ago at Trinity. And I went to him and I said, what do you think this word means?

And he said, shame. And I said, nobody agrees with you. He says, give them time. And guess what? All the modern translations realize that the correct translation is shame.

Shame. Not persistence, but shame. So what does that mean? That even though he will not get up out of friendship, yet because of the man's shame, he will get up and give him as much as he needs.

What does that mean? It can be interpreted in two ways. And if you look at the ESV, it translates it one way, and if you look at the NIV, it takes it the other way. But it's the same word.

It's the word shame. What it means is that what Mike is saying, I'm going to get up, not because he is persisting, not because I'm persisting.

[15:17] Mike is going to get up because my behavior is shameful. I am being thoughtless. I am being inconsiderate. All I think about is, you know, I need to get food.

I don't care whether his children get up or not. I don't care whether the neighborhood gets up or not. I don't care if I'm inconvenient anybody or not. All I'm interested is in what I need.

And so I am being selfish, inconsiderate. So it may be like saying, God, you know, Mike wants to shut me up.

So because of my shameful behavior that will not quit, I am persisting in shameful behavior. So he will get up and give me food just to shut me up and send me away.

That is one way of looking at shame. The other way of looking at shame is to think about it this way. If he doesn't give me food, I am humiliated.

[16:26] I am disgraced. I myself am put to shame. Daniel will say, I came to Samir and he didn't bother to give me anything.

So some translations translated, in order not to damage one's good reputation.

So you can use shame negatively or shame positively. In either case, the question is, if we have a need, does God just ignore us?

God will get up. He will get up for some reason. He will give us. Maybe because we are persistent. Maybe because he doesn't want us to be disgraced in public. Maybe he wants to give us because we, what we're doing is shameful and he needs to put an end to it.

[17:30] But God will get up and give us. And the point of Jesus is, if God will not allow us to be shamed in public, if friends will not allow us to be shamed in public, will God allow us to be shamed in public?

Who is a better friend? Daniel, Mike, or the Lord himself? Who is a better friend? If you compare us, at us, we are sinners.

We have bad temper. We have bad days. We're grouchy. But God is wonderful.

And if bad friends know how to be good, how much more is a wonderful, perfect, fantastic, great God?

How much better he is at being good than we are. So, he is asked the question, do friends act like this? And the answer is no.

[18:37] Even evil friends don't disgrace their friends in public and bring shame on them. How much more so? And then, he asks another question, do fathers act like this?

Look at verse 11. The same question that you saw in verse 5 is being asked in verse 11. Which of you fathers, if your son asks you for a fish, will you give him a snake instead?

Or if you ask for an egg, will he give him a scorpion? If you then, even though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more so your heavenly father?

Do friends shame other friends in public? No. Do parents poison their children? Do I have to worry that my daughter is going to poison the cake that my granddaughter is going to have for her birthday?

No. No. Not at all. If you take your kids to a restaurant, do you say to the cook, here's an extra dosage of arsenic, please put it, you know.

[19:53] No, we don't do these things. If fathers know how to take care of their kids, and if friends know how to take care of their kids, how much more so is our heavenly father?

It's a contrast between our limited goodness and his fantastic, incredible goodness and perfection. God is not like, God is not like a bad friend.

God is not like a bad father. God is a lot better than that. So, if we can count on our friends to come and help us, and if we can count on our parents to come and help us, how much more so can we count on God to help us?

So, it's a passage about have confidence in God when you knock, when you seek. However, let's look at verse 11, and there's a problem.

Let me summarize to you what we've done so far. We have looked at the Lord's Prayer very briefly. We've looked at the first parable, and looked at the second parable. The Lord's Prayer has our father, so there is a father in the Lord's Prayer.

[21:13] In the parable about the friends, there is the father who's inside, who doesn't want to get up because he'll wake up the kid. And in the question about fathers, there is a question about fathers.

So, there is father, father, father, father. There is asking, asking, asking. There is also food.

Give us this day our daily bread. Give us today our sufficient bread. bread is another theme that appears in all these.

Food. So, I conclude that this parable is telling me when you need food, ask God, and God will provide for you, like feeding the 5,000.

I think that's what's going on until I read verse 11 and following.

[22:12] It throws me off. which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, the father will give him a snake instead. Or if he asks for an egg, he will give him a scorpion.

If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more so will your father in heaven give?

I would have thought the word there should be food. Or good gifts. But it is not. How many of you, how many of you would do that?

If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask of him?

Holy Spirit? Who said anything about the Holy Spirit so far? The Holy Spirit hasn't even been mentioned. Where did the Holy Spirit come from into this discussion?

[23:13] We're talking about food. I pray, give us today our daily bread. I am knocking at Mike's door saying, give me food so I can give it to Daniel.

And the children are asking their fathers for food. They're not asking for the Holy Spirit. How did that come? Let me show you how inappropriate that sentence is. And then we'll try to fix it.

Suppose, suppose I have two brand new students who want to start at Trinity. They're incoming freshmen. And they're thinking, do I major in music or do I major in biblical study?

So I tell them all the good reasons to major in biblical studies. Brilliant professor like me. They get automatically an A if they play soccer or if they play violin.

Easy exams. Easy to bribe. You know. And then there is this other professor. And it's hard. It's like a foreign language.

[24:19] Who can figure out harmony and counterpoint and all of these big words. So I say to him, you really ought to major in big biblical studies. Let me summarize to you what I've just said to you.

If you have to choose between biblical studies and music, eat cucumbers. What on earth does cucumbers have to do with biblical studies?

And the answer is nothing. So, what does the Holy Spirit have to do with what we're looking at in this passage? Nothing.

So what does that mean for Jesus to bring up the subject of the Holy Spirit? Well, the answer is we stopped halfway through the passage. We're not finished yet.

So we shouldn't stop in the middle. We should keep going and see what happens. So let's keep going. And we're going to go skip, you know, the discussion about Beelzebub casting out demons.

[25:31] There is a battle going on between Jesus and Satan. And Jesus has won. And so Satan has been defeated and Jesus can plunder him.

To the victor belongs the spoils. And in this discussion, look at Luke chapter 11. Look at verse 20. Look at verse 20 carefully. If I drive out demons by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.

If there is a battle between good and evil, light and darkness, the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan, and Jesus is winning, that means the kingdom of God has come upon us.

So it turns out that Jesus is interested in the kingdom of God. If I, by the finger of God, cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.

[26:35] Okay? Go back to the Lord's Prayer. Is there any mention of the kingdom of God in the Lord's Prayer? Father, hallowed be thy name, your kingdom come.

The passage begins with your kingdom come and ends with the kingdom has come. And it is coming through the victory of Jesus.

So we're not talking about bread. We're talking about something a lot more important than bread, namely the coming of the kingdom of God. That is what's really at stake. So I'm excited here.

I'm on the side of Jesus. Jesus is winning. They're losing. I want to celebrate victory. So I say, okay, Lord, I want to bring about this kingdom. I want to be involved in bringing out this kingdom.

There are two people who are standing in front of us who are interested in going to a certain place to bring about the kingdom of God. We are interested in bringing about the kingdom of God in Kenosha.

[27:38] So how do I do it? How do I bring about the kingdom of God? Look at verse 20 again. Verse 20.

If I drive out demons by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. If I drive out demons by the finger of God, what does the finger of God mean?

Well, believe it or not, that is an expression from the book of Exodus. As Moses was producing these plagues, the magicians tried to duplicate it.

They failed, and they said, this is by the finger of God. But let's also take a look at Matthew 11, 28. Matthew 11, 28 is the counterpart passage to Luke 11.

Jesus says in Matthew 11, 28, if I, 12, 28, if I cast out demons by what? The Holy Spirit.

[28:56] The finger of God is another expression for the Holy Spirit. So how do I bring about, how do I participate in the coming of the kingdom of God?

Through the power of the Holy Spirit. Do you see it in Matthew 11, 28, the Holy Spirit? You should... I'm sorry, 12, 28.

12, 28, I'm sorry. 12, 28. If I, by the finger of God, cast out demons, then... If I, by the Holy Spirit, cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. 12, 28.

So how do I do it? By the power of the Holy Spirit. Go back to Luke. If we, evil parents, know how to give good gifts, how much more will the Lord give us what?

The Holy Spirit. Why does he want to give us the Holy Spirit? Because we are involved in bringing about the kingdom of God.

[30:06] So what is this passage saying? Number one, be confident. God is a better friend. God is better parent than anybody you've ever experienced.

You can count on God. God is winning. And secondly, God is winning. And God wants us to participate in bringing this victory and in celebrating his winning.

So it is a prayer designed to encourage us to pray. It's a prayer encouraging us to put our confidence in God and ask ourselves and ask ourselves, how, Lord, can we bring about the kingdom of God that you are involved in?

It may have something to do with food, but it is about the kingdom of God. So we started to look at prayer and the next weeks we will look at more on the subject of prayer.

Let's have a word of prayer. Lord, Father, thank you for giving us the assurance that you're a good father and that you're a good friend, that you will not disgrace us in public, that you will not shame us in public, and that you will and has and will continue to completely wipe out your enemies.

[31:40] help us to be godly men and women in this church. Help us as a church to be a godly church known for our prayers and devotion to you.

We ask it, Father, in Jesus' wonderful name. Amen.