

Luke 11:5-13 - The Ultimately Good Father

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- [0 : 00] You are listening to a message from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama. Our passion is to experience and express grace. Join us.
- Come with me this morning to Luke chapter 11, Luke 11. This is our last week in our mini-series on prayer.
- As we've been looking at this passage where Jesus himself is praying and a disciple comes to Jesus and asks him to teach them to pray.
- And Jesus does that beginning with the Lord's Prayer. We've seen over the last few weeks what he teaches them in this special prayer that we use often.
- To pray, Father, that God adopts us into his family. Invites us into his presence. And then he shows us what our priorities are to be.
- [1 : 01] That his glory and his kingdom would be at the forefront of our minds. And in all of life, those would shape our hearts.
- And we would treasure them. And he says, ask for daily bread. Highlighting our relationship with God. One of constant, communal dependence upon God.
- Next, we saw that God forgives our sins and pays our debts so that we too can forgive others. And finally, that through prayer we battle against sin and Satan by turning to our strong Father.
- Leaning on that relationship. So if you've missed the last five weeks, now you're caught up. You got it all right there. But before Jesus stops this lesson on prayer, he has one more thing to say.
- He's going to emphasize one aspect of the Lord's prayer above all the others one more time. Let's read at verse 5 and see what that is. Luke 11 at verse 5.
- [2 : 09] This is God's holy word. And he, Jesus, said to them, Which of you who has a friend will go to him at midnight and say to him, Friend, lend me three loaves, for a friend of mine has arrived on a journey, and I have nothing to set before him.
- And he will answer from within, Do not bother me. The door is now shut and my children are with me in bed. I cannot get up and give you anything. I tell you, though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, yet because of his impudence, he will rise and give him whatever he needs.
- And I tell 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.
- What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will instead of a fish give him a serpent? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion?
- If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him?
- [3 : 24] This is God's word. Let's ask for his help as we study it together. Father, thank you for your word. Thank you that you teach us things that are not natural for us.

And so we pray again one more time during this season. Lord, teach us to pray. Not just what about it, but teach us how to pray.

Make us prayerful people. Teach us to pray that we might know you, and love you, and trust you more. We ask it in Jesus' name.

Amen. Phone helplines are one of my areas of expertise. Because of my lack of expertise on anything technological or mechanical, I can't fix anything.

I don't know how anything works. And so I call and ask for help a lot. And if you do that, you'll know that sometimes you call, and you find out that the person on the other end of the line just doesn't really understand your problem.

[4 : 37] That there's nothing they can do to fix it, perhaps. Or sometimes they actually can. They're quite capable and knowledgeable, but you don't understand them very well. And it's frustrating, and you think, I can't get the help that I need, and so you just eventually give up and awkwardly try to get off the phone as quickly as you can.

Other times, however, you get someone who is really helpful on the other end of the line. I called about a late fee on my cell phone bill a couple of years ago, and I got a guy and was talking to him, seeing if he could take care of the late fee, and that was all I wanted.

And while he is taking care of the late fee for me, he says, oh, and by the way, I see a way I can get you a better plan where you get more data and save \$10 a month. Would you like me to put you on that plan?

Yes, absolutely. Tell me why not. There's no reason. You should want it. And what happens then? Now all of a sudden I realize, oh, someone is for me.

I have an advocate. I'm not in a hurry to get off the phone. What are all my other questions about my cell phone account that I've always wanted to have answered because I've found someone who can really help, right?

[5 : 50] I want to stay and talk to him and see how else he might be able to help me. The character, the helpfulness of the person we're talking to makes all the difference, doesn't it?

The same is true with prayer. And that's what Jesus wants us to remember one more time before we leave the subject of prayer, at least in sermons.

Who is it that we're praying to? This is, remember, the most shocking part of Jesus' whole model prayer that we are praying to our Father.

It's what drives all the petitions he tells us to pray, the things he tells us to ask for. It's the fact that we're actually talking to our Father, a Father who is infinitely good beyond anyone we know or can imagine and delights to help us.

That's the essence of these verses that follow the Lord's Prayer. They focus on the identity and character of the one hearing our prayers.

[7 : 04] Nothing else could motivate us to pray more than that. I think Jesus is going to talk about it again because we have such a hard time practically believing it that we pray to our Father and that he's infinitely good and loves to help.

What Jesus does is he tells two brief parables, two somewhat hypothetical stories to emphasize God's infinitely good character.

The first one is a bit complex because the rhetorical question is so long. It starts in verse five. Jesus says, Which of you who has a friend will go to him at midnight and say to him, Friend, lend me three loaves for a friend of mine has arrived on a journey and I have nothing to set before him.

Now this is only the first part of the question. He's not finished with the question yet. But what you need to understand that this might not seem too dramatic to you in Jesus' culture, this is a crisis.

It is a hospitality crisis, a culture crisis at the level of wearing seersucker after Labor Day. Showing up at a tailgate party and there's no food.

[8 : 23] Like that's the, there's something really wrong here. Something needs to be addressed. That's what's happening in this culture. Of course you would go if you didn't have food to a friend nearby to help you.

What Jesus is saying is actually the end of the question. Let's finish it. Which of you has someone that the situation will be that he'll answer from within, Don't bother me.

The door's shut and my children are with me in bed. I can't get up and give you anything. Nothing. The answer to that question is none of us.

No one has a situation like that. Because, though he will not get up and give him anything because he's his friend, because of his impudence, he will rise and give him whatever he needs.

That's the answer to Jesus' rhetorical question. No. This would never happen. Nobody would ever sit and not answer the door. Not just because you're such a good friend and everyone always helps you out, but because it would be disgraceful for your neighbor to decline to help you.

[9 : 34] His shame in the neighborhood, in the town, would be even greater than yours for not having food that he had and did not help you. That word translated impudence here in the last line.

It's a difficult word to translate it. It means shamelessness because you haven't used impudence recently, right? It means shamelessness or wanting to avoid disgrace or dishonor.

Trying to protect one's honor. And while it's true of the one looking for help in this parable, I believe the emphasis is actually not on the impudence of the one looking for help, but rather on the desire to avoid dishonor and disgrace of the one who's asleep in bed being asked for help.

He will do it to protect his honor. Of course all your neighbors would help, Jesus is saying. That reading fits with the point of the easier to understand parable at the end.

Verse 11. Jesus says, What father among you if his son asks for a fish instead of a fish give him a serpent? Or if he asks for an egg will give him a scorpion?

[10 : 54] Or birthday cake would give him broccoli? He would have included that. Ran out of room. If you then who are evil know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him?

One of the reasons this one's easy to understand is Jesus tells us the point, right? If you then who are evil, you evil parents, sermon on total depravity saved for another day, if you give good gifts, how much more will your heavenly Father, your infinitely good, perfect heavenly Father give good gifts?

See, that's what he's saying in the first story too, right? If any of your neighbors would get up and help you, God would too. If they would defend their honor and help their neighbor in crisis, how much more would God defend his honor and help you in crisis?

The point Jesus is making is about God's character. God is good all the time. All the time. God is good. He's a loving Father who gives good help, who loves to answer prayer.

God is good, gracious, merciful, faithful, never failing, unchanging. His character is spoken of that way over and over in the Scriptures.

[12 : 22] And in particular, it's demonstrated as he answers the prayers of his people. The Bible doesn't just assert that God is this way, it shows him being this way to his people.

And I've just picked a few this morning, thinking back of God's answers to prayers of his people in the Bible. Think all the way back to Abraham who needs a ram in the thicket when his son Isaac is about to be sacrificed and God provides.

And Abraham prays that God would heal Abimelech and his household and God heals them. The people of God later are in Egypt and they cry out for deliverance and God answers their prayers and then later gives them water and manna in the wilderness for 40 years.

God answers the prayers of Moses. Many times it's to forgive this people and not wipe them off the face of the earth as they deserve. Samson, who's become a blind judge, prays for strength one more time that he might testify to God's glory and God answers.

The woman, Hannah, cries out praying before God over and over in the temple and God answers her prayer and gives her a child, Samuel.

[13 : 44] Elijah prays to God and in one situation a young boy is raised from the dead. In another, God pours down fire from heaven in response to Elijah's prayers and to show his greatness compared to the prophets of Baal.

You can think of Hezekiah and Jehoshaphat and other kings who pray for military deliverance and God provides. Daniel is a man of prayer and in response to his prayer God gives him interpretation of dreams.

He gives him visions of the future even to comfort him and assure him in great difficulty. In the New Testament the apostles in the early church pray and a child is raised from the dead again.

The members of the church gather and pray and apostles are released from prison miraculously delivered into their midst. The church is built up through the prayers of God's people over and over and over.

This is what our Father is like, right? We don't stop to think how he's shown himself to be this kind of God but he loves to give good gifts to his children. You've seen it personally in your life.

[15 : 03] We've seen it corporately as a church. When you think about this reality it's really remarkable either way you think about this either to think that our Father is infinitely good is amazing or to think that the one out of all people who is infinitely good is our Father.

It's equally remarkable. It's incredible but it's true. This is who God is. This is his great character over and over and how he acts toward us and so we pray.

That's to be the result. And so we pray tucked between these two stories highlighting the character of God is the intended result in our lives.

Jesus says because we pray to an infinitely good Father we must pray desperately persistently and expectantly. Look at verse 9.

I tell 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.

[16 : 24] This is praying, right? Asking, seeking, knocking in this context is prayer. There are three things at least we learn about how we must pray because of the one to whom we pray.

Because of who God is first we pray desperately. Ask, seek, and knock have a progression to them as though the one asking is getting needier and needier by the moment.

Like the host in the first story who's seeking where to find bread, begging, pleading, please help me, I'm in a crisis in dire need. That's who we are, right?

Desperately dependent upon God, helpless, apart from Him. We should pray like that because that's who we are. We should believe it's true because it is true.

We're helpless apart from Him. I was praying just this week and I said the word, Father, we really need You in this situation. And I just stopped and chuckled and said, Father, we really need You all the time.

[17 : 38] It's just right now we really are aware of how much we need You. We really need Him all the time, right, for every breath that we take.

Isn't that the truth? We always are crisis level needy for God, dependent on Him and because He's the good Father who provides, we must remember our need for Him.

Secondly, we must pray persistently. Ask, seek, and knock are present tense verbs with the idea that we would not just pray one time but that we would continue to pray repeatedly over and over, constantly.

Of course, we're told in the Bible to pray without ceasing and we all do that, right? You're always praying. People think you're talking to yourself sometimes. Now, what's going on there?

What is it? The implication of this is that God is good and will give the good gift but when or how He does that may be unclear.

[18 : 42] We don't just pray once and say that, did it? We are to keep praying. We could say we must pray and we must not quit praying and if we have stopped we must start praying again.

That's what Jesus means, ask, seek, and knock. The passage is clear that the one who's listening is infinitely good. So let that encourage us to pray and to keep praying even when it feels like and looks like He's not answering it.

Even when it feels your prayers are hitting the ceiling and bouncing back like no one cares, Jesus says He does. He will act. He does love you.

God we have to remember that the heart of prayer is not getting things we want. It's our relationship with God, right?

We've said this every week. It's praying without ceasing. Constantly talking to God, living dependent upon Him moment by moment. I'd suggest you think of it like that friend that you text throughout the day.

[19 : 54] You have a friend like that. You just text them several times through the course of the day, something pops in your head, you text it to them, you send them a question, you tell them what you're up to, you ask them for something that you need, can they help out with something, you just are naturally comfortable talking with them.

That's the kind of relationship that we are to have with God, praying without ceasing all the time. So how do you get there?

How do you develop that kind of relationship you have with your friend? My guess is that if you have a friend like that at some point in time, you spent meaningful time together, set aside some time and just got to know each other, right?

You sat down and were together regularly, got to know about each other and committed that time to that so that eventually you can flow naturally in and out of conversation without anxiety because you've got to know each other and you've connected.

That's how I'd encourage you to think about developing your prayer life. The goal is that moment by moment, comfortable, dependent relationship with God, with your Father, that you can tell Him about anything, talk to Him anytime about whatever is on your heart.

[21 : 16] So the goal is not setting aside five or 15 or even 60 minutes every morning to say I prayed and now I can check it off my list and get on with my day.

That's not the goal. But in my experience that's a good place to start. If you don't have that kind of relationship, if you feel like you don't know a father you could talk to like that, start by setting aside that time, even if it just be a little bit, to get to know Him.

If you don't feel like you have a daily relationship with God, a lifestyle of prayer, let me encourage you not to leave six weeks of sermons on prayer and just carry on like that.

Oh, I talk about a relationship with God but honestly I don't even know what that would mean. I'd encourage you not just to be satisfied and leave it there. Your father wants to hear from you.

I'd suggest just picking one small step. Perhaps set time aside to pray through the prayer guide each week. We send these out for that reason.

[22 : 24] They're here but you get it in email every Friday morning. There's a reminder to pray, right? Maybe commit to praying through this. Or you could join us at 830 on Sunday mornings to pray together if it helps you to have other people with you.

We love to pray with you. You can take this bulletin home. You didn't get an outline this morning, mostly because I was behind. But also, so I could give you this tool.

It's just some of the questions we've been talking about each week. There are five sections that we've talked to of the Lord's prayer. You could take that home and just five minutes each morning, Monday through Friday, take one of these and let these questions spark your prayers to your Father and just start getting to know Him and learning to talk with Him.

He's so good. He's so eager to give. How could we not be asking persistently? Finally, we must pray expectantly.

Look back at verse 10. For everyone who asks receives. The one who seeks finds. And to the one who knocks, it will be opened.

[23 : 37] No strings attached. No disclaimers. Just God answers prayers. Right? I don't want to soften the glory of that, lessen the goodness and the promise of that.

I'm not going to explain it away. Briefly, of course, it's not just name it and claim it theology. It's not, oh, that's cool.

God, I'd like a new car, a million dollars, and for my team to win the game. And it's going to happen. Just like that. That's not what it means. That's a transaction rather than a relationship.

That's God as the magic lamp whom you control as you wish. In context here of a relationship, this is the things we're asking for, seeking for, knocking for, being the things Jesus has told us to ask in the Lord's prayer, right?

We are dependent there, and God is the one in control, not the other way around. The problem with name it and claim it theology is it focuses on the one asking thing.

[24 : 47] If you don't get what you asked for, where's the problem? It's with you. You don't have enough faith. You haven't asked hard enough or long enough. This says the focus is on the one hearing the prayer, on the prayer hearing answering God.

God answers because of who He is as the infinitely good Father, so we pray expectantly. Remember how we talked with the kids earlier about even human parents?

We are far from infinitely good, but we do sometimes give them something even better than what they ask for. They may ask for another piece of birthday cake for the fifth time, and their father may know that there's actually something better for them.

I love the way John Calvin explains this about God's ultimate goodness. Even when it doesn't seem like He answers our prayers that He is still saying yes to these prayers. God grants our prayer He says even if He does not always respond to the exact form of our request.

It may not look exactly like what you expected but God answers and Tim Keller says it this way, God will either give us what we ask or give us what we would have asked if we knew everything He knew.

[26 : 07] If we were omniscient and perfectly good, this is what we would have been asking for. That's so helpful. I could only find one other guy who said it better.

I'm sorry, I just, I couldn't resist this slide. It's the Presbyterian trifecta where I'm standing in for C.S. Lewis. Our infinitely good Father answers prayers infinitely better than we ask them.

That's the heart of what's happening here because He's so good. We pray expectantly. Not hedging our bets. I need to grow so much in this area.

We're so conditioned to expect only what we can control or explain, aren't we? Never expect anything else. Just what we could reasonably be in control of or explain how it happened some other way.

And God says, no, that's not in here. Ask. I answer. The answer may not look good to you but you can trust me.

[27 : 15] So ask me and then trust me. I've got even better than you can imagine in store for you. In fact, one last look at verse 13.

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

The Holy Spirit? Is that the only thing you've ever asked for? You pray for the Holy Spirit? Why? God doesn't promise merely good gifts here as he does elsewhere but the Holy Spirit.

In Luke, we've seen the Holy Spirit a lot. When God says he will give the Holy Spirit, that means his presence with us. It means his promises we can trust and rely on, all of them.

And it means his very person, the one who is himself, the ultimate good. God always gives himself to those who ask.

[28 : 19] That's why prayer is about relationship. It's about getting God our Father himself. I can't think of anything more important to tell you about prayer.

And apparently Jesus doesn't either. He wants you to know you can have God himself when you ask. Sometimes instead of calling a helpline, I call a friend here in town while I'm working on a project under the sink.

And sometimes instead of just giving me advice on what to do next, he shows up at my front door, rings the doorbell, says, hand over the tools, let me handle this for you.

He shows up in my mess, wallowing under the sink, knee deep in water, and says, let me take care of this for you. That's a good friend, right?

Our Father is infinitely good. So God gives himself to us. It's the essence of this table, isn't it, that we come to this morning.

[29 : 28] That God gave himself to us. First in the person of his son who came in the flesh and laid down his life for us. And then God gives himself to us in his Holy Spirit to live in us and dwell with us.

us so that finally and forever God the Father gives himself to us in relationship forever where he is the lamp of the eternal city and we celebrate that relationship with him forever that we already experience now that we sit and stop with him.

We are in fellowship with him. At this table we celebrate that God always gives us himself. if God did not withhold his own son from us how will he not graciously along with him give us all things as we pray desperately persistently and expectantly to our infinitely good Father.

Take a moment consider the goodness of our Father as we prepare to come to this family dinner to his table. Paul writes I receive from the Lord what I also delivered to you that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread and when he'd given thanks he broke it and said this is my body which is for you do this in remembrance of me in the same way also he took the cup after supper saying this cup is the new covenant in my blood do this as often as you drink it in remembrance of me for as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup you proclaim the lord's death until he comes this table is not a southwood table or presbyterian table it is the lord's table and our good father sets the feast before us and invites all who are his children by faith in jesus christ to come and to feast we're going to do something a little different this morning as we celebrate together as you come up the elder who is serving you is going to pray with you and then serve you the elements so for sake of time and instead of coming up one or two at a time we're going to have about 10 gather around together as we take communion and it's going to remind us of two really important things the first is that we come together to our father connected to everyone else who comes to god by faith we're in a family together and it's going to remind us of that and then it's going to remind us that we come to him and to this table completely utterly dependent upon our infinitely good father and his provision for us we're going to rejoice in that as we celebrate let's pray and we'll come to the table father for your goodness we are grateful and for these gifts we give you thanks and ask that you would use them for a sacred purpose in our hearts that we might know you and trust you more in jesus name amen our lord jesus on the night he was betrayed took bread and broke it and gave it to his disciples as i'm ministering in his name give this bread to you he said take eat this is my body broken for you do this in remembrance of me and in the same way after supper he took the cup and said this cup is the new covenant in my blood shed for many for the forgiveness of sins drink from it all of you our host team will usher you to tables forward or back come together in groups and we will celebrate together for more information visit us online at southwood.org you