

Praying with Expectation

Culture of Grace: Practices & Habits of GracePoint Church / Luke 11:1-13 / January 7, 2024

Introduction:

When I talk to people about how they would like to grow spiritually, one of the most frequent responses I receive is to grow in prayer. I think this a common desire because when the Lord captures our hearts with the beauty of His glory at salvation, alongside of that comes a desire to be with Him and prayer is one of the ways we can fill that desire on this side of eternity. If that is your heart today, I have been praying the focus of our “Culture of Grace” series this morning will meet you in that desire. In this series, we consider various means, or channels of God’s grace and how we want to build the culture of GracePoint Church around pursuing those ways in which God has designed for His grace to flow into our lives. Prayer is a vital means of grace because it is one of the primary ways we communicate to God. What is astonishing about prayer, though, is that it is not only a way for us to grow closer with God, as we take our burdens and requests to Him, but God has also chosen to make our prayers a functional part of Him exercising His sovereign purposes in our lives and the world. The English preacher and puritan, Thomas Watson says, “Prayer delights God’s ear; it melts his heart; and opens his hand. God cannot deny a praying soul.” Watson captures the thrust of our passage, in Luke 11:1-13, as Jesus not only answers His disciples request to be taught how to pray but also provides motivations to pray. Our prayer life will grow when we understand both how to pray and why we pray. Look first at the disciple’s request in verse 1, “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.’” As the disciples are following Jesus, they have seen him reveal a reliance on prayer that is worth emulating as He withdrew often for it. At one point, after watching him pray, one of the disciples asks for Jesus to teach them to pray. Notice he says, “as John taught his disciples.” This was likely a familiar request, as rabbinic disciples were known to ask to learn how to pray in a way that would distinguish them from other rabbinic schools (James R. Edwards, *The Gospel according to Luke*, 331–332). So, this request is a desire to learn how to pray in a way that characterizes them as followers of Jesus. Consider with me the way Jesus answers their request in verses 2-4, teaching us to,

Boldly Pray with Expectation

This prayer is similar to the one in Matthew 6, yet much shorter. We don’t know if this was a separate occasion or if Luke is only recording a part of the same prayer. Either way, our goal for this morning is to see Luke’s focus within this prayer. Look closely at Jesus’ response in verses 2-4, “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.” We should note the uniqueness of this opening, beginning with a reference to God as “Father.” With this opening, Jesus teaches an intimacy in prayer that would come through His life and death, as His people are connected through Him to God in a personal relationship beyond anything they could have imagined. He then focuses on a desire for God’s name to be hallowed and His kingdom to be known. “Hallowed” means to make holy. This doesn’t mean we are the ones making God’s name Holy, but that our minds and hearts recognize the holiness of God. It is a request for the God, and His glory, to be in proper position, set apart and exalted in your heart and the hearts of others. “Your kingdom come,” asks for the kingdom of God to be fully realized over all the earth. The opening of this prayer centers our hearts and minds on the rightful place of God and His purposes in our lives. Following this, Jesus teaches the disciples to ask for three kinds of things. First, is for God to provide our basic needs each day, giving us “our daily bread.” The idea is a dependence on God’s provision each day for exactly what we need. Next, Jesus focuses on our deepest need, teaching his disciples to pray for the forgiveness of their sins. As we come to understand the gospel, we know and trust that all our sins are forgiven through the death of Jesus Christ on the cross because His shed blood secured our forgiveness.

We trust that through this act, and His resurrection, God now looks on us and sees the righteousness of His Son. So, why does Jesus teach his disciples to ask for forgiveness as they pray? The apostle John sheds light on this in 1 John. 1:9-2:1. There he charges us not to deny our sin nature, but to acknowledge and confess our sins, knowing God is faithful to forgive because we have an advocate always before Him. Once we are in Christ, the confession of sin and request for forgiveness doesn't change, what changes is we know God is always faithful to answer that request because of the blood of His Son. So, we ask knowing it is always given. Praise God for the gospel of Jesus Christ! Note also how this request is connected to our forgiveness of those who have sinned against us. This isn't saying God's forgiveness is contingent upon our forgiveness of others but helps us to see how His forgiveness leads us to fully and truly forgive others. What is interesting is how Luke uses two different terms for sin, possibly pointing out how our sins against God are greater than any sin committed against us (James R. Edwards, *The Gospel according to Luke*, 335). As we reflect on the amazing reality that God forgives our sins, the depths of that reality will move us to forgive those who have sinned against us. Church, if you want to forgive others, meditate on the depths of God's forgiveness towards you. The final request Luke records humbly recognizes our weakness in battling temptation. Asking to not be led into temptation doesn't mean God is involved in tempting us, as James 1:13-14 tells us God tempts no one. This request acknowledges the trials we will face in this life and our need for God's power to endure those trials without falling into sin. Jesus repeats this command twice to his disciples in the garden of Gethsemane, in Luke 22:40 and 46, calling them to, "pray that you may not enter temptation." God is always there in our trials, ready to help us fight every temptation. As the disciples ask to be taught how to pray, Jesus points their hearts to pray for every physical and spiritual reality of their lives and ask God for what they need to honor and glorify His name. Now, one thing we don't see in our English translations is the force of these requests. James Edwards makes an important observation on this teaching, saying, "Most of us... modify petitions with words like if, would, or might. The Lord's Prayer invites believers to approach God not in polite timidity but in bold confidence. All the verbs except for 'forgive' (v. 4) are in the imperative mood, emboldening disciples to pray expectantly that God wills to act according to his promises." (James R. Edwards, *The Gospel according to Luke*, 336). Jesus teaches us to boldly pray with expectation, and the rest of our passage focuses on motivations to pray with expectation by showing two truths about God. The first truth is in verses 5-10, showing us that,

God is More Generous than a Faithful Friend

Two parables surround a central truth in verses 9-10, revealing how true prayer is persevering and expectant. Look at the first parable in verses 5-8, "And he 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" It was a common practice to travel at night to avoid the heat of the day, and hospitality was a significant part of the culture. The parable speaks of going to a friend late at night to request bread to help you be hospitable to a guest who has arrived. The friend is reluctant at first because the family is asleep and getting up to help would wake the children up. Then, we see something interesting. It isn't the friendship that motivates him to arise to help, but the impudence, or persistent boldness that moves that friend to provide what is needed. So, the focus is on the bold and persistent request. Notice the teaching of Jesus in verses 9-10, "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." Each verb for ask, seek, and knock are in the Greek present tense which speaks of continuous and habitual actions. And you can see how these verbs are connected to the parable, represent a similar kind of needy persistence. Jesus shows how those who approach God with this kind of needy persistence will receive everything they need in the same way the friend received what he needed.

Now, Jesus isn't suggesting God is reluctant to give like the friend from the parable but is contrasting the reluctance of the friend with God's ready and generous will to act on behalf of those who persist in coming to Him with their needs. Church, your prayer life will be invigorated when you believe our God is more generous than a faithful friend. Jesus, then moves from the truth of God's generosity to a second, deeper truth of God's goodness in verses 11-13, revealing that,

God has More Good for us than a Faithful Father

After calling on us to ask, seek, and knock with a needy persistence that receives what we need, Jesus moves to a second parable. Look at the parable in verses 11-12, "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?" The parable is short and clear. A faithful father would never answer his child's request for a fish or egg with a serpent or a scorpion. A good father would never give evil things to satisfy his child's needs. What is interesting in this contrast is how shortly before this, in Luke 10:19, Jesus equated serpents and scorpions to the power of the enemy and spoke of the disciples' authority over these things and their inability to harm them. He may be pointing to how God would never answer our requests with something spiritually harmful for us. Notice the details in how he concludes in 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!" Note how Jesus makes two comparisons. First, He compares earthy fathers, who are evil, with the heavenly Father, who is Holy. Second, He compares the good gifts we give our children with the gift of the Holy Spirit that God gives. The purpose of these contrasts is to show how God is far better than any earthly father and always gives the best gift. Pay attention to how the Holy Spirit is the best gift of God given to those who come to Him in persistent and expectant prayers. What is this teaching us? Is it suggesting God doesn't want us to request tangible things in this life, but only spiritual things? Or He always answers our request for physical things with spiritual things? I don't think so, because, in a likely parallel passage, Matthew records Jesus saying God's answers in Matthew 7:11, are "good things." Also, as we saw, Jesus taught His disciples to pray for their daily provisions in verse 3. Years ago, I was greatly helped by a teaching from our pastor in Abu Dhabi on this passage that I believe faithfully captures the meaning of this. He said this passage teaches that God will always answer every request you make, either giving exactly what you ask for, or something even better, a greater sense of His presence through the Holy Spirit. Church, understanding this transformed my prayer life years ago moving me to pray with a greater boldness, trusting that He would either provide me with exactly what I was asking for or something better. God has more good for us than a faithful father. To conclude, I want to give three charges I see from this passage. First,

1) Pray for Everything You Need

The scriptures are filled with calls and exhortations to pray. Philippians 4:6 tells us to, "not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God." Do you hear the call? In everything means in everything. When you need healing, ask God for healing. When you are discouraged, ask God for joy and encouragement. If you need help financially, are struggling with parenting, wrestling with temptation, want to love your spouse better, ask God for what you need. If you are exhausted from work but need strength to be present with your family, ask God for strength on your way home. If you are concerned about your children or grandchildren's future, seek the Lord on their behalf. The list could go on. There is nothing that you cannot make known to God. Church, pray for everything you need and expect God to move in and through your prayers. This leads to the second charge,

2) Keep Praying Until God Answers

In our passage, Jesus says you will receive, you will find, and the door will be opened. Those are powerful promises. Do you want to grow in prayer? Then let those promises sink deep into your heart. God will answer your prayers.

In Luke 18:1-8, Jesus gives another parable to teach his disciples to “always pray and not lose heart.” The parable speaks of a woman seeking justice from an unrighteous judge who refuses at first but caves after her persistence. Then, he compares the unrighteous judge to God, in verses 6-8, saying, “Hear what the unrighteous judge says. And will not God give justice to his elect, who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long over them? I tell you, he will give justice to them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?” Church, it is never a matter of if God will answer. It is a matter of whether we will have the faith to continue to go to Him when He delays that answer for His sovereign and good purpose in our lives. In his book Counsel to Christians, George Muller, a mighty man of prayer says, “The temptation is to cease praying, as though we had given up hope, and to say, ‘It is useless; we have already prayed so long that it is useless to continue.’ This is just what Satan would have us say; but let us persevere and go on steadily praying, and be assured that God is both able and willing to do it for us; and that it is the very joy and delight of His heart, for Christ's sake, to give to us all things which are for the glory of His name, and our good and profit.” Keep praying until God answers and don’t lose heart. This leads to the final charge,

3) Rejoice When God’s Answer is More of His Spirit

As Luke highlights, the greatest gift is the gift of His Spirit. Could more of the Spirit’s presence be the answer God has given for your request for healing or deliverance? Could more of His presence be the answer for the trial to be lifted? Could more of the Spirit’s presence be God’s answer for the lack of job growth, financial or relational strain, or continued temptation? The apostle Paul shows how to rejoice when a persistent request is met without change but instead the all-satisfying grace of God. In 2 Corinthians 12:7-9, Paul shares about a thorn in the flesh, described as a messenger of Satan, and him pleading with the Lord persistently to remove it, but God’s response was “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” So, Paul declares, “Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.” Church, God will always answer your request with your highest and greatest good, and often that highest greatest good is more of His presence, more of His grace, more of His power even when nothing about your circumstances change. Rejoice when God’s answer is more of His Spirit.

Conclusion:

As the worship team is coming to lead us in a time of response, how will you respond to God’s word? Today is communion Sunday, where we reflect on what Christ did for us on the cross. As you reflect, consider how He secured our ability to take everything to God in prayer. It is only through the broken body and shed blood of Jesus that we have any hope of God’s constant answers to our prayers. Think on the work of Christ on your behalf. As you hold the cup and bread in your hand, think deeply on His body broken and His blood shed for you. Dwell on the hope you have because of His sacrifice. A sacrifice that invites you to call God father. A sacrifice that opened the door for new mercies every day. A sacrifice that provides the forgiveness of your sin, power over temptation, and consistent favorable response to your prayers. We have songs prepared to provide an extended time to meditate on what Christ’s sacrifice means for you before we take together. Take this time remember all He has done. Maybe that means praying for the first time for the forgiveness of your sin found through the blood of Jesus. If so, ask for His mercy and trust in God’s promise to forgive all your sin. Maybe you need to ask God to forgive you of current sin or help you forgive others. If so, take this time to confess your sin and meditate on His mercy and grace. Maybe you need to pray again for that request you gave up on years ago, trusting that He will answer. Or thank Him for how He has answered your request with more of His Spirit. Whatever it is, respond to His grace today. Come kneel before Him in humility if you desire. Sit and reflect, or stand and sing. However you are led, move towards God’s grace in prayer with expectation that He will answer, either giving you exactly what you request or something far greater. After a few songs, I will come up to lead us in taking of the bread and cup together. Would you pray with me as we respond?