

spiritual formation

PRAAYER

SPIRITUAL FORMATION: PRAYER

April 19, 2020

LUKE 11:1-4

Now Jesus was praying in a certain place, and when he finished, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples." And he said to them, "When you pray, say: "Father, hallowed be your name.

Your kingdom come.

Give us each day our daily bread,

and forgive us our sins,

for we ourselves forgive everyone who is indebted to us.

And lead us not into temptation."

Transcription:

Hello family. Before we look into the Word, let's take some time just to pray and invite the Spirit to teach us, to lead us, to speak to our hearts, convict us, and to equip us through this time. Let's pray.

Father, we thank you for your kindness and grace for your presence, for your ongoing care. We thank you for your word. We thank you for prayer. We're going to talk about that today and it's such a gift that you would give us prayer, a means to commune with you and converse with you and know you and be known by you. And so we pray as we look at your word, we look at Jesus and how he led his disciples to pray that you would grow us in prayer this season. Help us as we now look at your word, to learn, to be equipped, to be changed in Jesus name. Amen.

Well, family, I want to remind you that Christians are actually disciples. They're apprentices of Jesus. They're committed to be with Jesus. They're committed to become like Jesus. They're committed to do what Jesus did. And we don't do this because it's the religious thing to do. We do it because Jesus is the very best version of being a human. In fact, being a disciple of Jesus, is actually choosing to live the most abundant and full human life possible.

You can tell a whole lot about your own apprenticeship to Jesus by how much your daily responses to life's circumstances look like how Jesus would respond. I'm sure many of you right now during COVID-19 are becoming very aware of how much you're not like Jesus. Areas where you need to be apprenticed by Jesus in new ways.

We have an opportunity right now to let the truth of what we're really like be seen and be known and we have grace from God to not be afraid to be seen and known. We can go to him in prayer and invite him to continue to change us from the inside out.

I love how the Spirit really led our elders this last season to take a whole year and focus on just being with Jesus. And it's really interesting that the very first quarter we decided to do silence and solitude and here we are. We're in solitude, we're in isolation, we have a lot of space to be alone. And I'm convinced that the Spirit of God led us as a church to this season of being with Jesus to prepare us and enable us to walk through what we're going through right now. He knew what we were going to face and he led us to what we're doing. Our God sees us and he knows us and he cares about us.

And this quarter we're going to look at prayer. Man, I can't think of a more important topic for us to really grow in in the next few months as we continue to face the realities around us. Family, we have a great opportunity to grow in one of the most important disciplines, one of the most important spiritual practices we could ever grow in, and that's prayer. And we're going to provide like we had before, guides your MCs to process through, for your DNA groups to talk through what God's doing in your life. And I really want to encourage you to engage this practice very seriously in this next season.

We're going to look at how Jesus taught on this, how he led by example in the area of prayer with his own disciples, with his own apprentices. If you have your Bibles, we're going to look at Luke. We're gonna spend a lot of time in chapter 11 but I want to just get to a chapter 11 by going through a few other passages briefly about Jesus' prayer life. Let's look at how Jesus engaged in prayer.

Luke 5 verse 15, "But now even more, the report about him went abroad and great crowds gathered to hear him and to be healed of their infirmity."

So he's busy. He's got tons of people coming to him. Verse 16, "But he would withdraw to desolate places." It could also be translated in lonely places and pray.

Mark 1:35 shows that Jesus often did this in the morning.

Move forward. Chapter 6 Luke 6 verse 12, "In these days, he went out to the mountain to pray and all night he continued in prayer to God and when day came he called his disciples and chose from them 12 whom he named apostles."

Jesus is praying around major decisions. Now, Luke 9, let's look at verse 28,

"Now about eight days after these sayings, he took with him, Peter and John and James, and he went up on the mountain to pray." Verse 29 "and as he was praying, the appearance of his face was altered and his clothing became dazzling white."

Jesus prays, meets with God and he's transformed in their midst while he's praying. And then Luke 11, which is where we're going to spend a lot of our time. Verse 1, "Jesus was praying in a

certain place and when he finished, one of his disciples said to him, Lord, teach us to pray as John taught his disciples."

Now it's interesting, this is the only time the disciples specifically asked Jesus to teach them something. You think of all the things they watched him do. Heal the sick, raise the dead, cast out demons, calm the storm. You think of all the things they would ask him to teach them, would it be prayer? Absolutely.

See, they understood that the most important thing Jesus did was pray, was talked to the father. They saw him do it every day. Start his day this way, and the busier he got, the more he prayed. They saw him make major decisions with prayer. They watched him transformed by prayer and now they're going to see in a few passages, that Jesus actually raised Lazarus from the dead. And as he's doing it, he's talking out loud to God to make sure they know that he's praying all the time.

And Jesus is going to pray in the garden for his disciples, then he's going to pray in the garden to the Father for the will of the Father to be done. Then from the cross, he's praying, Father, forgive them, they don't know what they're doing.

Over and over and over again they see Jesus praying in every circumstance. So it's really important, they knew it was the most important thing and they realized we'd better learn from Jesus on how to do this.

I would bet if we're honest, most of us would say it isn't the most important thing. That if we were to look at our lives, the schedules that we have, the priorities we engage in, that prayer is minimized in terms of its importance in our life. And there's probably a lot of reasons for that. I'm sure some of us are saying right now, I'm really busy. I'm too busy to pray.

It's interesting. Luther said, The busier I got, the more I have to pray. Because he realized he needed more of God's help in the busyness of life.

Some of us are just far too distracted. I mean, I've been watching my own patterns lately and realize that I tend to take my phone up first in the morning instead of take myself up in prayer to God. And we're distracted by our phones, by our our devices. And it's not that we're too busy, it's that we're too distracted to make the space. It's why we wanted to start our first quarter in silence and solitude so you can learn how to make space and learn to be quiet with God.

I'm sure there's some of you who think, It doesn't really matter. I mean, God's going to do what God's going to do. My prayers don't affect anything, which we're going to get back to in a bit, but that's a lie. God has chosen to call you and I into the reality of his work through prayer and we affect things through prayer.

And I'm sure in a largely affluent context that we live in, some of you, maybe the reason you don't pray, you don't feel like you have to. You don't feel like you really have needs. You can kind of get on with life with the money you make and the things you have and own.

Now we're facing a reality with COVID-19 where all of us realize we're in need. Hopefully that wakes us up. Hopefully it causes us to pause and say, man, have I been going to God regularly in prayer? Here's a great time, family, for us to grow in prayer.

And I'm sure there's a lot of reasons, but all of them I'm convinced are connected to the fact that we probably don't really understand the nature of prayer. We don't really understand what it accomplishes. Because I think if we understood its nature and what it does, we would pray a whole lot more.

So I want to look at what Jesus does to teach them about what prayer is and how to engage in prayer in Luke 11 -- look at verse 2. And before we go, I want you to understand this is not just a kind of like a wrote thing that you're supposed to say. This is a template for what prayer is and how we ought to pray.

He says this, "When you pray, say Father, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come."

First of all, he says, Father. Now Matthew's version says "Our Father" and first thing I want you to see here is that prayer is communal. That the very nature of prayer is, that it's not a religious ritual we engage in, it's a relational activity we get to have with God. And we don't just do it alone, we also do it together with others -- it's communal -- us with God, us together with God.

Prayer is how we do life with God. It's how we personally and collectively commune with the living God. Paul Miller says this in his book, a praying life, which I really recommend, family, if you want to grow in prayer. He says that prayer is simply the medium through which we experience and connect with God.

So your relationship with God, your intimacy with God, your sense of relating and communing with God is directly connected to how you see God and how you relate to God through prayer. Prayer is the primary way you have a relationship with God. In fact, if you are not praying, you are not actually growing in your relationship with God. It's impossible to grow in a relationship with somebody without spending time with them. And prayer is how you spend time with God.

This is how all healthy relationships work. Jayne and I check in daily on how we're doing. We try to set aside a time every week for a date, whether that's lunch or dinner, but just time to be with, to engage in. Usually at night we try to check in see how things are going. We get time away for special events like our anniversary or vacations, where we just get time together. There's no way you can grow a relationship without spending time with people.

I would bet, because we're getting so much time with each other, that a lot of us are realizing our relationships weren't as healthy as we thought. I imagine a lot of you in your homes are

really struggling right now because now you're realizing, I didn't know you like I thought or I had been so busy I wasn't paying attention to what was actually broken.

And the same is true in our relationship with God. Many of us, I am concerned, actually don't pray because we actually don't want to face the reality of where we're at with God. We're not sure what he'd show us or what he might call us to do or what he might call us to give up -- what he might cost a surrender.

Ruth Haley Barton states in her book, *Sacred Rhythms*, Perhaps the deepest reason we are ambivalent about the intimacy of true prayer is that intimacy always leads us to a place where we are not in control. When we give ourselves over -- which is what we do when we pray to God -- When we give ourselves over to another person in the act of love, we're not in control.

And here's the deal, family, a lot of us may not be going to God and releasing control because our view of God is so broken. Many of us might have a false view of God. And this idea of praying to God, our Father, is a really hard concept for us to grasp because we didn't have a good father. And even those of us who had good fathers, our fathers have still fallen short of being like the heavenly Father.

And so we might have a hard time going to God as father because we have a concept that's broken. And what is your image of God as father? When you hear that, what comes to your mind? Is he aloof and distant? Is he angry, demanding? Or is he just kind of like this impersonal force to you?

See, Jesus came to show us the Father. He said, if you've seen me, you've seen the Father. So if you want to know what God the Father's like, look at Jesus. And if you look at Jesus, you realize God the Father is love. That God loves you, that God sees you, that God cares for you, that God is absolutely committed to your wellbeing.

And if you really believe that and knew that, then you would see prayer as a way to spend time with your loving, caring, present, heavenly Father.

Matthew's version of Jesus teaching them how to pray continues, "Our Father in heaven..."

Now we have a broken view of what heaven is. I think many of us think heaven is this far off place, way beyond the clouds that we travel to. But that's not the biblical picture of heaven. In fact, the word heaven could also be translated sky or air. So in other words, Jesus is saying, Pray our Father in the air. In other words, our Father, who's right with us, right by us. God is present everywhere. Everywhere you go.

In fact, Psalm 139 verse 7 rhetorically asked the question, Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence? And the answer is nowhere. You can't go anywhere and get away from God. God is always with you. And so Jesus reminding us that prayer is acknowledgement that God is always present and therefore prayer isn't only communal and relational, but it's also conversational. That it's good, yes to have set aside times to pray with

God, but he's always with you and you can engage in a conversation with God all day long. That it's an ongoing reality of mindfulness, of his presence with you wherever you go.

God's with you. Are you paying attention? Are you even acknowledging it? Are you talking to him? Are you listening to him? He's speaking. He wants you to give him your attention.

We see this with Jesus and Lazarus in chapter 11 of John, John 11 verse 41 through 42 where he's about to call Lazarus out of the tomb, raising him from the dead. And he says this, "Father, I thank you that you've heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I said this on account of the people that are standing around me that they may believe that you sent me."

What is Jesus doing? He's saying, did you not realize like he's right here? The Father's right here, I've been talking to him the whole time. Everything I do is because he's leading me, he's showing me what to say, what to do. And now I'm going to kind of pull back the veil and let you know I've been talking to Father the entire time, but I'm going to talk out loud so you can realize, you could have the same thing. You could have the same relationship I've got with God the Father -- he's with you. He sees you, he wants to lead and guide you, he wants to interact with you, he wants to commune with you, he wants to have a conversation with you.

Richard Foster says this about prayer and work -- 'cause I think a lot of us think, man, this is gonna take a lot of work, this prayer, it's a big deal. I dunno if I've got the energy to do it -- but I love what he says. He says, "We need not worry that this work of prayer will take up too much of our time. For it takes no time, but it occupies all of our time. It's not prayer in addition to work -- and I would add to our daily activities -- but rather prayer simultaneous with work. We precede, enfold, and follow our work with prayer. Prayer and action become wedded."

And this is the Christian life. The Christian life is not a religious life of ritual, but a life of relationship with God where we not only commune with him, but we get to walk and talk with him all through the day. He wants to be with you in the middle of everything you're doing, and then guide you in how to do it. And prayer is that activity of communion with God in the air, right there with you.

Now, before I spent regular extended time in prayer, I didn't get this idea. I mean what Richard Foster is talking about, I had not experienced, I mean the idea for me was prayer is something you do before you start your day, before you eat a meal, maybe when you're facing a really difficult situation. But I didn't understand this idea of prayer is conversation through my day with the living God. And when I expended -- set extended time aside to just be with God in prayer, I began to learn to recognize his presence, to be mindful that he's with me, that he's listening to me and that he's talking to me. And that sometimes he's not talking at all, he just enjoys my presence and he wants me to enjoy his presence.

And I found that as I started to do that, as I started to learn to commune and converse with God, I started to realize he was with me all through the day. He was speaking, he was listening, he was helping, he was giving me everything I needed.

Family, I want you to experience that. I mean, what a gift. What a gift that we get to experience the living God, communing with us, conversing with us, engaging in life with us. You don't have to do life alone. You get to do it with him, every part of it.

And that's not a burden. I love what Dallas Willard says in the "Spirit of the Disciplines". He says, "Constant prayer will only burden us as wings burden the bird in flight." No bird's complaining about their wings. It's the very thing that lifts them up. We get to be lifted up with the power of God as he carries us on his wings through life.

He continues, "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name." And what does hallowed mean? Well, the word hallow means to set apart as Holy. In other words, to say this is altogether different. And in the case of God is to say that God is truly unique, that he's absolutely without parallel. There is no one like him. Yes, we're made in his image, but we are not God.

And when we hallow God's name, we remember that God is like no other, that he loves and gives like no other in our lives. Tim Keller says it this way, "To hallow God's name is to have a heart of grateful joy toward God, and even more a wonder sense of his beauty."

Consider how different this is from the normal way we use prayer to get things. We may believe in God, but our deepest hopes and happiness reside in things. Like how successful we are or in how our social relationships are going. We therefore pray mainly when our career or finances are in trouble, or when some relationship or social status is in jeopardy.

See, prayer is communal and it's conversational, but it's also captivating. When we hallow God's name in prayer, we're being captivated by his beauty and splendor. We're pausing and saying, man, why? Why do I love him? Why is he so worthy of praise? Why do I worship this God?

And I know that when we come to know God is love, when we're aware of his constant presence, when we see his glory and his beauty displayed everywhere we go, and most specifically and fully in the gospel of Jesus Christ, it's hard not to be captivated. And our prayer life should be ones of captivity, where our hearts and our affections are being captivated by the beauty and the splendor of God.

And when that happens, when we're captivated, when we realize there's no one like him, then we're so captured by God and what he's done that we'll actually want the next part of the prayer to be true. "Your kingdom come" in Matthew's version, it says, "On earth as it is in heaven."

See, when we're captivated by God and his beauty and splendor and all that he's done to change our life, then we want others to experience the same thing. We want his kingdom to come. We want our friends to experience his rule and reign in their life. We want our world to experience what he's done inside of our own lives so that everybody gets to experience the kingdom of God, the splendor and glory of God show up in everyday life.

Jesus is wise in teaching us to pray in this order because he knows if we understand God as Father, that he loves us, he sees us, he cares for us. That if we learn how to converse with him in daily life throughout the day, if we're captivated by what he's really like and all of his glory and splendor, then we will absolutely want his kingdom to come so that everybody experiences what we get to experience.

And the primary way that the kingdom of God is going to be experienced on earth right now as it is in heaven, is through prayer. Yes, it's our lives lived out, but it's powered by prayer. It's informed by prayer. It's led by prayer. The kingdom of God will not get experienced if we're not praying that it come in our hearts and through our lives.

And so we started our prayers focused on God. We get captivated by God. Our affections are stirred up for God, and then he realigns us to his will. And that's what praying your kingdom come really means. It's like God, start with me. Align me again to what you're about and who you are and help me to submit myself fully to you. Make me more like Jesus.

But then it works itself out into our community, into our neighbors, lives, into our coworkers, lives into our classmates lives, into our households.

And our prayers -- I want you to hear this, our prayers bring heaven to earth. I mean, it's a remarkable privilege that we get to say, God, would you take what is true in the heavenly realms and make it real here? It brings God's powerful presence into our present situation. Man, we need that right now. In light of what we're all going through, this ought to be the prayer we are praying all day long. God, would you bring the kingdom of God, that heavenly reality into our present situation so people can see and know that you're good, and taste and see that you are kind of God they should be captivated with as well.

See, Jesus teaches us to pray like this because prayer is causal as well. Your prayers work. They actually bring about the cause of God's work in your life and through your life. Jesus teaches us to pray this way because he wants you to know your prayers really make a difference.

Charles Spurgeon once preached that prayer is the slender nerve, which moves the muscle of omnipotence. I love that. Your prayers are maybe the most important thing and most powerful thing you could do. God hears and he responds. I don't know why. I don't know why, in God's humility, he would respond to our prayers, but he does. The Bible is full of stories that demonstrate this to be true.

This last week, Ken Flower, our church planting resident, shared an article with our team about a missionary named James Fraser. He was a missionary to the pagan Chinese villagers of Lisuland. And that was kind of an area that you had to get up into the mountains and travel through to get to. And he found himself incredibly frustrated and angry with God because of all the snow storms that were coming that made it impossible to track through the mountains to get to these people.

In fact, he kept seeing it as a problem and eventually he understood that God was in the middle of the problem. That God was awakening him to what actually would be more powerful and more important, which is prayer.

In fact, he took up a little experiment. He said, I'm going to take the time I would have spent traveling there and spending the day with them there and turn that into prayer. Figure that'd be three to five days -- one to two days up the mountains into the villagers, one day spent with them, and then one to two days coming back. And for the whole season of winter, he committed himself three to five days to just pray for them that God would bring transformation, believing that that God could do far more through his prayers than he could just by being present.

And the experiment proved to be true. In fact, the villagers that he got to spend all the time with actually grew less than the people he couldn't spend time with, but did spend time with through prayer. Some actually trace this prayer experiment that he engaged in to a significant revival. We don't know this side of Jesus' return, how many of his prayers affected what eventually happened, but many missiologists trace back the enormous revival that swept through China in the past 50 years to the revival that began amongst the Highlanders of Lisuland during the winters when he stayed home and prayed.

Man, what if we believe that was true? What if we believe that our prayers move the omnipotent hand of God that our small cries for God to move, would actually work? That he would move? What if we believe this family?

What if during the season when we we can't gather and we can't even really go out and be with people? What if we devoted our time to prayer believing that God can get to them without us? That through our prayers he can move and he can bring miracles about?

Family, we've a great opportunity in this moment to engage in the same experiment. What if we took the time we put into a Sunday gathering -- maybe you're a server and so you take the time, you would drive to the gathering and drive home, and the time you'd put into serving, and we thank you for that -- but what if you put this season, you took that time that you drive, that you serve, that you attend, and you devoted that to prayer for people that need Jesus, for your family to grow up in their faith in new ways?

What if we took the time we drive to our missional communities and back -- and still want you to keep meeting family virtually -- but what if you took some of that time that you would have spent preparing meals or driving to and from your missional community meetings, and you devoted it to prayer?

What if you took the time that you would've been commuting to work, to and from and you said, I want to dedicate that time to prayer? I want to try and experiment in these months that we are in our homes and see if God might not actually hear my prayers and work because prayers are not just communal conversation, but they are causal. They actually work. God works when we pray in powerful ways.

And these prayers aren't just for spiritual awakening, they're prayers for you too.

Jesus continues, "Give us each day our daily bread."

He wants you to know God cares about everything. And right now when some of us are losing jobs or going through times where our health is at risk. Or we're, we're dealing with the reality of just our loneliness and sadness -- he cares about all the daily needs. Bring those to him. Ask him to provide. Ask him to be present. Ask him to meet you in your everyday moments. He cares about it.

And your prayers not only move his hand of power, but they also move his hand of provision. He wants to be powerful in your prayer, he also wants to be present and provide your needs.

Lastly, prayer is confessional.

"Forgive us our sins for we also forgive everyone who is indebted or has sinned against us."

So here's what happens after you rightly see who God is, when you start to align your heart to his kingdom values, and then you experience him, come be present with you in prayer, you'll see where you're not rightly submitted, where you're not rightly aligned, where you're not rightly acknowledging his rule and reign in your life. And the outcome of prayers like this will lead to a humble submission that cries out for forgiveness because we see our sin, we see where we fallen short. In fact, even as I'm talking, you might be feeling like, Oh my goodness, I'm so far from God right now. I've walked in ways I wish I hadn't. I'm doing things I wish I didn't. And the beautiful thing in this prayer is that Jesus is saying, It's okay. You can ask for forgiveness. God is gracious, he's merciful, his love is steadfast. It doesn't go away and it doesn't change.

And so the outcome of praying and the way Jesus leading us to pray is that we will get to the place where we have to face ourself after we've seen God and all of his splendor. And we'll know that we can confess. Confess your sins to him.

Then he ends, "And lead us not into temptation." Now Matthew's version says, "But deliver us from evil." And this is his way of saying, ask God to lead you in ways that are not going to lead you to darkness, to evil, to sin. Ask him to lead you away from Satan's temptation and desire to undermine your life, to hurt your marriage, to rob you of joy, to lead you to ways that are going to be destructive. Invite him into how you lead -- live your life. Let him be the leader. Say, Lord, lead me, guide me. I don't want to go in any way that you don't want me to go. And this is our -- we end the prayer this way because it's after seeing who he is, what he's done, his kingdom, after we're captivated with his glory, after we submit ourselves to his desires, after we confess our sins, we don't want to go back another way. We want to go in the way he would have.

And so we end with this alignment saying, God lead me in the way that will be life-giving.

Family, we're never going to have a thriving relationship with God without prayer. We're never going to have a thriving relationship with others without prayer. But we can go to God,

absolutely confident that he hears us, that he sees us, that he loves us, that he cares for us and that he will respond to our prayers.

Why? Because of Jesus. Jesus suffered and died for our sin and then from the cross cried out in prayer, "Father forgive them, they don't know what they're doing" and then rose again, victorious over Satan, sin and death. Then he ascended to the right hand of God the Father where he is making constant intercession for you and for me. He's praying for us right now and he is a high priest that represents you before God. In fact, Hebrews 4 says it this way, and this ought to inform how you pray:

"Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in our time of need." With that kind of access to God, why wouldn't we pray?

Family, I want to encourage you in this season to believe it's true that God has made a way through Jesus for you to come to the Father with confidence to ask for whatever you need. You get to commune with him, have a conversation with him, be captivated by his glory. Know that your prayers are causal, they change things. And then confess when you fall short. Man, it's such a gift God's given us. I hope we grow in it this season. Let's pray.

Father, we're thankful that you have given us every means necessary to grow into godliness, to live a life of abundance, to walk with you in relationship and we thank you for the gift of prayer. I pray that you would help us as a family to press into you in this season in ways we've never done before to grow in our conversation with you, to commune with you, to be captivated with you, to realize that prayers matter, they really do change things.

And Lord, in all this, we confess that we've fallen short, that we've trusted in other things. We have not gone to you first in prayer. We've gone to other things and we ask you'd to forgive us because of Jesus. We pray in his name, Amen.

Now family, as we respond, I want to encourage you to take some time through prayer to practice some of the things that we talked about. Take some time to hallow his name, talk out loud with God and each other about all the reasons why you should be captivated with God and all of his beauty and all of his splendor. And then pray that his kingdom would come -- pray very specifically according to the needs your family's facing, that your friends are facing, this world is facing. Start with your own heart as you do that, and invite the Spirit to show you where you need to confess. Where you've been aligned to a different king, you've been going to a different source, you have not gone to him in prayer.

And after you do that family, I encourage you, if you'd like, to take communion together as an affirmation that God's grace is sufficient for you because of all that Jesus has done. I love you family, I miss you. Hope you have a good week.