

## “Learning Prayer from Jesus”

Luke 11:1-4

July 30, 2017

This morning we turn to Luke 11 which begins with the Lord’s Prayer.

Interestingly, this lesson on prayer follows in Luke’s telling the story of Mary and Martha, two sisters who were serving Jesus when he came to their house. But Mary stopped and chose to sit at Jesus’s feet and listen, to pursue relationship with him. Martha, on the other hand, kept on doing and then added complaining, saying, “Jesus tell my sister to keep working here”. Jesus called Mary’s choice better, because Martha was distracted with all her doing.

When you study the Bible, context is very important, what comes before and after help us understand a particular teaching. I find it interesting that the lesson on prayer comes right after Mary and Martha. For one of the ways we can tell if we are like Mary or like Martha is by examining our prayer life. A great temptation is to neglect time with Jesus in order to do stuff for Jesus. Both are vital.

I confess I fit more in the Martha category, especially if you examine my prayer life. And in a church like ours, my guess is we have lots of Marthas. In fact, I’ve heard from a few of you asking when we are going to start talking about doing stuff; we have to get off our knees and get to work. Well, not so fast, because what the Lord teaches us here is that being on our knees IS a major aspect of getting to work!

Earlier this summer, Pastor Mike addressed early section of the prayer that God is our Father, a description of intimacy and of character. That character of love as a Father provides the context for the kind of prayer he models for us.

Today, we’re going to examine the second part of the prayer, the Kingdom and the tools needed to live as kingdom citizens. The prayer from our knees gives us hints as to what we do when we get up from our knees.

Luke 11:1 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.”<sup>2</sup> And he said to them, “When you pray, say:

“Father, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come.

<sup>3</sup> Give us each day our daily bread,

<sup>4</sup> and forgive us our sins,

for we ourselves forgive everyone who is indebted to us.

And lead us not into temptation.”

There is a plant that grows widely in Mississippi where I grew up that we have here, too. It’s kudzu. You know it as a leafy vine that seems to take over everything if untended. In fact, kudzu is known as the vine that ate the South! It starts small, but grows and grows and grows.

Just like the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God is not some realm, like the United Kingdom. It is more a rule, an administration of God that is going on in this world. When Jesus came as King, his life, his values, his priorities were planted in this world and grow and grow, in part through the ministry of his people, kingdom citizens, like us.

It is almost like the kingdom has come like kudzu and its effect spreads out through his people in this world. Learning to pray with Jesus teaches us to pray for that! In fact, this prayer sounds a little like a battle cry. We pray in worship each week: your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Can you imagine that? For the earth to be filled to be more like heaven! The reign, the love, the mercy, the justice, the flourishing of God to spread through this earth just as his reign is complete in heaven!

And to move us toward that flourishing kingdom, the Lord’s prayer teaches us to ask for tools, for the means by which that kingdom expands in this world through us. These means and tools are counter-intuitive. They seem to fly in the face of growth and influence. Why? Because they clearly focus on God being the agent, doing his work through us as his instruments. Jesus is leading us to say, “God, we understand who you are, and would you use us to have more of you represented in this world”. In a very counter intuitive way, from our knees we say we stand ready for action!

What are these kingdom tools for which Jesus teaches us to ask?

### 1. Content Dependence

Verse 3 says, *Give us each day our daily bread*. On its face, this is simple enough. We pray that the Lord give us every day what we need. On the other hand it is hard for us to know what this feels like, because so very few of us know what it feels like to genuinely be hungry. We live in a land of abundance.

But we do know what this means. Here's how. The word "daily" is a strange word. In fact there is only one other place in the entire corpus of ancient Greek literature that it is used except for in reference to the Lord's prayer. Language experts suggest Jesus is teaching us to pray something like this: Give us today the bread that doesn't run out.<sup>1</sup> Of course, "bread" here isn't simply about bread, but rather, content dependence for his gift of all we need to live, to survive, even to thrive in our lives.

So it seems the Lord is teaching us to give over to himself one of our most basic fears: the fear that we won't have enough. That we'll run out of what we most need. We all know EXACTLY what that means and how it feels: that fear that takes up residence deep inside? It gnaws at us deep within and destroys our ability to live with a sense of peace in the present and erodes any confidence of being taken care of tomorrow.

We feel it when we look at our resources and wonder if we have enough to pay for school tuition AND cover the cost of an expensive medical treatment that is necessary. We feel it when we look at our emotional resources and fear we don't have the emotional bandwidth to continue loving a difficult person in our lives. We feel it when we are physically exhausted and think I have nothing left to give here; I just can't go on.

But how might it change how we live if we leave behind the crippling fear that "I won't have enough"? The fear that my Father does not care enough to provide? It will make us generous people. If I don't have to be crippled with providing for myself, but realizing God provides what I need, my life will be freer to give you what you need. When I run out God supplies more. I can afford to give until I feel a bit spent, because of God's supply. After all, this is a prayer for OUR bread, not MY bread. If I truly believe God may not give what I want, but what I need, then I can afford to open my hands and help be God's agent of provision in what you need.

Also, we will begin to look at what we have as stewards; what we have are God's gifts entrusted to us to be used for HIS purposes. If you have been given much, might it be that God has provided abundance to you in order to relieve another's distress? You can afford to look at what you have that way when you leave behind the fear of not having enough. Living in content dependence leads to a big hearted and kingdom building generosity. Are you content in dependence enough to give your life away pursuing God's priorities and kingdom rather than building your own?

### 2. Living in Freedom of Forgiveness

Verse 4 reads: *and forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone who is indebted to us*.

Here we find yet another kingdom tool: forgiveness. By praying this, we acknowledge that we are sinners, coming to a holy God. Just as we ask for a daily provision from our Father, we also ask for "daily pardon."<sup>2</sup> That sense of forgiveness brings to us an experiential freedom, the freedom of forgiveness.

When we pray this prayer, most often we recite Matthew's version: forgive our debts. But Greek like English has different words for sin. Luke manages to use two in his version: sins or trespasses and debts. The distinction is something like this: debts refer more to the unfulfilled obligations of holiness we leave undone, all the ways we've failed to fulfill what God asks: the love not given, the kindness not offered, the suffering not relieved. We have failed in our

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<sup>1</sup> Kenneth Bailey, *Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2008), p. 121.

<sup>2</sup> Phil Ryken, *Luke, vol. 1, Reformed Expository Commentary* (Philipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2009), 577.

obligation of perfect life and loyalty to God by leaving good undone. But trespasses or sins speak more to the wrong we've done, the ways we have acted in contrast to God's holiness. Not only did we leave good undone, but the very things we do are wrong and sinful. When we confess, we confess both: we've not been the people God desires.

Because of our sin—both what we've left undone and by what we have actually done, we owe God our lives. Our sin calls for our death as punishment. Yet, that debt of life is forgiven. Why? Because Jesus lived a perfect life of doing everything good AND gave his life to remove our guilt by his own blood. Jesus gave his life to perfectly obey and to pay MY debt, your debt. By the Lord Jesus's work of a perfect life and on the cross we are given freedom before our heavenly Father, freedom from our guilt and our shame. Not because he simply looks the other way, but rather because our guilt has already been punished in Jesus! By his stripes we are healed, Isaiah says. Through the work of Jesus, reconciliation with our Father begins.

Yet there is a connection between forgiveness received and forgiveness offered, *forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone who is indebted to us*. This may sound like a condition, but rather it is given as a description, an assertion. When we forgive others, it does not somehow merit God's forgiveness of us; rather, it serves as a window into our hearts. If we understand the enormity of our debt against God that is forgiven in Christ, then we will turn that mercy received toward others who sin against us. Those who have received freedom from the burden of our guilt before God, offer that freedom into the relationships around us. Let me say it simply: Forgiven people forgive! As Packer says it: "Those who live by God's forgiveness must imitate it; one whose only hope is that God will not hold his faults against him forfeits his right to hold others' faults against them."<sup>3</sup>

On June 17, 2015, a group of men and women were studying Mark 4 in a little church in downtown Charleston, SC. A parable about soils, hard soil where the nothing can grow and good soil where crazy surprising, unexpected growth happens. They talked about what kind of soils characterized their hearts as one boy pulled out a gun, and fired 77 bullets, killing 9 of those fellow studiers in a torrent of racism and hatred in hopes of starting a race war.

One of those saints killed was Sharonda Singleton, the mother of Chris Singleton, an 18 year-old African-American young man who was transformed before our watching nation. He was the oldest son, just 18. And once the coroner identified that Sharonda was indeed among the deceased, Chris became like a father to his sister, Camyrn, 15 and brother Caleb, 12. He had to walk from the coroner's office and tell his brother and sister that their mother would never be coming home again because a young man hated her and them because of their skin color. How would you feel? What would you do with that unpayable debt that in hate a boy took your mother's life, and the lives of other aunts, uncles, grandparents, co-workers, brothers and sisters? The mother who loved you so well, taught, supported and raised you was taken from you for such a STUPID reason as racism.

Chris, as a young man who had grown up in the church hearing about grace and forgiveness, determined to forgive. The following night as he stood before cameras at his baseball field together with his coaches, Chris demonstrated what sort of soil characterized his heart: a crazy, surprising, gracious soil in which Jesus is alive. When asked what he would say to his mother's killer, he replied, "I forgive him. Love is stronger than hate." He removed the microphone from his shirt, walked to his car, closed the door and began to weep. He wept for the pain; he wept for the debt; he wept for the strength to actually forgive, and turn this debt, this pain over to the Lord. Chris Singleton became in that moment and the moments following a mentor to me, to you, to his city and to our nation. There was no race war instigated because as Chris testified, Love is stronger than hate. An 18 year-old African American young man taught me that, what it looks like to live that. Forgiven people forgive.

I wonder who is your debtor, the one who has offended you, either by leaving some deed of kindness undone, or by harming you in sin? What person comes to mind this morning? You see, forgiveness is a turning away from repaying the debt of sin with vengeance or punishment. Forgiveness states that I turn away from seeking to make you feel the pain I feel, that need to make you hurt because you hurt me.

Honestly, forgiveness is often excruciatingly difficult, because it calls us to turn away from something we feel we are owed. Yet hanging onto offenses perpetuates within us bitterness, anger and a thirst for revenge. Anne Lemott famously wrote once: a lack of forgiveness is like we eat rat poison and expect someone else to die.

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<sup>3</sup> J.I. Packer, *Growing in Christ* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1994), p. 193.

True forgiveness releases someone from our debt. It cancels an obligation. It may not include a reconciliation in relationship, especially if there has been some sort of abuse. But forgiveness revokes the hunger and thirst for revenge, to pay someone back for the hurt they've done to us. It stops the cycles of recrimination and accusation that makes the world go round far too often. Forgiveness is a kingdom tool to bring life and freedom into a space mired in accusation and death. It changes the world. We need the power to get off our knees and forgive; but, it won't happen unless we have been on our knees.

Further, it is impossible unless we remember the work of Jesus for us. Is there someone you need to forgive? Does it cause a pit in your stomach? Look again at the cross where you will see all your sin, your debt nailed there, cancelled and remembered no more. Then pray, asking for strength. Then turn toward the one indebted to you and forgive.

### 3. Guided by our Father

Finally, being guided by our Father is yet one more kingdom tool. Do you ever feel lost in this world, pulled this way and that? The Avett Brothers are some of my favorite musicians and they describe this feeling in their song, *Ill with Want*. The refrain says, "Something has me, O something has me, acting like someone I know isn't me, ill with want and poisoned by this ugly greed." I know that feeling. Do you? Being dragged off into temptation and feeling powerless to fight against it?

If so, call out to your Father. V. 4, [lead us not into temptation](#). God doesn't tempt us, James 1:13 says. So this is not asking God to stop tempting me. Rather, this is the request of a weak person, who understands that when the desires of my flesh are compounded by the allure of evil, I have no hope of standing against it without the strength of God. This prayer is calling out to our Father to guide us safely through all the things that trap me in this world. It is the cry of a sojourner who cries out: Don't let me get lost. Don't let me get trapped. Bring me through, Father.

This is not the prayer of a disciple in retreat, being cloistered away from all the influences of the world. No, this is the prayer of a disciple living as salt and light as a kingdom citizen in this world. The one going out there, seeking to live for the truth before a watching world, prays this, yet ever mindful of the power of temptation that we can NEVER withstand on our own. Our Father will guide us through.

I need this prayer, because lately I've seen all too clearly that this world is not like it is in heaven. Our lives are filled with suffering and hospitals and death and suicide, and broken marriages, shattered dreams and wandering children, and anger and grief. I need this prayer in my life, daily bread, daily forgiveness, daily guidance because I have trouble sometimes concentrating on anything beyond today.

Maybe you do too. The really good news is that our Father hears. Our Father cares. Go into this world filled with dependence, armed with forgiveness, walking in the paths of his guidance. When we do, watch the kingdom spread like kudzu—from Central, to St. Louis, to Missouri, to the USA to the world.