

“Prayer School”

Luke 11:1-13

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I knew it was almost time for school to begin when I walked into a Cracker Barrel last week. They had their Halloween and Thanksgiving merchandise on display...in July!

I'm not sure what month it was when the disciples asked Jesus to teach them to pray, but Jesus granted their request and classes began immediately. The School of Prayer was in session, and I suspect it never ended.

What did Jesus teach the disciples in that first class? There are two places we could turn for the answer to this question, Matthew 6:9-13 and today's text in Luke. While there are many similarities in these two accounts, there are also noticeable differences.

Matthew's version is longer and more formal. Luke abbreviated the Lord's Prayer and made it more direct and personal.

Matthew included it as a part of the Sermon on the Mount when Jesus taught the multitudes on a hillside overlooking the Sea of Galilee. Luke has Jesus responding to a request by his disciples when they asked him to teach them to pray.

Luke attached two parables to the Lord's Prayer, both intended to reveal the character and nature of God. If a man would grudgingly disrupt his family's sleep in the middle of the night to help a neighbor, how much more would a loving and generous God respond to our pleas for help at any time of the day or night? If an earthly father who is capable of making

mistakes would never intentionally deceive or harm his son, how much more can we trust our wise and caring heavenly Father to do what is best for us?

There is something else you need to know about Luke's account of the Lord's Prayer. The narrator frequently mentions Jesus praying, in contrast to Matthew who doesn't mention Jesus praying until the fourteenth chapter and John who doesn't mention Jesus praying until the final week of his life.

Luke has Jesus praying after he was baptized, prior to calling his disciples, on the Mount of Transfiguration, before he talked to his disciples about his impending death and while he was on the cross. Obviously, Luke wanted his readers to know how important prayer was to Jesus and should be to them.

It is apparent Luke believed no decision should be made without asking for guidance, and none of life's provisions should be received without saying thanks. Devotion to God and dependence upon God required fervent and faithful praying.

The most intriguing part of our text for me is found in the words of the disciples to Jesus when they asked him to teach them how to pray. Didn't they know how to pray? Well, of course they did. However, they came to the realization they didn't know how to pray like Jesus, and they wanted him to teach them what he knew.

This was not an uncommon request. Every rabbi or prophet, including John the Baptist, taught his disciples how to pray, so it was not unusual for the disciples to ask Jesus.

I do believe, though, there was an element of wonder and awe which struck them when they watched Jesus pray. I am confident they had never witnessed anyone pray like Jesus, which contributed to the timing of this request and the longing to know more.

Whose prayers have had this kind of impact upon you? While my heart has been touched by the prayers of many people, one in particular is Mrs. Marjorie Warren. I believe I told you about her on another occasion. She was on the Pastor Search Committee of one of my former churches.

The first time I met with this group, Mrs. Warren was asked to pray. Immediately, I knew why.

At some point while she was praying, I opened my eyes to get a glimpse of God. She prayed as if no one was in the room but God and her, and they were best friends. The sound of her voice and the sincerity of her words touched me deeply. I felt the same way every time I heard her pray in worship or in a class. I suspect the disciples experienced this every time they heard Jesus pray.

“Lord, teach us to pray,” the disciples said to Jesus after observing him in prayer, and he did. **If someone asked you to teach them to pray, what would you say?** I pondered this question for some time last week. Here are some of the things I would share.

Talk to God the same way you talk to the person you love and trust the most. Perhaps the most radical thing Jesus included in this prayer was the way he taught his disciples to address God as Father.

This is the word a child would use when speaking to her father. It paints a picture of an intimate relationship based upon mutual love, trust, respect and appreciation. It describes prayer as a conversation with God about this journey we are on and opens the door for a meaningful partnership.

I’m not sure we understand how radical this concept of God and prayer are. For the most part, the ancient Hebrews had not been taught God was this approachable. Even the Temple was designed to keep people at their proper distance from God with strict boundaries for Gentiles, women and priests, with no place for the sickest among them.

According to Jesus, though, anyone could talk to God at any time or place, regardless of their status in life. It made no difference if they were female or male, rich or poor, sick or well, educated or uneducated, Jew or Gentile, a part of the ruling class or a commoner; all had equal access to God.

No wonder the common people embraced this prayer and some religious leaders mocked it. It opened the door for those who felt they had been forgotten to sit in God's lap like a child would a loving parent, and it stripped those who claimed religious superiority of their arrogance and control over the masses.

What would I tell someone about how to pray? I would start where Jesus did. Talk to God like a child sitting in a parent's lap.

Secondly, approach God the same way you do the person you admire the most.

Intimacy does not undermine majesty or respect. To refer to God as Father doesn't make God any less God. Certainly, God is greater than we are in every way, but this doesn't make God unapproachable or inaccessible.

God is eager for us to know him and to join us on our pilgrimage. God wants to be involved in our daily struggles and joys and help us formalize our hopes and dreams, which should make us even more grateful, humble and respectful.

When you pray, offer to become the best team player you can be to make the world the best it can be, or as Jesus said, "To bring heaven on earth."

I have a good friend who says, "We know heaven will be wonderful. Right now we need to be doing everything we can to make earth like heaven." I believe that was Jesus' purpose and passion.

No phrase is used more often in scripture than "the kingdom of God." Jesus came on the scene preaching the good news of the Kingdom of God, and he showed us what it means to live the way God wants each of us to live—how to arrange our values and priorities, treat our enemies, handle our problems, spend our money, run our business, use our time, respond to adversity and be a good neighbor. He prayed for God's will to be done on earth as it is in heaven because he knew it would bring the best out in each one who asked for this, and it would create a just and peaceful world.

So, when you pray, ask God to help you do your part to make earth more like heaven. You can make a difference, and with God's help, you will.

When you pray, talk to God about how you feel and what you need the same way you talk to your doctor, counselor or best friend. Be specific. Include the necessities of life--food, clothing, shelter and companionship.

Confess your sins and ask for forgiveness, along with the readiness to forgive those who hurt you.

Ask to be spared the hardest trials of life, but if they come, ask for the ability to confront them with strength and courage.

It is never wrong to pray for what you need. What is sinful is to receive what you need and not share it with those who are struggling. There is no place in the Lord's Prayer for selfishness and indifference.

Are you aware that every pronoun referring to humans in the Lord's Prayer is plural? Our, us, we...praying should make us mindful of the common bond we share with all of God's children and the importance of being a good neighbor.

When you pray, make a commitment to God that you will share whatever He gives you. I am confident this will make God smile like it would any parent!

By the way, who taught you to pray? Did you learn by observing them, or did they talk to you about it? Have you passed on what you learned?

Who needs you to share with them what you know about prayer? How could you help them to understand the value of prayer and the importance of praying?

Perhaps you could begin by telling them the difference praying makes in your life. I know faith and prayer are profoundly personal, but I tend to think those around you will listen to instructions you give them and be more motivated to pray after they know what praying does for you.

I believe this was true for the disciples. I am certain their interest in learning more about how to pray arose from noticing the impact praying had on Jesus.

I have to believe after praying, Jesus was more focused and less distracted, more confident and less fearful, more determined and less timid, more hopeful and less discouraged, more patient and less impulsive, more peaceful and less fretful, more energized and less drained.

Maybe Jesus told the disciples prayer made it possible for him to keep his eyes on God when others' focus drifted, to resist temptation when others caved in, to accept stiff challenges when others turned them down, to take risks when others backed away, to serve when others demanded to be served, to make sacrifices when others refused to do their part, to be generous when others became more stingy, to be truthful when others chose to be deceptive, to build bridges when others built walls, to be humble when others boasted about their accomplishments, to confront evil when others ignored it, to right wrong when others accepted it, to seek reconciliation when others held grudges, to forgive when others became vindictive, to give people another chance when others condemned them, to console the grieving when others forgot them, to heal wounds when others inflicted pain, to feed the hungry when others let them starve, and to build God's kingdom on earth when others built their own.

Yes, I believe the disciples' request for prayer school was directly related to the impact praying had upon Jesus. They knew they needed God's help to be and do their best, too.

Do you know how much you need God's help to achieve your potential?

I wonder how more time in prayer would help you deal with your challenges and struggles.

I wonder who would be influenced by your courage, strength, tenacity, resilience, generosity, honesty, humility, compassion and selflessness.

I wonder who might ask you to open up a Prayer School.