

TEACH US TO PRAY

Tuesday, February 3

Reading: Luke 11:1-13

Luke 11:1 *One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When He finished, one of His disciples said to Him, "Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples."*

The Lord's Prayer is recorded in two of the four gospel accounts – Matthew and Luke. Surprisingly, Jesus gives this prayer in two totally different circumstances. In the more popular Matthew 6 account, Jesus gives the prayer as part of His Sermon on the Mount. In Luke 11, however, the prayer is given in a private setting when His disciples ask the Lord to teach them to pray. Critics cite this as a contradiction, but it should not surprise us that Jesus would repeat His important teachings more than once during His multi-year ministry.

Logically, the Luke 11 account probably occurred first and Jesus would later incorporate it into His larger message to the crowds. The disciples had been watching Jesus and recognized His powerful prayer life. The Gospel of Luke emphasizes this aspect of Jesus' life. Jesus is praying while He is baptized (3:21). He prays all night before choosing the Twelve (6:12). Jesus is praying just before asking the disciples who they believe He is and Peter responds with "You are the Christ" (9:18). He is praying at His transfiguration (9:29) and in Gethsemane (22:41-44). He uses parables to teach them about prayer (18:1-14). He prayed specifically for Peter (22:32).

But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed" (Luke 5:16)

With all this evidence, it is no wonder the disciples were in awe of Jesus' prayer life and wanted to know His secret. Jesus responds by giving them a slightly shorter version of the model prayer than Matthew's account. He follows this up with some illustrations to teach persistence in prayer.

The first illustration is a lesson from a bad example (11:5-10). Jesus is NOT saying God is like the reluctant friend who only answers the request because he is annoyed. God does not have to be convinced to give to His people. Jesus' point is that if persistence will eventually get this poor friend to help, how much more will our loving heavenly Father give to those who ask Him. Persistence in prayer does not change God; it changes us! It aligns our hearts and minds to the will of God. In the Greek text, Jesus literally tells us to keep on asking, seeking, and knocking!

The second illustration (11:11-13) compares the heavenly Father to earthly fathers. We can see the humor of Jesus as He describes how even flawed, sinful parents know how to give good gifts to their children. In comparison, our heavenly Father gives us the greatest gift – the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit to guide and grow us.

Do you know how to pray? It is not about some formula or outline. It is about a personal, intimate connection with the Father. It is about tuning our lives to His life. It is about the persistent, everyday dependence on God. As an old adage says, "Seven days without prayer makes one WEAK!" If you are struggling, find a Christian friend who knows how to pray and observe them. Ask them questions. This is a lifelong endeavor. We will never have perfect union with God until eternity. But we can continually bring a little of that eternal relationship into our lives today.