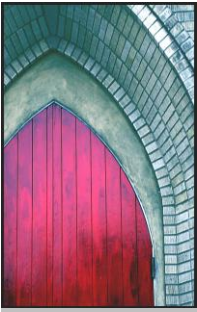


"Father"

The Lord's Prayer—Part 1

TEXT: LUKE 11.1-13



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BORED & BUSY?

How many ways can you access the internet in your home? Cell-phone? MP3 player? Game System? Computer—how many? You may have seen a video of a comedian on a late night talk show who declares “everything is amazing ... and nobody is happy.” He argues that we take technology for granted—to the point that we are spoiled. He describes having wireless internet access on a commercial airliner. We love it, and when we can’t have it we act as if life is over—ignoring the

fact that by no ability of our own we are experiencing the miracle of flight. As a result, he concludes “nobody is happy.” My synthesis of his remarks is that in the midst of living in the “days of miracle and wonder,” we’re completely bored.

The irony is that many of us would also describe our lives as “busy.” Between work, household tasks, time with friends, keeping in touch with out of state family members, immediate family responsibilities, and finding some ‘down-time’, we feel like life is often non-stop. We’re bored—which suggests that we have nothing to do, but at the very same time we’re busy—we have too much to do. And we’re still not happy. What’s our problem? And what are we to do? It is a problem with our ability to engage with the world around us on a level in which we can appreciate what we’re actually experiencing. And it’s a problem with our propensity to fill our lives with activities in hope that we will find meaning in one or more of them. The challenge, though, is that it’s never as simple as saying “stop and smell the roses” or “live in the moment.” At the same time it is never as simple as taking stuff off of our calendars. It’s not a sin to have an active or even a busy life. Both our boredom and our busy-ness flow out of restless hearts that are always searching, but struggle to find rest. The result is that we are both disengaged and over-engaged with everything around us.

I contend that the ‘short’ answer for us to our boredom and our busyness, as God’s people, is prayer. We face our struggle to engage rightly with the world by first learning to engage with God, the Creator and Sustainer of the universe,^{cf. Gen 1-2; Ps 104} and with His Son, through whom and for whom everything was created, and in whom all things hold together.^{cf. Col 1.15-20} Prayer is God’s call to us to live in His world in dependence on Him and it is the means by which we respond to His word and live in relationship with Him.

To consider this together, we begin this morning a study of the Lord’s Prayer. In the Gospels we find two forms of this prayer^{cf. Mt 6.9-13; Lk 11.2-4}. In both places Jesus is teaching His disciples, though one is public and the other is private. In both forms, Jesus confronts us with questions of priority in the Christian life, and through the truth of the Gospel at the heart of this prayer, we face the holiness of God and our great need. In the midst of being both bored and busy, ever searching for rest, hear the call of our Lord to approach our Father in prayer.

LUKE 11.1-13

¹Now 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.” ²And he said to them, “When you pray, say:

“Father,
hallowed be your name.
Your kingdom come.
³Give us each day our daily bread,
⁴and forgive us our sins,
for we ourselves forgive everyone
who is indebted to us.
And lead us not into temptation.”

⁵And 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, ⁶for a friend of mine has arrived on a journey, and I have nothing to set before him’; ⁷and 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?’ ⁸I 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. ⁹And I tell you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. ¹⁰For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened. ¹¹What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will instead of a fish give him a serpent; ¹²or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? ¹³If 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!”

“TEACH US”

A theologian from the last century called prayer “the very breath of spiritual life.” If you are a Christian, you know what it is to pray. How did you learn how to pray? I remember my dad praying for our evening meal. I also remember my junior high Sunday school teacher informing our class that the pastor would call on one of us for prayer during the worship service. And I remember getting in trouble for snickering while one of my friends stumbled through a prayer that his dad had written out for him. We learn to pray by hearing others pray, and praying becomes ours as we pray ourselves.

This is where we find Jesus and His disciples as this passage begins. The disciples make a request based on what they presumed John the Baptist had done.^{11.1; cf. Lk 3.1-22, 7.18-35} Jesus responds with a simple 6-line prayer that focuses our attention on God, and covers the entire scope of our need—what one writer summarizes as “provision, pardon, and protection.” Jesus gives this prayer as a guide for us. This is a call to pray.

Jesus draws us into prayer in one word: “Father.”^{11.2} This one word stands at the very heart of what it is for us to pray, because it challenges us with our understanding of who God is. The focus is on the relationship described—both an intimate familiarity, and the distance of authority. We know what it is to not understand our dads and the decisions they make but at the

same time realize that we're turning into them. If prayer is how we learn to engage with God and His world, we engage with God through prayer as we approach Him as our loving Father. So, how does this encourage and challenge us in our praying? In the verses that follow this prayer, Jesus unfolds for us the impact of knowing God as our Father through prayer, in order to round out a picture of His love.

HE KNOWS OUR NEEDS

Jesus first illustrates that God the Father knows our needs, and therefore hears us cry out to him. In verse 5 Jesus asks his disciples "*which of you has a friend*" who you know you can inconvenience when you have a need?^{11.5} Imagine that an out-of-town guest has arrived in the middle of the night, and you've got nothing to give him. To have nothing for him would be a source of deep embarrassment for you, and an insult to your guest in a culture where hospitality was a sign of acceptance and belonging. Your friend, already fast asleep with his family in their small home, grumbles at the inconvenience of climbing over sleeping bodies, grabbing some bread, and opening the creaky door.^{11.7} But he knows what's at stake for you, and certainly wouldn't want to cause you the social embarrassment, nor would he himself want to risk his own sense of being a gracious host.^{11.8} You walk away with a midnight meal.

God the Father, in comparison with the 'friend', knows full well what we need. When we ask Him to provide for us, we are not presenting Him with new information. The man in the parable tells his friend his need, and no other explanation is necessary. The same thing is assumed in verses 11-12; a dad understands basic provision for his son. At the same time, God, in contrast to the friend, is not inconvenienced by our asking for what we need. He is not asleep; He is not distracted by bigger problems elsewhere in this world. Nor does He respond to us with a sense of embarrassment that we would have the nerve to ask Him for what we need. God knows our deepest needs. In encouraging us to bring them to Him, He confirms to us that He hears us because He knows us.

HE RESPONDS TO OUR DESIRES

Jesus continues and broadens our concern in prayer by declaring that God the Father will respond to our desires. The terms Jesus uses ("*ask ... seek ... knock*,"^{11.9}) work together to give us a general understanding of what it is to pray. We "ask" because there is something we want or need; we "seek" because there is something we're looking for; we "knock" because there is a door closed before us. Each term speaks of being in a position of need. The emphasis, though, falls on the next verse: "*everyone who asks received, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened*."^{11.10} Building on verses 5-8, Jesus calls us to ask, seek, and knock with every confidence that the Father will respond.

These words direct us to God Himself. Consider the words of Psalm 27.4: "*One thing have I asked of the LORD, that will I seek after: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD and to inquire in his temple*." In asking God for anything, we approach Him to speak and act into our lives. In seeking anything, we run first to Him. In knocking, we approach the warmth and belonging of being in His presence. Prayer begins and ends with our pursuit of God. What a promise this is for God's people! We bring our deepest desires—the unknowns of our lives, our greatest pursuits, and the rest of acceptance—and He promises to

respond. In our doubts, fears, uncertainties, and anxieties, God invites us to approach Him with everything.

HE'S GOOD

At this point, the questions begin in our minds: is Jesus telling us that we can ask for *anything* and we'll get it? Jesus address that question as he finishes His teaching in this section as He focuses on the goodness of the Father. This is where we struggle the most with God. It has caused many to say "either God doesn't exist or he's unimaginably cruel." And so it is the goodness of God where our hope rests.

The assertion that Jesus makes in these final verses is that God is concerned for the good of His children. Appealing to a basic sense of right and wrong, Jesus asks a question: would a father, when asked for a basic need, give instead a something harmful?^{11.11-12} While this sadly happens all of the time in our world, Jesus' point is that even dads who are selfish, manipulative, and impatient know how to give good things to their kids. God is not malicious, vindictive, or cruel. Without this, we are left with an all-powerful, all-knowing deity whom we cannot trust for anything but random events. Though that is often how life feels for us—the promise is that He is good.

But of what does His goodness consist? Jesus promises God will give His Spirit.^{11.13} This is not slight of hand by Jesus. What greater sign of goodness could we receive? It is the Spirit of God that prepared God's people for the coming of their Savior,^{Lk 1.35, 41, 67; 2.26-27} on whom Jesus depended by faith in His work,^{2.16, 2.22, 4.1, 14, 18; 5.17} and who He promised would lead His people in His work.^{Lk 24.49; Ac 1.8} Jesus describes the Holy Spirit as the "Helper" and the "Spirit of Truth,"^{Jn 14.16-17; 16.7} who will "teach you all things"^{Jn 14.26} and will "guide you into all truth."^{Jn 16.13} The Apostle Paul adds to this the title "Spirit of Adoption" who reminds us of our standing before God as His children,^{Rom 8.14-17} and "helps us in our weakness" by praying for us even when we have no words ourselves.^{Rom 8.26-27} Jesus doesn't promise that by prayer we will not struggle, suffer, or fail in this life, nor that life will always make sense. Rather, by the work of this Helper, the Spirit of Truth, we learn and believe that "*for those who love God all things work together for good*."^{Rom 8.28} Through His Spirit, the goodness of the Father is the offering of Himself to us.

"FATHER"

At the heart of the Lord's Prayer is the Gospel, because its foundation is that we call out to God as our Father. Jesus invites us to speak to God as our the Father, even as He spoke God as His father.^{Lk 2.49; 10.21-22; 22.42; 23.46} John tells us regarding Jesus that "... to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God."^{Jn 1.12} Luke recounts a story where Jesus is surrounded by people on his way to heal a young girl. As the crowd pushes in, He is touched by a woman at the end of herself—sick for 12 years, broke, an outcast from society, and without hope. Her need was known and her healing immediate. Jesus doesn't recoil in embarrassment for her. Looking to her He says: "*Daughter, your faith has made you well*."^{Lk 8.43-48} The outcast is brought near.

You may have a journal full of questions about prayer. Jesus offers to us confidence that the Father knows our needs, responds to our desires, and that He is good, because He has drawn us near as His children, through His Son. If you are His, bring your needs boldly, ask, seek, and knock, and rest in His goodness. He is your loving Father. "*Lord, teach us to pray*."