

Prayer and the Fatherhood of God

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Date: 09 June 2024

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[0 : 0 0] the 12 disciples of Jesus like us must start somewhere and what better place is there to start by asking Lord teach us to pray to pray is a an inbuilt human instinct but we do need God's help to learn how to pray aright on the surface of things Luke 11 verses 1 through 13 is about Jesus teaching us to pray but there's a deeper lesson he wants to teach us here prayer is pointless unless we understand to whom it is we are to pray everyone prays the Christian prays the atheist prays the Muslim prays it's the relationship beneath our prayers which defines us as Christians prayer is more about how we think about God than the precise words we use when we pray it's that relationship with God Jesus is describing in these verses you will notice that Jesus teaching in our passage begins in verse 2 with the word father and it ends in verse 13 with heavenly father so our passage is bracketed with Jesus teaching on the fatherhood of God in the context of prayer Jesus knows it's good to ask Lord teach us to pray but it's even better to ask Lord show us to whom we pray and Jesus answers that better question saying the one to whom you pray is your father if disciples of Jesus don't grasp

Jesus teaching here they'll never get past first base in the Christian life but grasp it these disciples do and as we move from Luke into Acts we find the early church gathering every day to pray praying to God as father becomes basic to the growth of the early church a former minister of mine Alec McDonald in Aberdeen used to start all his prayers with the words our loving heavenly father more than just prayer starting and basing our Christian lives on God as our loving heavenly father is the secret of health and growth in our spiritual lives well in our passage Jesus defines our relationship with God as father in prayer in four ways the shape of the fatherhood of God in prayer verses 1 through 4 the supremacy of the fatherhood of God in verses 5 through 8 the simplicity of the fatherhood of God in prayer verses 9 and 10 and the superiority of the fatherhood of God in prayer verses 11 through 13 one thing before we get into the meat of our passage notice from verse 1 the occasion of Jesus teaching on prayer we read now Jesus was praying in a certain place and the disciples having watched him pray are now asking

Lord teach us to pray like you do and Jesus explains to them that his whole life especially his prayers is based on his experience of God as father and he's teaching them therefore to pattern their prayers upon his prayers the prayers that he had just finished making so if as Christians we want to be like Jesus then we can at least model ourselves on his prayers first of all then we have the shape of God's fatherhood in prayer from verses 1 through 4 the shape of God's fatherhood in prayer Jesus answers the disciples by giving them a variation of the prayer he had given them earlier in his ministry in Matthew 6 remember the Sermon on the Mount Jesus had taught them to pray saying our father who is in heaven hallowed be thy name thy kingdom come and so on and now later in his ministry he's reminding them of that prayer like any good teacher

Jesus knows that to get his message across he needs to say the same thing many times and in many different ways Jesus begins with the word father here's the first relationship we enjoy with God as disciples of Jesus not king not judge not lord but father every child has a way of speaking to his or her father which is different from how he or she would speak to a king judge or lord so this is a family prayer where we learn how in the context of our relationship with God we are to speak to him as father having God as our father doesn't lessen our respect for him if anything it heightens our worship of him loving him like we do we want others to love him to adore him and to worship him that's why Jesus teaches us to pray hallowed be your name may your name be glorified and worshipped that's why

Jesus teaches us to pray your kingdom come because we want others to know what it's like to live under our heavenly father's gracious lordship these are mission shaped prayers focused on the world knowing God our father as he really is in the splendor of his grace and the supremacy of his

majesty just as children depend on their fathers so Jesus teaches us how we are to pray for our own concerns he teaches us to pray saying give us each day our daily bread it's written into a parent's job description to provide for their children and we pray that our father in heaven would provide all we need we pray that our father in heaven would forgive us for the sins we commit against him even as we forgive those who are indebted to us because we want nothing to get in the way of our relationship to God we want to enjoy our father's smile we want to experience the love of his heart like loving children we know that we need our father's guidance and help so we pray lead us not into temptation it's common for children to think that they know better than their parents but in reality 99 times out of 100 our parents know better than us with God it's 101 times out of 100 we trust him not to lead us into danger we trust him and so we pray to him so there's so much more that we could ask in prayer than these few specific requests but the basics are all here

[7 : 23] God's concerns first our concerns second what is for his glory first what is for our good second but underneath it all it is to know that we are praying to our father not to him as king judge or lord although he is all these things but to our father in Luke chapter 10 in verse 21 we looked at this a couple of weeks ago we hear Jesus in prayer and how does he address God he calls him father lord of heaven and earth and in our passage Jesus calls us to relate to God as father and the question for us is this how would it change our whole attitude to prayer if we thought of God as our loving heavenly father in Christ how would it change the confidence with which we pray the things for which we pray how would it change the shape of our prayers the shape of God's fatherhood in prayer well secondly we have the supremacy of God's fatherhood in prayer the supremacy of God's fatherhood in prayer as human beings we all had parents we all have friends and acquaintances among friends that are some who are closer than others of course social media is complicated and messed this up according to Facebook which I never use

I have nearly 500 friends but how many of those are real friends to whom I can turn for help in bad times now on the surface of things verses 5 through 8 seem to be about persistence in prayer I've got a man who goes to his friend at midnight asking him for free loaves how would you feel if someone knocked on your door at midnight asking for food not just for themselves but for someone who just decided to turn up at their house well the man finally gives his loaves to his friend but as Jesus says not because he's his friend but because of the man's impudence his shamelessness his rudeness imaginess now this passage might seem to be about persistence in prayer but in the last analysis it's got nothing to do with how often we pray or how shameless we are in prayer rather it's all about the supremacy of God's fatherhood in prayer when that man went to his friend at midnight the friend was reluctant to get out of bed and give him three loaves it wasn't ultimately his friendship which motivated him to give him what he wanted rather it's because he wanted to get his friend off his back to stop his impudent friend from knocking at his door so he could get back to bed is that the way it is with God when we pray when we go asking for our daily bread from God shaking his head in heaven saying to himself not her again just to get her off my back

I'll give her what she needs is God the friend in the story Jesus has just told grudgingly answering our prayers is he saying well I know I made all these promises to my people I better keep them just to show that I'm God and to stop this infernal noise of their prayers in my ears not at all the point Jesus is making in this story isn't about persistence in prayer rather he is showing how much more committed and passionate God is to answer our prayers than that man was to answer his friend's request God doesn't answer our prayers because of our persistence impudence or shamelessness but because he loves us far more than our friends love us why?

because he's our father this is a passage about the supremacy of God's fatherhood in prayer how much deeper how much more loving how much more certain is the love of God the father for us than even that of the closest of friends the basic relationship we enjoy with God isn't that one friend to another but of a child toward his or her father and so again we say how would it change the confidence with which we pray and the things for which we pray if we really believe this we wouldn't approach him in prayer with trepidation not sure whether we're taking advantage of him or whether he'd be willing to answer us we go asking him for three loaves of bread at midnight and he doesn't answer us because of our impudence but because he loves us like that poor man beaten up and left for dead in the parable of the good Samaritan we looked at last time if that poor man's father had walked past him would he not have done even more for him than the good Samaritan did when we've been beaten up by our circumstances when we're grieving and lonely and hurting and depressed do we honestly think our heavenly father will walk by dispassionately on the other side

our closest friends might but he never will rather he'll hear our cries he'll patiently tend to our wounds and he'll lovingly bind up our broken hearts this is the supremacy of our father in prayer Jesus is urging us to reverent confidence and boldness not because God's our king although he is but because he's our father third the simplicity verses 9 through 10 of God's fatherhood in prayer the simplicity of it for many people prayer is a complicated thing but for Jesus it was simple child relating to his father and in these verses Jesus speaks of it in three ways asking seeking knocking I mean can it get any simpler than that any fool can make something sound complicated making something complicated is a sign that the speaker hasn't really mastered his subject but Jesus shows both his genius and mastery of the subject in prayer in that he presents it in such simple ways ask seek knocking things we do every day we ask we seek we knock a day never goes by when I don't ask someone to help me do something it might be something as simple as could you pass me the salt or it might be something more complicated like could you help me understand this passage of the bible all of us asks

[14:14] Jesus says prayer is the simple act of asking our heavenly father again a day never goes by when I'm not looking for something it might be a file on my computer it might be an odd sock I can't find it might be the meaning of a word but I'm seeking and looking for understanding it's something we all do in the same way prayer is the simple act of seeking from our heavenly father and again very few days go by when I don't knock might be knocking at someone's door I'm visiting it's something we all do and in the same way Jesus says that prayer is the simple act of knocking at our heavenly father's door from the previous story of the man who went looking for three loaves when he went to his friends for help he went seeking three loaves and he knocked at his friend's door and these are pictures of what we do when we pray we ask God for forgiveness we receive forgiveness we seek new strength from God to cope with the difficult situations we face and we find that new strength in him we knock on his door asking for a closer relationship with him and he welcomes us but the point

Jesus is making is that prayer is not the complicated thing that we're making it out to be when the Pharisees and their colleagues prayed they used words which had been memorized from the set prayers of the rabbis they wore certain clothes when they prayed they adopted certain physical positions they went to certain places it was also complicated by contrast Jesus frees us from the complications of prayer and tells us that if God is your father prayer is simply asking seeking and knocking wonder how it would affect our prayers if we knew that we could pray with such simplicity such spontaneity our father doesn't need us to wait for a special time to hear us he's not waiting for us to memorize certain words rather with the simplicity of a child we ask and we seek and we knock the simplicity of God's fatherhood in prayer and then finally from verse 11 through 13 the superiority of God's fatherhood in prayer the superiority now we know that at least some of the disciples were married men which means that some of them may have had children

Jesus seems to imply this when in verse 11 he asks what father among you you don't have to be a father to get Jesus point in these verses but if you are you'll understand this even better so starving child comes to his father asking for fish he's hungry there's no better food to give him than a fish besides which most of the disciples were fishermen later on he comes again and asks his father for an egg can you imagine any kind of scenario where if your hungry child came asking you for food you'd give him a snake or a scorpion the equivalent today would be if your child came asking you for milk and you gave him bleach instead we'd rather them have the fish and the egg and we go hungry we'd rather be hungry so they could be full every father can be selfish I'm no exception but not like this human love reaches out toward one's children to meet their needs when they come asking many fathers worked themselves into an early grave to provide their children with better opportunities than they had in life the love of parents for their children is one of the strongest forces in the world strong enough to die for

Jesus sets up here the nobility of human parenthood but in verse 13 he drops a bombshell if you then who are evil know how to give good gifts to your children how much more how much more will your heavenly father give the holy spirit to those who ask him the greatest and most selfless of human love for one's children is vastly inferior to the love of God the father for us vastly inferior the love of God for us is of an altogether greater order it's exponentially higher no calculator can contain its magnitude no space can contain its volume no mind can contain its wholeness the love of God for his children is vastly superior to the love of even the most noble of earthly fathers for his and the gifts he gives us through prayer are just so much better greater than anything our earthly fathers

could ever have given us for a start his gifts are always good even if at times it doesn't always appear that way to us the greatest gift he gives us in this verse is the Holy Spirit the Holy Spirit is described as one commentator as man's greatest good he gives us man's greatest good it's the Holy Spirit at work in us and through us who gives us strength in our weakness hope in our despair and joy in our sadness it's the Holy Spirit who established the early Christian church as he empowered the preaching of the apostles and tens of thousands became believers in Christ we might wish that God would give us earthly wealth and contentment but Jesus here reminds us that our greatest good isn't to be found in anything this world can give us but in the Holy Spirit and why is that it's because the Holy Spirit is the Father's presence with us it's the Holy Spirit at work in us who brings our heavenly Father close my father died 17 years ago some of you will remember the day one would think that by now I'd have moved on from his death but I'd still miss him

[20 : 36] I would give everything I had just to have my dad with me for one more hour to tell him all about how proud he'd be of his grandchildren to ask him for his advice you know just to lay my head upon his chest as I did when I was a wee boy lying in bed beside him feel so loved so safe the Holy Spirit is our heavenly father's presence with us and prayer is the intimacy of telling our heavenly father everything listening to him laying our heads upon his chest to feel loved and safe what is prayer one of the Scottish covenanters wrote what is prayer but a child babbling to his father child babbling to his father and that's the point of Jesus sermon in Luke 11

I want to close by making two comments first Jesus says all these things to his disciples to those who are already following him he gives his disciples confidence to base their lives upon the loving fatherhood of God God is their father through faith in Jesus Christ but he is not including in this passage those who have not yet become his disciples those who do not believe in him because for them God is not their father God is still their judge the only way in which God can become our father and we can pray to him in these terms is if we become disciples of Jesus the only way in which we can experience and enjoy the benefits of God's heavenly fatherhood is if we become followers of Jesus by faith in him second how do we know that God loves us with such passion and commitment how do we know that

God loves us more than our parents loved us or we love our children how do we know that he loves us more than we love our friends and they love us we know it because the heavenly father to whom we pray gave his one and only son his beloved son the very beat of his heart to the cruel death of the cross for us if ever we should doubt that God loves us with the intensity and infinity of a heavenly father and that therefore we can babble as children to him we look to the cross what a loving father gave his loving child for sinners like us if we ever want proof of the supremacy and superiority of God's love for us look at the cross of Calvary where the most loving of all sons was given up to death by the most loving of all fathers for sinners like us when we look at that cross we bow our knees in prayer with the words of the apostle

Paul Luke's mentor ringing in our ears he who did not spare his one and only son but gave him up for us all how will he not also with him graciously or freely give us all things Christian Jesus calls us today to base our lives and to base our confidence upon the loving fatherhood of God "... not