

Sermon for Pentecost 10 (Series C) / Prayer
Text: Luke 11:1-13 Preached on 07-29-2007

Introduction:

The President of the United States is not a part of our everyday lives. Sure, he sometimes interrupts our favorite television show by addressing the nation. Aside from that, however, we don't have regular, on-going access to him. Most of the time, he is surrounded by bodyguards and advisors. Although he occasionally greets visitors at the White House, can just anyone drop by for a visit? Hardly! Visitors must have received a formal invitation before gaining an audience with the President. Gaining an audience with the Lord is much easier! The reason why is because we have already received a formal invitation to approach Him anytime: 24 / 7! In prayer we have an open audience with the Lord.

How are you using your audience with the Lord? Do you pray often? Do you pray for the right things and in the right way? What's your attitude when praying? Are your prayers getting through; are they being heard? Are they being answered? I can't tell you how many "self-help" books have been written to answer those questions on prayer. But I can tell you that every one of them is unnecessary. They are unnecessary because all of our questions about prayer are answered in this book (The Holy Bible). In Scripture Alone,

Theme: The Lord Teaches Us To Pray!
Part I: For the proper things (vv. 1-4, 13)
Part II: In the proper way (vv. 5-13)

Part I: For the proper things (vv. 1-4, 13)

We know that Jesus had a very active prayer life. He spent several hours in prayer with His heavenly Father on numerous occasions. The disciples, then, probably had many opportunities to listen in on some of Jesus' prayers. In doing so, they must have become painfully aware of how flawed their own prayers were. They wanted to change. They wanted their prayers to be more like those of Jesus. So they asked Him, "**Lord, teach us to pray**" (v. 1). Jesus answered their request by giving them the words to a model prayer, one that would shape and guide all their future prayers.

The pattern (or outline) of prayer that Jesus taught His disciples has come to be known as the Lord's Prayer. It has become very familiar to Christians everywhere through repeated, sometimes mindless, use. But Jesus never intended for the Lord's Prayer to be rattled off with very

little or no thought to its words. He did intend for it to serve as a model to pattern our daily prayers after. Simply put, the Lord's Prayer teaches us how to pray. Specifically, it teaches us what to pray for. You may be surprised to learn that the Lord's Prayer only contains one petition for material blessings: Give us this day our daily bread. Every other petition deals with the spiritual side of things! Whether we're praying for God's name to be kept holy; for His kingdom to come; for His will to be done; for His forgiveness to be given; for His help in overcoming temptation; or for His protection from the devil and every evil, the emphasis is on spiritual things 6 out of 7 times. Spiritual blessings, therefore, more so than physical blessings, are what make for proper, God-pleasing prayer.

Application:

A man skeptical about God's love and concern for him thought to himself, "I wonder if God can really hear me?" So he prayed, "Hey God! I'll make a deal with You. If You give me a promotion at work, a flashier car, and a bigger house, I'll never doubt You again." As ridiculous as this man's prayer sounds, the truth is that our prayers often sound very similar. Our prayers, too, tend to emphasize physical (or material) things over and above spiritual things. We are quick to pray for good health, fulfillment in our jobs, happiness in our marriage, and maybe even for a winning lottery ticket. If we were to chart all of our requests, though, keeping track of the number made for physical (or material) things versus the number made for spiritual blessings and divine guidance, we would be shocked to see just how frequently we fail to follow the prayer-pattern Jesus has provided for us in the Lord's Prayer.

BUT Jesus, who always prayed for proper, God-pleasing things, encourages us to regard spiritual prayers as a greater importance and higher necessity than physical (or material) prayers. He says, "**Seek first My kingdom and My righteousness, and all these (earthly) blessings will be given to you as well**" (Matthew 6:33). Jesus always prayed for the right things because He was perfect. We, however, are not perfect. So we often, "**Do not know what we ought to pray for**" (Romans 8:26). That is precisely why Jesus promises the Holy Spirit, "**To those who ask Him**" (v. 13)! The Holy Spirit gives us greater understanding of God's Word, deeper appreciation for our Savior, stronger trust in God's promises, and a firmer commitment to live with love for one another. These spiritual blessings, along with every physical need, makes the Holy Spirit the greatest thing we could

pray for. Because it is the Holy Spirit who works in us the desire to follow the prayer-pattern Jesus has provided for us in the Lord's Prayer.

Transition:

No matter what way you look at it, *The Lord Teaches Us To Pray!* In addition to teaching us to pray for the proper things, the Lord also teaches us to pray...

Part II: In the proper way (vv. 5-13)

In prayer we come and speak to God in the way a little girl does to her father. Sally, for example, does not hesitate to trouble dad when she wants something. She keeps on pestering him until she gets what she wants. Jesus illustrated this by telling the story of a man who came and asked his friend to lend him some bread so that he could feed an unexpected houseguest. The only problem was that it was quite late. The other man had been in bed for some time. So he refused his friend's request. He said, "No!" **"Because of the man's persistence" (v. 8)**, however, he eventually got up and gave his friend as much as he needed. The word for *persistence* here suggests unashamed boldness, the kind that keeps on pestering someone until it pays off; until it gets results. That's how the Lord teaches us to pray: with bold persistence.

No loving father would play a mean trick on his son when approached by him with a simple request. If Bobby, for example, asked his dad for something good and necessary, he wouldn't receive something harmful instead. Jesus illustrated this by asking, **"Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give Him a snake instead? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion" (vv. 11-12)?** So if human fathers know how to answer their children's requests by giving them good, beneficial gifts, how much more will God answer our prayers? They aren't always the answers we are looking for. They don't always come when we want them to. But the answers God gives are always the answer of a wise and loving Father. God's promise to answer all of our prayers teaches us to pray with great confidence.

Application:

A Pastor once scolded his congregation for coming to church without bringing their umbrellas. Apparently, they had all prayed for rain the Sunday before. See how much easier it is to ask God for something than it is to actually trust He will give it to us? I wonder how many times we've prayed for something, either here at church or at home, not

really believing that God would respond. At other times, we just fling our prayers at the Lord, demanding that He give us everything we ask for RIGHT NOW! When God delays, it can be easy for us to simply stop praying. We can feel it too. We feel our prayers diminishing, both in length and in number. We feel ourselves giving up on the Lord faster than we first approached Him to begin with. Before you know it, we may no longer be praying at all. No doubt about it! Our prayers frequently lack the persistence and confidence that should characterize our prayer life.

BUT Jesus, who always prayed with persistence and confidence, encourages us to keep on praying. The NIV translation, unfortunately, does not bring out the full sense of Jesus' encouragement. A better translation of His words would be, **"Keep on asking...; keep on seeking...; keep on knocking"** (v. 9). In other words, Jesus wants us to do more than pray about something once and then stop. He wants us to pester the daylights out of Him. He wants us to constantly annoy Him. He wants us to keep on bugging Him; not giving up. Jesus promises that such prayers, prayers that are characterized by continuous, on-going action (or asking) will receive an answer. That promise, God's promise for a good, beneficial answer, encourages us to pray not only with persistence, but with confidence too.

Conclusion:

J. Hudson Taylor was an English missionary to China who founded the China Inland Mission. At his death it included 205 mission stations with more than 800 missionaries and 125,000 Chinese Christians. He attributed the mission's astonishing success to the fact that he got up early every morning to pray. I'll use the same analogy he once used. He asked, "What sense does it make to have a concert first and tune your instruments after it's over?" In the same way, what sense does it make to go through your whole day and pray after it's over, when you're comfortably in bed and too tired for proper, God-pleasing prayer?

No wonder Jesus Himself, a real human faced with a busy schedule and an overwhelming ministry, began His day with prayer. Mark tells us, **"Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house, and went off to a solitary place, where He prayed"** (Mark 1:35). So in addition to giving us a model to pattern our prayers after in the Lord's Prayer, Jesus also gives us an example to follow in His own prayer life. There too, He teaches us to pray (1) for the proper things and (2) in the proper way. All-in-all, *The Lord Teaches Us To Pray!* Amen!