

# Relational Prayer

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Preacher: Daniel Ralph

[ 0 : 0 0 ] with you to open them to Luke chapter 10. Even though we're going to be taking our reading from chapter 11, I'd like us to start reading at the end of chapter 10, and I'll explain why in a minute.

So, Luke chapter 10, and we'll pick up the reading at verse 38, and then we'll just read through to Luke 11, verse 1.

So, now hear God's word. Luke 10, verse 38. Now, as they went on their way, Jesus entered a village, and a woman named Martha welcomed him into her house, and she had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to his teaching. But Martha was distracted with much serving, and she went up to him and said, Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me. But the Lord answered her, Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her. In other words, Mary has chosen to listen to me, which is the good thing. Now, Jesus was praying. This is Luke 11, verse 1. Now, Jesus was praying in a certain place, and when he'd finished, one of his disciples said to him, Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples to pray. Well, we're going to come back to that in a minute after we sung, but just bear two things that you can boil the Christian life down to here, and that is either

God speaks to us or we speak to God. Any kind of relationship requires both us to listen to God speaking to us, which is what you get with Mary, but also us speaking to God. And Martha's words here, this is just something just to meditate on as we sing this next song, which is about prayer.

She says to Jesus that why can't Mary, her sister, basically serve with me? And what I want to convince you of this evening is that we ask for helpers in every area of the church. This is sort of a personal conviction. I think we all feel it. We need helpers for what? Helpers for YP, helpers for Sunday school, helpers right across the board. And yet notice what Jesus does with prayer.

[ 3 : 0 2 ] He doesn't put prayer in the bracket of praying for the work, does he? He actually says prayer is the work. And so if prayer is the work, like what is the work and YP is the work and Sunday school is the work. We need a lot of helpers. We need a lot of helpers. A lot and lots of helpers. So as we sing this next song and then we come back to the passage or just verse one of chapter 11, let's bear that in mind. But first, as we sing this song together, thank you. I'm tempted to have a word with that child.

Who is it? Who is it? Oh, it's my youngest son. Right, we'll have a... I'll come then and sort you out. I don't want us to look at the prayer that we've read this evening or we got into reading. I just want us to look at the request. And the request found here in Luke chapter 11 verse 1 is simply, Jesus is just finished praying. The disciples witnessed Jesus just finish praying and basically say to Jesus, can you teach us to do what you're doing? Can you teach us to do what you've just done?

That's the request. Now before we go any further, I want you to imagine your best friends. Now being in the pastorate, I don't have best friends. This is no... Yeah, this is for several reasons. No, but the main reason is of choice. It's very difficult to be close to any one person in particular. And so I try and keep everybody at the same distance, though some people speak to me more than other people. I don't take it personally. That's just the way we gel, I guess. And you know, I have minister friends who will... are in the ministry and that they feel the same thing. And it's necessary to be that way.

But I want you to imagine your best friend, whether it's your husband or your sister or your brother or whoever it is, I want you to imagine for a minute your very best friend. And you're going to spend the whole day with your friend. In fact, you're going to spend a whole week's holiday, let's say, with your friend. So you've got the picture. Now I want you to imagine this, that as you're on holiday with your friend for the week or for the two weeks or whatever the length of time may be, what would your relationship look like if you spoke to your friend that day or for the length of the holiday as much as you spoke to God in prayer? Would your friend think that there's something wrong with you?

Would your friend think that there's something wrong with them? Would your friend think that there's something wrong with the relationship between you two? And how long do you think that your relationship would continue if it continued on that basis?

[ 6 : 26 ] Now, given the understanding that relationship involves communication, what is their relationship like with God? I mean, that's quite a searching question.

That if we understand on a purely human level that if we spent the day with their best friend, they would at some point ask us what's wrong, what's up, have I done something to annoy you, is there something wrong with you that you want to talk about, is there something happened at home, is there something that you're worried about, you're going to be bombarded with these type of questions from your concerned friend, simply because you're not speaking? And so, if you spoke to your friend as much as you spoke to God, would they ask that type of question? And if that is the case, what do you think God might be thinking at this point?

What does it mean to pray? Well, it means, as the song clearly teaches, it is the simplest form of speech. It is simply talking to God. And so, the reason for concentrating on Luke 11 verse 1 is to point out something so obvious that none of us may have seen it, or we perhaps have seen it and then forgotten it quite quickly. The disciples request Jesus to teach them to do what he's just been doing.

Lord, teach us to pray. We notice you were praying. Lord, teach us to do what you have done. And normally, what we do after this is focus on the content of the prayer. Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. That's what we tend to concentrate on. But notice how Jesus teaches his disciples to pray. How does he do it? He gives them a prayer to pray. Okay? Jesus teaches his disciples how to pray by giving them a prayer to pray. That's it. The end. That's how simple it is.

How do you learn how to pray? Well, you learn how to pray by praying. When they ask Jesus, can you teach us to pray? What does he do other than to give them something to pray?

[ 8 : 42 ] Pray. So the way that we learn to pray is by praying. So prayer happens by praying. Okay? Prayer happens by praying. We learn how to pray by praying. We learn how to speak to God by speaking to God.

There is no other way to do it. And so prayer is natural, but it's one of those natural things that has to be learned a bit like walking. Walking is natural by God's grace, but it has to be learned.

Prayer is natural, but it has to be learned. And if it has to be learned, then it has to be taught. And Jesus is so teaching them how to pray, and he gets, the way that he teaches them how to pray is just by saying, pray this. Get to prayer. If prayer then is talking to God, and talking to God is a measurement of every other type of human relationship, of how healthy that relationship is.

Imagine you're married, and you're not talking to one another. What kind of healthy relationship would that be? Well, I don't imagine it would be healthy at all. But here you have the most wonderful relationship with God, and how healthy it is depends on how much you are speaking to him, at least in part. It depends on that. Communication seems to be a measurement of healthiness when it comes to relationship. We all know that. At least we know that with any other type of relationship that we're in. But what happens when it comes to God? Well, we seem to find great difficulty in speaking to God. I think one of the reasons why we find difficulty in speaking to God is because we have those moments of what we call awkward speech. Have you ever not spoken to someone in a long time, and then when you go to speak to them, it's awkward at first because you don't quite know what to say, or how they're going to take what you're saying? And I tend to think that our relationship with God falls into that type of category. It's been a long time since I've actually spoken to you, God, and now I'm finding it difficult to come and speak to you. And what do you do when you're in that type of mode? How do you begin the conversation? Well, here's the thing. It has to begin with you. If you're going to start praying, it has to begin your side. God's spoken to us through his word, and now we are to speak to him. And so, simply put, there may be 101 barriers to a praying life, but there's no barrier more simple or straightforward than not praying.

Okay? It doesn't matter what other barriers there are, that the most basic barrier to not praying is not praying. And the only way to overcome not praying is by praying. Like, the only answer to an unrepentant life is what? A repentant life. The answer is staring us in the face. So, let's not overlook the fact that when the disciples ask Jesus to teach them to do what he's just done, pray, he gives them something to pray. He gives them a prayer to pray. And what this means is that prayer has to be learned, and prayer has to be taught. And when a child is born, it is by God's grace that a child can walk eventually. And when a child is born, it is by God's grace that a child can talk eventually. And even though walking and talking is quite natural, it still has to be learned.

[ 12 : 25 ] You still have to pick the child up on their feet and give it a go, and you still have to perhaps go through the alphabet and make word sounds to get them to form the sounds that they're making with their mouth. So, we would say that walking is natural. We would say that talking is natural.

Jesus would say that prayer is natural to the new birth. But it's natural in the same way walking and talking is. It still takes effort to do. And the more you do it, then guess what? The easier it becomes. Because prayer, as it's simply put, is just speaking to God. And prayer means that you believe that God listens to you when you speak. Now, Jesus does get onto the content of prayer. He goes down, pray these words, pray like this. So, there is a content issue. But first, we just need to begin with saying something. And whatever we say to God, we can be sure that God will listen. We practice by practicing. We walk by walking, we talk by talking, and we pray by praying. That's how you get to do it.

Long before you get to the content of prayer, what to say, you first have to say something. And so, don't overlook this very simple fact that the way Jesus gets his disciples to pray is by giving them something to pray. Now, hearing a sermon on prayer is like hearing a talk on walking.

If I give you a wonderful talk on walking, it doesn't make you walk. It may explain to you how walking happens. It may explain to you that you need to walk in order to get from A to B. It may explain to you that walking is necessary for a healthy life in part. But it stops there.

It doesn't, the sermon doesn't do it for you. And in the same way, hearing a sermon on prayer doesn't mean that your praying life has increased any measure. You still have to go and pray.

[ 14 : 40 ] And so, the point here is that if you want to pray, then just start praying. And don't think you need to hear something else. And don't think you need something else before you can start praying.

All you need is to just start speaking to God. But many of us think, I need a new journal. I need a new pen to write my notes down in my journal. I need a time in the day where I can start.

I need all these things before I can begin. No, you don't. The thing that you need more than anything else is just to begin. Lord, teach us to pray. Okay, here's a prayer. Get to it. Get on with it.

Speak to God. So, don't overlook the very simple fact that the way Jesus gets his disciples to pray is just by praying. And we tend to focus so much on what Jesus says next, the content of prayer, which is the right thing to do, that we overlook the simple instruction of it's a prayer.

So, the way to pray is to pray. Now, depending on the type of relationship you have, whether it be with God or with any of your friends, what you say to another person will vary a lot. You will say something to one person that you wouldn't necessarily say to another person. And so, Jesus wants you to understand the type of relationship you have with God so that your communication will be sort of free-flowing. And the kind of relationship that you have with God, if you belong to Jesus, is that God is your Father. And because He is your Father, He knows everything about you, and so you can say everything to Him. And so, what type of things can I speak to about God? Well, if you go and read the Psalms, everything.

[ 16 : 35 ] Now, I wonder if your prayer life is a prayer life where you do just pour out everything to God. You know, when God knows you better than anyone else, you just say, I'm feeling this way. I'm, this is what I'm thinking about. This is what I'm worried about. This is, and you just start pouring all this out to God because God is the only one who's really going to attentively listen to you and provide the answers that you need. In fact, Nehemiah understands that the God that he prays to is the God of all creation, an all-powerful God who can not just listen to our prayers, but can actually do something about what we're praying. God's never stumped with an answer.

He never has to go and ask for advice. It stops with Him. You pray, and He will answer you. And so, praying life of God is like any other type of communication. He listens and knows and understands He is your maker and your provider. And so, Jesus wants you to understand that your relationship is one of a father and a son, a father and a child. And we know that as children, we don't always say everything to our parents that we ought to tell them, but the trouble is with God, you can't get away with that with God. God knows what I'm going to say even before I say it, so I'm stumped either way. I may practically hide it from God. I may practically not pray it in my praying life and think, well, if I've not said it, God hasn't seen it. But when it comes to God, He knows it's all there, and pouring it out to God is the necessary reality. The way to speak to God is just by speaking to God. Now, in Jeremiah, it puts how we ought to pray in one context, if we put it in the context of prayer, with the character of God, and this is what it says. But let him who boasts, boasts in this, that he understands and knows me, and that I am the Lord who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth. For in these things I delight, declares the Lord. Jeremiah 9, verse 24. In other words, that he's speaking to the people of God, and he's trying to convince them what type of relationship that they have with God. And the type of relationship they have with God is one where they ought not to boast in anything else other than the fact that they know God.

Now, if you read the verse that comes before that, this is what it has to say. It says, let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the mighty boast in his might, let not the rich man boast in his riches, but let him who boasts, boast in this, that he knows me. In other words, what Jeremiah is convincing the people of is that it doesn't matter what capabilities or abilities that you have, the thing that trumps all of them is the fact that you know God. The thing that can trump great riches in your life is the fact that you can know God. The thing that can trump your personal strength is the fact that you know God. The thing that can trump your wisdom is the fact that you know God. In other words, the thing that can beat it all is knowing God. It doesn't matter how strong or how clever you are or how rich you are. The thing that can beat all of them is a person who knows

God. Now, if you understand this in the context of prayer, what does it mean? Well, it means this, that if you think you can do with your brains, with your intellect, with your wisdom, what can only be done through prayer, you're not going to pray. You're going to try and do it through your intellect, through your wisdom, through your ability. If you think you can do with your strength what can only be done through prayer to God, then guess what? You're not going to pray either, because you're going to just try and do it in your own strength. And if you think you can do with money what God can only do through answering your prayers, guess what? You're not going to pray again. And what happens is that personal strength, personal intellect, and personal money becomes a substitute for knowing God practically.

In other words, the way that I make my life through life is by using my powers of wisdom, my intellect, is by using the money that I have, by using the strength that I have. This is how I get through life. And Jeremiah is saying that's not really how you get through life. God gets you through life, and you're trusting in the wrong things. And so, if you're going to boast in anything, boast in the fact that you know God. Don't trust in the wrong things. Luke says, Jesus says this in Luke. He says, that if a son asks his natural father on earth, and his natural father gives him the answer, then how much more will God give to you if you ask? In other words, he's putting a praying life in the context of father and child, not in the context of someone who has intellect, someone who has strength, or someone who has money. In fact, a child has none of those things. And so, a child is completely dependent on their father in order to give them what they need. And Jesus is trying to convince you and me that that is our real status in life in this world before God. That though we try and pretend as though we're five going on 50, relying on our intellect, relying on our strength, relying on our money to do what only prayer can do, the real reality is that we ought to be asking the father, because knowing him trumps all of those things.

[ 22 : 55 ] So, that's what our praying life should look like. I mean, why does the son need to ask in the first place? Because the son doesn't have anything. Okay, that's Jesus' point. If a son asks his father, and the father gives him, how much will your father give to you? Well, why do I need to ask in the first place? Well, because you don't have any of those things. So dependent upon God giving them to you.

And so, God is not like a human parent who may long for his children to grow up and stand on their own two feet. God doesn't actually want you to stand on your own two feet. He wants you to be dependent upon him. He wants you to boast in the fact that I know a God who is my God, who is the God, who answers my prayers. You see, when you do with money what can be done with praying life, who gets the glory? Well, you do. You've bought it for yourself. You've got the intellect. You've got the strength. All the glory goes to you. But when it comes to God, answering prayers, who gets the glory then? But it goes entirely to God. And that's what Jesus is saying here, or it's at least included here.

prayer. This is why I think almost every book that you could ever read on prayer will say at some point, and it's normally at the very beginning of the book, that prayer, the ultimate realization of prayer, is that prayer is dependent on God. Prayer, sorry, is our dependence on God. And so the person who prays a God is a person who feels their dependence a lot. And a person who doesn't pray much is a person who is often depending on their strength and their intellect and the money that they have and whatever else it might be. But it won't be God. And those things begin to rob a praying life because you're trying to do with those things what can only be done really with prayer. So when the disciples ask Jesus to teach them to pray, Jesus says, just pray. Pray. Pray to your Father who is in heaven.

Now, when you pray, there's two things that will happen. One, you'll recognize that you have a relationship with God. And two, you'll recognize that the status of your relationship is that of a child. You're asking your Father who is in heaven. When Jesus teaches his disciples here what prayer is, he has to teach them what prayer is. And if prayer is both powerful and effective, then our talking to God makes a difference. It follows then that if we don't talk to God, it'll also not make any difference.

So if we can see the difference that prayer makes, follow me on this, we ought also to be able to see the difference that prayer, an absent of prayer makes in our life. You ought to be able to notice the sort of things that are happening in your life when you're not praying.

[ 26 : 19 ] Now, what we do is we shrug them off by saying it would have happened anyway, or it would have turned out like this anyway. But what if that isn't actually the case? And that prayer would have made a difference if only the prayer was prayed. We'll get to it at some point where James teaches us, you have not because you ask not. It doesn't mean the opposite of what it says. In other words, it would have been that way anyway. And James clearly says, you have not because you ask not. In other words, the reason it is lacking is because you didn't pray. And so prayer is powerful, but in order for prayer to be powerful, the prayer has to be prayed. So Lord teaches how to pray. Here's a prayer. Start speaking with your Father who is in heaven. So in order to see the difference that prayer makes, we have to pray. In order to wrap this up, I want us to consider a few other things. The first difference that a praying life will make is our communion with a Father, a bit like our friend who's on holiday with us. The moment we start speaking with them, guess what? The relationship begins to improve immediately. And a lack of communication with your Father means that your relationship is not what it ought to be. And a good communication with your Father, God speaks a lot to us. And so a good communication with your Father means that your relationship with Him will improve immediately. And so we have to return to the point that we began with. When Jesus teaches His disciples to pray, He gives them words. But words have to be said. Words are communication. Words are speaking. He teaches them to pray by praying. In fact, think about it. You can't learn to swim without swimming. You can't learn to walk without walking. You can't learn to read without reading. And you can't learn to pray without praying. And many of us stop praying, or at least haven't begun to pray, because we tend to think we have to learn something else in order to pray.

But we don't need to learn something else. We don't need anything else before we pray. Prayer is like walking. You do it by walking. Prayer is like talking. You learn it by doing it. Prayer is like swimming. You learn it by swimming. And so if you're thinking, well, I need something to happen to me before I can start speaking to God, how is that the case? Pray by praying. So an important aspect is, as we conclude, with our relationship with God is simply talking. When we read the Bible, we're listening to God. And when we pray, we are speaking to God. Okay? When we read the Bible, we're listening to God. And when we pray, we are speaking to God. And this relationship works like all other relationships. And so our prayer is important. And so our prayer is important. Our communication with the Father is important. We pray by praying. We talk by talking Him, telling Him what we're feeling, what we're thinking, what we're going through, what we're concerned about. We just spill it out to God. We just talk and talk and talk. And so we remember, as we conclude, that no one can speak to God about anything unless he speaks to God about something. Okay? You can't speak to God about anything unless you start speaking. Amen.

Amen. Amen.