

Over the last few Sundays we have engaged challenging, mission-oriented passages that could make it easy to lose sight of the King because we're so focused on the work of the Kingdom. But, throughout his Gospel, Luke shows that mission and relationship are inseparable, and in chapter 11, he returns to an aspect of relationship that is foundational and accessible to everyone who is a follower of Jesus: prayer.

So let me ask you: "How's your prayer life?" My guess is many of us don't feel great about our answer, and if your answer is anything but "awesome", you are missing out. I confess I have times where my prayer life is rich, and other times where it's not so much. Just last week I sat down to pray, and after a while, I realized all I was thinking about was smoking a brisket! What's getting in your way? Is it because you're too busy, you think God's too busy, you don't know what to say or think he already knows what you're going to say, you don't think you're worthy to be heard from, or you struggle with being vulnerable enough to ask for help? If that's you, there is no shame for you this morning. Only encouragement.

"The primary purpose of prayer is to bring us into such a life of communion with the Father that, by the power of the Spirit, we are increasingly conformed to the image of the Son." -Richard Foster

That's prayer! **God made us to pray because God made us to have a relationship with him.** That means a Christian without a prayer life is like a puzzle missing a piece. Over the years I've observed that **those with the most vibrant prayer life are those with the most vibrant relationship with God.** But that is not reserved for a select few. Jesus wants that for everyone who calls on his name, and this morning he's going to show us how we can begin to get there.

[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." ² And he said to them, "When you pray, say: "Father, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. ³ Give us each day our daily bread, ⁴ and forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone who is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation."

This is one of eight times Luke records Jesus praying. He wants to show how integral this is to Jesus' life, both with the frequency and words Jesus uses. Jesus calls God "Father". **It tells us prayer is not a religious exercise but the means to intimacy with God.** Prayer is not a required practice to pass on information. It is communication that is the currency of relationship.

I love to work with young couples to show them how good communication leads to greater intimacy. I worked with one couple where the guy was a bit dubious about "good communication". But he showed up. I coached them, gave them some words and attitudes, and they started processing what had become an issue between them. As they talked, using this coaching, everything started to fall into place. They were heard and understood and came to a resolution. And when it all clicked, the guy snapped his head around and looked at me with astonishment, like I had just given them some secret magic sauce. His mouth was agape, and he was thrilled, because he realized the result of good communication was greater intimacy.

That is what is accessible through prayer, and there is no one who lived it more than Jesus with his Father. **If discipleship is ultimately being transformed into the image of Christ, there is, perhaps, nothing more Christlike than praying.** If you want your life to look like his, pray. If you want your character to look like his, pray. If you want your relationship with the Father to be intimate like his, pray. So how do we do that?

Jesus gives us a prayer, known as the Lord's Prayer, that is both a model with regards to its themes, and a worthy prayer on its own. Evangelicals sometimes knock liturgical prayers, but they give us words when we have none, set our hearts right when we offer them sincerely (as opposed to mindless rote recitation), and unify us communally. My college football team prayed this together every Wednesday after practice, and it was a significant moment each week.

Hallowed be they name: This a prayer of praise and exaltation. Hallowed means "to set apart as holy". It declares who God and aims our hearts towards him. This is where we start because everything else flows from it. As one old pastor said, "God is to be magnified before we are satisfied."

Your Kingdom come: This asks that God's will and reign in this world come to complete fruition and aligns our will with his. Jesus and his disciples have been announcing the Kingdom from the beginning. It has invaded this dark world, and this prayer asks that God's love, justice, righteousness, and rule overcome.

Give us each day our daily bread: This is a prayer of dependence, acknowledgement, and thanksgiving that everything we have comes from God. **He is the one who meets our needs.** This Thanksgiving week, I encourage you to make it full of prayers of thanksgiving for all God has provided for us.

Forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone who is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation: This is a prayer of confession, a request for forgiveness and spiritual protection, and an acknowledgement God is the only one who can provide that. It asks God to humble us so that we could do for others what God has done for us. Any other members of the Grudge Holders Club here? Our forgiveness is not contingent on forgiving others, but unforgiveness will make you miserable. There is peace and freedom when we forgive others. And there is a request to protect from temptation. **The first step in the battle against sin is admitting you can't win it on your own.** The Pharisees set up extra rules in order to avoid sin by willpower. The prayer Jesus gives us confesses we can only do that through God's power. I was talking to a guy who is going home from school next week and he said, "I am going to see my girlfriend for the first time in three months and it's going to be tempting." He didn't say he was going to bear down and tough it out. He was saying he needed help. That's this theme.

Jesus gives us these words, but just saying them isn't the point. There is an attitude and expectation he encourages us to have.

[Luke 11:5-8] ⁵ 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, ⁶ for a friend of mine has arrived on a journey, and I have nothing to set before him'; ⁷ 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'? ⁸ 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.

In Jesus' culture, taking care of a guest was of paramount importance. This guy is in need and he can do one of two things: be a bad host or boldly go to his neighbor in the middle of the night, confess his need, and ask for his help. He chooses the latter and models for us the shameless boldness Jesus encourages us to go to God with in our times of need. The neighbor is bothered and begrudgingly meets his need, but Jesus uses him to contrast how God responds to us. If you've ever sincerely said to someone "If you ever need anything, just ask", you've expressed the heart of God.

I'd like to show you a picture of shameless boldness. This is our family's woodpecker. I'm not sure why he has chosen us, but he lands on our window day after day and announces his presence by shamelessly and boldly pecking on our windows. It shakes the whole house. I'm not upset with him. I'm impressed! He's doing what he's made to do, and if I could find a way, I'd let him in.

Many of us are hesitant to pray like this because we are unsure of the character of God or the extent of our salvation. **God has made access to him possible and he wants us to take advantage of it.** John 10 – Jesus calls himself the door we go through to be with God. Matthew 27 – the veil in the temple is torn in half. Ephesians 2 – You have been brought near by the blood of Christ and through him we have access in one Spirit to the Father. Colossians 1 – Jesus reconciled us to Himself, making peace through the blood of the cross. Hebrews 4 – Let us then with confidence (boldness) draw near to the throne of grace.

What keeps you from praying like this? Is it that you don't like to ask for help? Look at Jesus's prayers. He's asking for help all the time! That you are you a sinner? Jesus has paid for it all and declared you right before God. You are free from shame. There is nothing in the way. That God already knows what you need and what you are going to ask? Sure, but it's not about him taking orders. **It's about relationship, vulnerably expressing our needs and letting God lovingly meet them.** God is not this neighbor. He says "You are not a bother! You're exactly where I want you to be." And Jesus goes on to show us how God responds.

[Luke 11:9-13] ⁹ 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. ¹⁰ For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened. ¹¹ What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will instead of a fish give him a serpent; ¹² or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? 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!"

God loves you, he's made a relationship with you possible, and when we boldly and shamelessly pray to him, he graciously, generously, and lovingly answers. Our prayer life should be full of asking, seeking, and knocking; asking for what we need and don't have, seeking guidance to live

the life God has for us, and knocking to enter his presence and experience intimate friendship with him. Jesus compares the response of our Heavenly Father to an earthly father. Think about someone you love dearly. Would you hesitate to give them anything they asked for that bettered their lives? No way. And you're a sinner! God is not! God is love, God's love is perfect, and God's love is poured out on us through generous response to our prayers. This is not the prosperity gospel. Jesus is not saying name it and claim it. This is God willing to give good gifts to us to live the life he has for us.

And you want to know the best gift of all? God himself! When you pray, no matter what it's about, you get God. We no longer need to pray for the Holy Spirit. He was given on the day of Pentecost and indwells everyone the moment they trust in Christ. But remember what I said in the beginning: **Prayer is relationship. Prayer is intimacy. Prayer is a conversation with God, and that's something he wants all of us to have.**

Pray. What a shocking application! If you are a prayer warrior, keep going. I am married to one and blessed daily because of it. God has gifted you with that and we all need the covering of your prayers. But also pray with others and teach them to pray how God has gifted you to pray.

If your prayer life is "meh", pray more...not because you have to, not to do a religious exercise because the guy up front told you to, but because when you do you get more of God.

And if you lack total confidence in this area, pray these words regularly, and then begin to pray what they bring to mind. Jesus gave us these words to pray and to help us pray.

And for all of us, remember we have our prayer page on our website [fellowshipdallas.org/prayer] that has prayer resources, training experiences, and prayer podcasts to help all of us make prayer what God so desires for it to be in our lives.

This morning, I want to close with prayer. I'm going to invite Noah up who will sing this prayer over us, and then I've asked four of our church members to pray out of the themes of this prayer and give you an opportunity to do this silently where you sit. This is a good prayer for us individually, but look at all the "us, we, and our" found. We are to pray it together, and we do so now.