

## **“Who Taught You to Pray?”**

**Luke 11:1-13**

Preached by Dr. Robert F. Browning, Pastor

First Baptist Church

Frankfort, Kentucky

January 28, 2018

This morning our attention turns to prayer as we continue to focus on our theme for 2018—**FBC263: A Call to Discipleship**. 263 is the number of times the word disciple or discipleship is repeated in the New Testament. This is in contrast to the word Christian, which is mentioned only three times and Christianity, which is never written.

This year our goal is to discover why the word ‘disciple’ was chosen so often by biblical writers to describe those who followed Jesus. What message were they sending their readers about what it means to follow Jesus and feed his sheep?

Through sermons and small group studies, we’ll answer these questions by finishing these two statements:

- 1. The call to follow Jesus is a call to...**
- 2. We feed Jesus’ sheep when we...**

We’ll focus on the first question this winter and the second one after summer.

In the first two sermons we discovered the call to follow Jesus is a call to **trust** and a call to **learn**. Added to this list today is the call to follow Jesus is a call to **pray**.

I have chosen Luke’s account of the Lord’s Prayer for today’s text. While there are many similarities between Luke’s version of the Lord’s Prayer and Matthew’s (Matthew 6:9-13), there are also noticeable differences.

Matthew's description 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 and came to the conclusion I would frame the answer around three questions: Why do we pray? How do we pray? When do we pray?

**Why do we pray?** I think there is a difference between the reasons we pray and the purpose of prayer. While there are many reasons to pray, there is only one purpose.

We pray because we are confused and need clarity, we have decisions to make and need guidance, we are sick and need healing, we have sinned and need forgiveness, we are afraid and need courage, we are weary and need strength, we are stressed and need peace, we are sad and need comforting, we are blessed and need to offer gratitude and we are concerned

about family members and friends and want God to help them. Of course, there are other reasons for praying that are valid and legitimate.

Prayer, however, has only one purpose, and this is to develop and maintain a close relationship with God. Strengthening this relationship of trust based upon unconditional love exceeds any request. This is why prayer naturally flows out of a heart that yearns for God.

**Having said this, how should we pray?** I'll share what has been helpful in my own prayer life.

***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, 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 the prayer in our text 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.

***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 lives to help us achieve our noblest dreams, which should make us even more grateful, humble and respectful.

***Be candid and tell God 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 and liberation from guilt.

Ask to be delivered from evil in its many forms, but if it comes your way, ask for the ability to confront it with strength and courage.

Ask God to help you become a person of integrity who lives by the Golden Rule—a person who is honest, trustworthy, reliable, dependable, compassionate, generous, kind, considerate, industrious, responsible, respectful, fair, humble and loyal.

Ask God for confidence to meet your challenges.

Ask for wisdom to learn from your mistakes.

Ask for willpower to resist temptation.

Ask for help to rise above selfishness and greed.

Ask for patience when answers or solutions don't come.

Ask for a heart big enough to love even your enemies.

It is never wrong to pray for what you need or want. Just make sure what you desire is compatible with God's hopes and dreams for you.

In addition, share what God gives you and use it to make the world better for all people. There is no place in the Lord's Prayer for selfishness and indifference, indicated by the abundance of pronouns in the Lord's Prayer. As a matter of fact, every pronoun is plural—our, us, we—reminding us of the common bond we share with all of God's children and the importance of being a good neighbor.

I have discovered how we view God when we pray dictates the way we pray. Prayers offered to a loving God whom we respect and trust change the way we think, believe and live.

**When should you pray?** This depends on how close you want to be to God.

The more you pray, the closer you will be. This is why I urge you to carry on a conversation with God throughout your day and to allow the Holy Spirit to be your constant companion.

**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 purpose and value of prayer?

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 knowing 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 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 be of service 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 Jesus to teach them how to pray was directly related to the impact praying had upon Jesus. They knew they needed God's help to become who he was.

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

I wonder how more time in prayer would change your relationship with God and 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 teach them to pray.

There is one way to find out.