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Luke 11:1-28 – How to Pray and More on Spiritual Warfare

“And I tell you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.” -- Jesus, Luke 11:9

Today’s lesson opens with a master course on prayer. **Read Luke 11:1-13.** As was His custom, Jesus daily withdrew from the crowds, and His disciples, to pray, sometimes all night. His discipline impressed the disciples, who request He teach them to pray. What follows has historically been referred to as “the Lord’s prayer” because He gave it. But upon inspection perhaps it is better titled “the Disciple’s prayer” based on the request to be forgiven of sins, of which the Lord Jesus was never guilty. It is also noteworthy that we learn John the Baptist had taught his disciples to pray; we have no record what John taught, but we can surmise it centered on forgiveness and repentance in preparation for the Messiah. Bottom line: Prayer must be taught.

Jesus starts with “*when you pray*”, not “*if*”. We are commanded to pray, and prayer is one of the three main daily disciplines (with Bible reading and fellowship) for a healthy Christian walk. Dr Martin Lloyd-Jones stated, “Prayer is beyond any question the highest activity of the human soul. Man is at his greatest and highest when, upon his knees, he comes face-to-face with God.”¹

Matthew 6:5-15 relates this prayer in the Sermon on the Mount, making it a teaching early in Jesus’ earthly three-year ministry. Jesus would repeat His messages as He went along, allowing His disciples to ingest the content and fix it in their minds. In Matthew’s context, Jesus warned the crowd against prayer as a way of drawing attention to self rather than to the object of our prayer. Rather, He taught them to pray to God in secret. Here in Luke, He is responding to the disciples’ request to be taught, so this is a separate, later event.

So what did He give them? Rather than a prayer to be memorized and repeated (as is the custom in many worship services, which does serve a useful teaching purpose) it actually forms a framework of required elements an effective prayer features. Starting with the address of God as “our Father”—a revolutionary teaching to Jewish ears of His day—we see an outline of adoration, gratitude, confession, and petition. This is a prayer construct for Christians, for only one born from above has the right to address the Creator of the universe as “Father”. Then outlined is: Highlight of His holy Name; that His kingdom will come in power; the

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Our desire is to witness God’s work in transforming hearts.
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acknowledgment that all our daily provisions come from His hand; the need for forgiveness, received by us and extended to others; and the request to be led away from our only enemy, the devil and his powers. It takes about 20 seconds to recite Jesus' words so a robust prayer that fleshes out this outline is more in view. These are the minimum principles sufficient to the task, include each one when you pray.

Having provided that structure, Jesus addresses the need for persistence in praying with a short parable. A man, needing to show hospitality, awakens his friend at midnight asking for three loaves of bread. Although an imposition, the friend is persuaded to leave the comfort of bed to answer the request. Jesus establishes the principle that in order to receive one must ask/seek/knock, continuously--James 4:2b: "You do not have, because you do not ask." In contrast to the sleepy friend, the Father in heaven desires to answer us and, being a good father, always gives us what we need. Pointedly, Jesus even makes the comparison that we humans, even though evil, know how to give our children good gifts—how much more the heavenly Father gifts us with what is truly needed: *The Holy Spirit!* Our need of the Spirit becomes more important with this next section.

Read 11:14-26. Prayer is a spiritual exercise and Luke goes directly to an incident involving spiritual warfare. Upon another successful exorcism, people murmur that Jesus' ability must come from practicing powers of

Beel'zebul, considered a prince of evil, was a heathen deity of the Philistines.
Baal'zebub, god of flies became (derisively):
Baal'zebul, god of dung by the Jews.

Beelzebul, the prince of demons! Jesus, fully aware of such talk and their desire to continue to test Him, responds to their thoughts in a way which defines the battle lines. (President Lincoln borrowed Jesus' reference to the "house divided" for his senatorial campaign in 1858.) Jesus' point is the good works He did were not for the demons but against them. This reveals the

crowd's fickleness in attributing an evil motive to Jesus. Then, His reference to "the finger of God" points directly to Exodus 8:19, where Pharaoh's fake magicians admit they cannot keep up with God's plagues. Jesus implies their "exorcisms" at that time were just as fake as the Egyptian magicians (e.g., the sons of Sceva, Acts 19:13-16). Now, time and again Jesus confirmed the fact of actual exorcisms; in fact, every salvation story involves Jesus breaking us away from the power of sin and the devil (see Acts 26:18). The main point: Jesus casts Satan as a "strong man" but One who is stronger attacks and easily overcomes him (v. 22). We mortals are caught in the crossfire of a war that began before man's fall in the Garden, between the rebellious evil power of Satan and the much greater divine power of God. Finally, there are two groups: for or against Jesus.

The last section of our text today gives insight into how the demon world seems to need a host—a person or a place—to possess. Without that, the demons appear restless and purposeless. So, when ejected from such a host, if that place does not replace the vacancy with something, those demons return with a sevenfold increase in presence or power. Clearly, when a demon gets dispossessed the person needs the indwelling of the Holy Spirit to preclude such a terrible turn of events. This is why the New Testament writers consistently tell us to put off our selfish and evil ways and put on the things of Christ (one example: Ephesians 4:20-24).

1. Lloyd-Jones, M., *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount*, Eerdmans Publishing, pg 322.

Questions To Ponder Further: 1. *What is meant when we pray, "Your kingdom come"?* 2. *Have you considered the spiritual war raging around us? Perhaps you attribute fighting with a physical cause. But the actual cause of all strife is spiritual. Meditate on James 4:1-10.*

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