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The Kingdom Way: Pray, Pray, Pray

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TEXT: Luke 11:1-13 (ESV)

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." And he said to them, "When you pray, say: 'Father, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread, and forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone who is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation.'"

And he said to them, "Which of you who has a friend will go to him at midnight and say to him, 'Friend, lend me three loaves, for a friend of mine has arrived on a journey, and I have nothing to set before him'; and he will answer from within, 'Do not bother me; the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed. I cannot get up and give you anything'? I tell you, though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, yet because of his impudence he will rise and give him whatever he needs. 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. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened. What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will instead of a fish give him a serpent; or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"

In the book of Acts, followers of Jesus were referred to as people who belong to "The Way." Believing in Jesus Christ as the way of having a saving relationship with God, issues forth into a new way of living life. So, they conducted their lives in the Kingdom of God way seeking first the kingdom and His righteousness, just as Jesus taught them to do. In Luke 10-11, there are three stories in which Jesus points out the kingdom way of living for those who follow him. The first tells us that the Kingdom Way is exercising generous, radical love. The second story, about Mary and Martha, teaches us that the Kingdom Way is more than serving Jesus, but also letting Jesus serve you. And finally, we have today's passage before us where Jesus teaches the importance of prayer for all the citizens of His kingdom. You see, Jesus prayed a lot. He set quite an example for his

disciples. Pastor S.D. Gordon, in his little book *Quiet Talks on Prayer*, makes this observation about the prayer life of Jesus, how much prayer meant to Jesus.

It was not only his regular habit, but his resort in every emergency, however slight or serious. When perplexed, he prayed. When hard pressed by work, he prayed. When hungry for fellowship, he found it in prayer. He chose his associates and received his messages upon his knees. If tempted, he prayed. If criticized, he prayed. If fatigued in body or weary in spirit. He had recourse to this one unailing habit of prayer. Prayer brought him unmeasured power at the beginning and kept the flow unbroken and undiminished. There was no emergency, no difficulty, no necessity, no temptation that would not yield to prayer.

So his disciples, seeing how much Jesus valued prayer, asked him to teach them to pray, and in response to the request, Jesus gave them two valuable things. First, he gave them a prayer to use. He taught them the Lord's Prayer, which is sometimes called the disciples' prayer. And I've also heard it referred to as the kingdom prayer. I recently covered the Lord's Prayer in a sermon series last spring, so I'll just offer up a quick summary today of that prayer. In this prayer, Jesus is giving instruction on what to pray about. It's a pattern or an outline for us to use as his followers. It's not given simply to recite unthinkingly. First, you address God as your loving father Jesus teaches us, and then first, pray to God that His person, God, the Father, would be worshipped and honored above everything else. Second, pray that God's program, the kingdom, would be established so that He'll rule over all. Next, pray for daily provision – daily bread – then ask for pardon for your failures in being obedient in your love towards him, a neighbor. Finally ask for God's protection from the evil one who seeks to destroy our relationship with God. “When you pray,” Jesus said, “Pray about these matters.”

Will God always answer, can I trust him? That question could have been rolling around in the heads of those disciples that day. It still rolls around in our heads as well sometimes. So, Jesus gave them a picture of the hearer of prayer, that would encourage them to keep praying. He told a story meant to encourage citizens of God's kingdom to pray boldly and confidently. Jesus said,

Suppose one of you has a friend and you go to him at midnight and say to him, “Friend, lend me three loaves of bread. I've had a guest show up and I have nothing to serve him for a meal. Help me out.” And the friend answers you from within, “Don't bother me,” and then gives you some weak excuses for not

helping you out. [Jesus goes on to say,] I tell you, even though this friend won't get up to help you because he's your friend, at least he'll get up and give you what you need just to get you out of his hair, or to fulfill the cultural responsibility to be hospitable to village guests.

Jesus, you see, had an effective way of arguing from the human to the divine. He believed human analogies could help people to see God's nature and will. So he's saying, take the very best of human beings and God is all that and incomparably more. So we say if a friend, a human friend, however unwilling, can be induced to get up and give help, how much more will God, your Heavenly Father, be ready to supply your needs? His love and faithfulness is incomparable to that friend's. It surpasses any earthly friendship you may have. The God to whom you pray has an integrity that He will not violate. And beyond this, know he loves you.

So Jesus authoritatively sums up the point he's making. "And I tell you. Ask. It'll be given you. Seek, you'll find. Knock. And the door will be open to you." By the way, the verb tense he's using here is of continued action. Keep on asking, keep on seeking, keep on knocking. And God will hear you and respond. The parable is anticipating. Then the next verse, which reveals the grace and the goodness of the God to whom we pray. He's our Heavenly Father. Jesus points out "What Father among you would give your children something harmful if you, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more" (there we go again) how much more will the Heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him?" God is a loving Father who cares for His adopted children through Christ and is ready and willing to listen to them and answer their prayers. The loving parent will always give a child gifts and those gifts will be good. And those who ask of God can be assured that God will give them even better gifts than any human parent can give. Again, Jesus uses that "how much more" argument. And He says, "If you sinful parents know how to give good gifts, how much more will the Holy will the Heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to His adopted children who ask him?" God is a father of love and honor that people can trust and have complete assurance that their prayers will be heard by him; and the one to whom they pray is more than willing to answer their requests and to give them the greatest gift of the Holy Spirit, who will empower and guide the believer in their lives as they serve Him faithfully. Through the working of the spirit, believers will begin to reflect the mind and manner of Jesus in their lives, in their daily living, in their act of love for others and obedience to the Father. Jesus is promising that God will answer that prayer as you ask for the Holy Spirit. That's a life-changing promise to claim for your prayer

life. You could say that while prayer changes things, it most definitely changes us in the most positive ways imaginable. He gives the spirit who shapes and molds us into something beautiful for God.

So we have a prayer outline and an assuring encouragement for followers of Jesus to always be praying confidently, believing in God's goodness and power and love. And that you can lean on God, believing in the power of prayer because you know the kind of being the great hero of prayer is. He's your loving father who wants the best for you. As a hymn writer who reminds us: [singing]

No earthly father loves like thee,
No mother half so mild,
Bears and forbears as thou hast done,
With me, thy sinful child.

So he promises: ask, it will be given. Seek, you will find. Knock, the door will be open to you. What a glorious promise this is. If you are a member of God's Kingdom through faith in Jesus Christ, you will find your strength and help for daily living and service to Jesus by continually and confidently approaching your Heavenly Father in prayer. It's a vital part of kingdom living.

So pray like Jesus, like Jesus taught, like Jesus did at all times. Pray in all places, in all things. Jesus was always off spending time with his father in prayer, as you read through the Gospels before daily tasks and major decisions and events. And even when he was on the cross suffering and dying to pay for our sins, Jesus was praying right up to His last breath. "Father into your hands I commend my spirit." And always be asking, always be asking for a fresh indwelling of the Holy Spirit in your life. Scripture encourages us to keep being filled with the Holy Spirit. We find that in Ephesians 5:18 from the Apostle Paul, he says it's vital, keep being filled. That happens as we pray. It's important for us today in the church.

You see to ponder this question: how did the early church with all the obstacles before them, all human odds against them, not just surviving but thriving after the ascension of Jesus? How did they manage to maintain the fire, the confidence, the passion, and boldness and joy and effectiveness, effectiveness for the gospel that turned their ancient world upside down? How did that happen? Well, as you read the Book of Acts in the New Testament letters that follow, you discover they prayed. They were praying in Jerusalem for the power from on high to come as Jesus had instructed them. They

prayed constantly in all circumstances, good or bad. They prayed for power to fill them to witness, and to be faithful for the Gospel. They prayed for God to shape them and use them to His glory. They prayed for His guidance and wisdom and all their decision making. They were totally dependent on God's help in all things. They prayed. You see those disciples of Jesus took their Lord's promises and instructions to heart, and prayed and prayed some more. After the ascension and great things happened in their lives and all around them. The Holy Spirit of God went to work in them and through them in mighty ways, and those promises of Jesus were fulfilled in their lives.

I want to assure you that they are still being fulfilled in people's lives today as they pray. One of the most inspirational books I've read was written by Pastor Jim Cymbala of the Brooklyn Tabernacle Church. It was entitled *Fresh Wind, Fresh Fire*. And he tells the story of how his dying little church was having very little impact in their community turned to prayer. And the and he tells of the amazing things that God did. It all began on a Sunday evening worship service when, in front of a small group of attendees, things were looking so bad that Cymbala broke down and wept five minutes into his sermon. And as he wept, he invited the people that were there to come up to the front and join him. And they began to pray. "Help us. Help us." And the spirit of God came upon them. That moment proved to be the spiritual breakthrough. That congregation needed. Cymbala writes

That evening, when I was at my lowest, confounded by obstacles, bewildered by the darkness that surrounded us, unable even to continue preaching, I discovered an astonishing truth. God is attracted to weakness. He can't resist those who humbly and honestly admit how desperately they need him. Our weakness, in fact, makes room for his power.

And he talks about they're praying. The rest is history. The prayer meetings became the center of their ministry, and God did supernatural things in people's lives, in the congregation and in the surrounding community. It's quite a story about the power of prayer and the Holy Spirit.

I took a course and taught a course by Nicky Gumbel called *Alpha*, and he gives this testimony about prayer. He at one time was an atheist, and then he became a Christian.

Every Christian knows through experience that God answers prayers. When I started out, I began to pray for little things in my own life. Coincidences started to happen. Then the more I prayed, the more coincidences I saw. I made a connection and I asked risk praying for bigger things. Of course, it's not possible

to prove Christianity on the basis of answers to our own prayers, because it can always be explained away by the cynics. But the cumulative effect of answered prayer reinforces our faith in God. I have kept a prayer diary for years now, and it's fascinating to me to see how day after day, week after week, year after year, God has answered my prayers.

That's Nicky Gumbel's experience. I have dear friends that would testify to the same thing. Ask and it'll be given, seek and you will find, knock and the door will be open. Your Heavenly Father, the hearer of your prayers, loves you. And he'll answer.

So dear sisters and brothers in Christ, fellow citizens of the Kingdom of God know this: we were created by God to have a relationship with Him. Jesus' death on the cross made this relationship possible. And prayer is the way we deepen and strengthen that relationship with him – that friendship. That is why prayer is the most important activity of our lives as citizens of his kingdom. Pray, because you see, it's the kingdom way.

Let's pray. Thank you for the gift of prayer, Heavenly Father, and thank you for the promise to always listen and to hear us as we cry out to you and declare our dependence upon you and our need for your help. In the name of Jesus, we pray. Amen.