

## **"LORD, TEACH US TO PRAY – THE NOVICE’S PRAYER.”**

**Rev. Robert T. Woodyard**

**First Christian Reformed Church, Lynden, WA**

**September 17, 2023, 6:00 pm**

**Text for Sermon: Luke 11:1-13**

### **Introduction:**

I remember the conversation well. It was one of those awkward conversations, kind of like between a student and a principal, or between a young driver and a policeman. It wasn't a familiar, casual, easy kind of conversation. It was halting, stilted, stumbling, groping. I felt insecure, my words seemed inadequate. I was a rookie, a novice and I felt it.

It was June 10, 1972 in the evening on a rock at Malibu, the Young Life camp in British Columbia. It was quiet, I was alone. We were supposed to talk to God, get real about our lives and where things stood. Like I said, it was an awkward conversation. I hadn't really tried to talk to God in any kind of real way like this before and certainly not about things so personal.

It felt strange talking to someone you can't see or hear, like talking to the air. And what do you say? By God's grace and I believe by His Spirit's enabling, I was able to say, "God, I surrender, I give up, I want you to be the Lord of my life. I have sinned and I need a Savior. Please take over. Not my will but your will be done." Not those words exactly, but words to that effect. A humble, simple crying out to God.

It was a novice's prayer. A simple conversation between a creature and the Creator, a needy dependent soul and an all powerful provider and sustainer.

That's the impetus for most prayer, a clearly defined sense of inadequacy and dependence. The greater the sense of need the greater the seeking. Prayer is the place for hurting, needy, broken, searching, struggling people. It's the oasis in the wilderness; it's the rest stop on the highway of our lives. It's the break room in the midst of our work and labor; it's the calm in the storm.

### **Prayer is a crutch.**

Some would say prayer is a crutch. When they say that they mean to be derogatory, but you know what, if you have a broken leg, a crutch is a wonderful gift. If you don't lean on it you will fall down. And the truth be told, we all have a broken leg – no – worse than that, a broken soul. We are broken to the core of our being. We all walk through life with a limp, and prayer is for people who have a limp and know it.

But our neediness and dependence aren't the only reason we pray. There is another reason. The things that matter the most in life cannot be gained or acquired by us. The most important things come from God. Our salvation and new birth, our conviction of sin and forgiveness, our growth in faith, hope and love, our desire for Christ and His Word, the indwelling of His Spirit,

love for the body of Christ, zeal in worship, boldness in sharing, compassion for the lost, all that is most to be valued in life only comes from God through prayer.

Prayer is the most important thing you will ever do. And if you don't pray you are in serious trouble at the point in your life that matters the most.

### **“Lord, teach us to pray”**

When it comes to prayer, I am very thankful for the apostle's honesty and vulnerability, that even as good Jews they pushed past any pride and asked Jesus, **“Lord, teach us to pray”** (Luke 11:1).

That honest request shows two things, we have a natural inability to pray and we all need someone to teach us to pray. There is a real sense in which we cannot just up and pray by ourselves, we need outside help, we need someone to teach us, we need Jesus to be able to pray. Only by Jesus can we learn how to pray and what to pray.

So this evening I want to begin a sermon series on prayer through an extended exposition of the great prayer called The Lord's Prayer. My plan, Lord willing, is to introduce the topic this evening. Next week I will give a sermon on why pray when God knows our needs. Then I will begin an exposition of the Lord's Prayer starting with Our Father, and then at least one sermon on each of the seven petitions.

We will take 10 to 12 weeks and even then we will not plumb the depths of this great passage of Scripture. This is a rich mine from which we will never get all the gold. One man's simple and humble question has become a rich treasure for the whole church of Jesus Christ for all generations and to the end of the world.

Jesus wants us to pray and He delights in the opportunity to teach us how to pray. So let's begin the lesson.

This evening we have taken our text from Luke's gospel, the other place where Jesus taught His disciples to pray the Lord's Prayer.

### **Text: Luke 11:1-13//Matthew 6:5-13**

Jesus was a man of prayer. From the beginning of His ministry on earth to the end, He prayed. He was praying at His baptism when the dove of the Holy Spirit descended. He was praying in the wilderness when He was tempted. He prayed before choosing the disciples. He was on the mountain to pray when He was transfigured. He was in the garden praying when He was arrested. He prayed from the cross. His natural response before any decision or in any crisis was prayer. He was a man of prayer.

Jesus was also a teacher of prayer and He wants to teach us both how to pray and what to pray. We will get to the “what,” the content in a couple of weeks. This evening I want to focus on the “how.”

Martin Luther summed up Jesus' teaching on the how this way, "Prayer should be brief, frequent and intense."

This is the intention of the parable Jesus gives after teaching the content of prayer.

### **Entreating the Lord in prayer, earnestness.**

All the grace we receive from God is unmerited, undeserved, unearned. Some of it comes unasked, unrequested. But there is much grace we receive from God only after we have asked.

Our God, our Father in heaven and our Lord and Savior, love to be entreated in prayer. They are not like men who weary quickly of incessant requests.

Do you ever wonder why God is slow to answer sometimes or why He seems to be waiting or even withholding from us when we pray? There are several answers to those questions and I want now to explore one of those answers given in our text.

One of God's purposes in being slow to answer is to test or prove our faith and our desire, to show us our mettle, what we are made of and whether or not our heart is really in our prayer. Do we really desire what we are asking for? God means to draw out our earnestness, He means for us to pray with frequency and with intensity.

I can demonstrate this is one of God's reasons for the way He answers our prayers from many testimonies in Scripture.

There was Jacob at Peniel who wrestled all night with the Angel of the Lord and at day break was bold to ask, "I will not let you go until you bless me" (Genesis 32:26).

There is the story in II Kings 13 of King Joash coming to the prophet Elisha crying out for mercy and help against the armies of the Syrians.

**II Kings 13:18-19** He said, "Take the arrows," and he took them. And he said to the king of Israel, "Strike the ground with them." And he struck three times and stopped. **19** Then the man of God was angry with him and said, "You should have struck five or six times; then you would have struck down Syria until you had made an end of it, but now you will strike down Syria only three times."

There is the story of the very bold and persistent Canaanite woman who came to Jesus.

**Matthew 15:22-28** A Canaanite woman from that region came out and was crying, "Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David; my daughter is severely oppressed by a demon." **23** But he did not answer her a word. And his disciples came and begged him, saying, "Send her away, for she is crying out after us." **24** He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." **25** But she came and knelt before him, saying, "Lord, help me." **26** And he answered, "It is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs." **27** She said, "Yes, Lord, yet

even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table.” **28** Then Jesus answered her, “O woman, great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire.” And her daughter was healed instantly.

There is the story of the two blind men at Jericho who cried out to Jesus for healing, and when they were rebuked and told to shut up they were not put off but persisted all the more and all the louder, “Son of David, have mercy on me!” And Jesus being God and knowing what the men needed, still asked him the question, “What do you want me to do for you?” (Luke 18:40-41).

This parable in Luke 11 and the similar one in Luke 18 of the widow who went to the judge are meant to teach us this lesson shown in Scripture again and again. Our Lord and our God loves to be beseeched and entreated and begged and called upon again and again. Why?

It’s not lack of love or lack of caring or lack of concern that keeps God from answering right away. It’s actually greater love, for our Father in heaven is not like our fathers on earth. He loves us with a far greater love. He knows what is best and only gives the best gifts.

“His purpose is to rouse you from spiritual laziness. His purpose in removing Himself from you is to cause you to pursue Him...His desire is to give Himself to the soul that really loves Him and to that soul which earnestly seeks Him” (Guyon).

He wants to know if our hearts are in it and He wants to know why our hearts are in it.

Is it selfish enjoyments and pleasures we want, or are we motivated by love for God and a desire for Him above all other things? Is our biggest concern the circumstance we are in, or is our biggest concern the Lord Himself? Do we only seek His hand or do we seek His face?

When He hides Himself from us He wants to know, will we abandon the prayer, get discouraged or defeated and give up, or press in all the more and pursue Him all the harder?

Let us learn this lesson well. There is something in the persistent, persevering, prevailing prayer that is good for us and draws us to the Father. Let us learn to pray much and often and to lose nothing or fall short of nothing because we did not ask and ask much.

The problem with many of our prayers is that they are too small and ask too little. If He answers in ways greater than we can ask or imagine, why not pray more than we ask or imagine.

How many of us ask for things like salvation? How many of us ask for things like holiness and righteousness? How many of us ask for things like Solomon asked for, for much more wisdom to discern well and lead well? How many of us ask for more faith and more faithfulness and more fruitfulness? How many of us ask for more of the power and presence of the Holy Spirit and more of the evidence of His fruit in our lives?

Jesus presents us with the stories of desperate people in the most impossible and desperate of situations and commends their great faith when against all odds and against much resistance they endeavor to persevere in prayer.

They who ask much enjoy much, for God loves to give much, even more than we can ask or imagine.

Who will plead? Who will persist? Who will persevere until our prayers are old and wrinkled and tried? Abraham prayed 25 years for a son. How old are your prayers? Do you have any 25-year-old prayers?

One of our 28-year-old prayers is being answered in three weeks in Moscow, ID. But I have started another prayer that I will take to my grave, the salvation of my children's children to the tenth generation.

God will have the measure of our hearts, He will draw out our seriousness and our intentions, He will expose to ourselves our words and actions and show us the true measure and depth of them.

Len Honcoop told me about people who would come into his office asking for a job and when he said he didn't have any openings he got responses like "Oh, OK, whatever, no big deal, just thought I'd ask, but oh well." They really didn't want work or care. Or they are drawing unemployment and they were insincerely trying to satisfy the government's requirement that you make a sincere effort each week to find work.

Are our prayers insincerely, half-heartedly, fulfilling some religious duty or are they earnest, pleading, begging? Are our prayers weak and inconsistent because we are drawing on our own strength or wisdom or ability?

Jesus knows how easy it is for us to begin a habit but how hard it is for us to continue. He is imploring us here against laziness and against unbelief. Countless thousands of Christians pray for things and then forget about it or move quickly on to other things. They ask for a little bit and since there is no quick answer they give up, what's the use, they say.

Scripture urges us again and again to be watchful in prayer or to pray without ceasing or to ask, seek and knock. Press in and press on, in the right time and season the answer will come. Think of Anna and Simeon in the temple all their lives praying for the Messiah and in their last years they saw Him.

Prayer is the gauge of spiritual life and health. With prayer our spiritual life flourishes and grows and without it, it declines and decays.

With all humility and earnestness cry out to God to teach you to pray. Cry out to Him to make you want to pray. Cry out to Him to make you hungry and thirsty and then hungrier and thirstier. Cry out to God to awaken your dull souls and sensitivities.

Cry out to God that through His own Son He would graciously and mercifully grant you His Holy Spirit to draw you and enlighten you and grant you this one request, to fill you with the knowledge of His Holy and perfect and sovereign will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding so that by His perfect will, according to His sovereign good pleasure you might be enabled by His Spirit to live lives worthy of your Lord, joyfully giving thanks to God.

**Prayer:**

Jesus, teach us again how to pray, teach us until a new longing begins to fill our cold, dry, empty souls. Teach us in your school of prayer. Show us again and again that your glory alone is worth living for, that your gifts are the best gifts, that your answers are the best answers. Increase in us a desire for the best things and increase in us a persistence in pursuing the best things, for in this prayer you delight to answer. Above all give us your Holy Spirit, for in your Spirit is truth and life and power and much fruit.