



## “Effective Prayer”

Luke 11:1-13

**Idea:** Effective prayer is the provision for every need and the solution for every problem.

**Intro:** Over the past week, you might have dealt with the death of a loved one, received a report from the doctor that was not favorable, realized your taxes are due on Monday, had an air conditioning unit go out, or received a call from your child’s principal. Those are just a few of the hardships that I could mention. You see, life is full of trouble and perplexity. I believe we can all agree that this is true. We also should be able to agree that the trouble and perplexity of this life can and ought to drive us to prayer. Martin Luther said, “The less I pray, the harder it gets; the more I pray, the better it goes.” If this is true, and I believe it is, then why do we not pray more?

The picture the Bible portrays of God is one of benevolence and goodness towards His people. E. M. Bounds magnifies this depiction by saying of prayer, “God’s promises lie like giant corpses without life, only for decay and dust, unless men appropriate those promises by earnest and prevailing prayer.” In other words, our God possesses both the means and the desire to bless and guide His people. The condition lies on whether His people will engage Him in prayer. So, why is prayer so difficult for us if God is so willing?

Last year, I got to travel with a handful of our people to Israel. One of the days that we were in Jerusalem, we visited the Western Wall, commonly referred to as the “Wailing Wall.” It is the only remains of the retaining wall surrounding the Temple Mount or the site of the first and second temples of Jerusalem. Thousands of Jewish people come to pray at this wall every day. Well, a number of years ago, there was a female journalist who was sent by one of the nation’s largest papers to Jerusalem to write special interest stories. She rented an apartment across from the Western Wall, overlooking the square where the people come to pray at the wall. Every day she would get up and eat her breakfast while watching the Jewish men and women as they prayed at the wall. One morning she noticed a particular older man who prayed for hours. Then he left and came back to pray for several more hours that afternoon. The next morning, this journalist noticed the same man praying at the wall again in the morning and again that afternoon. This cycle continued as the journalist watched him for several weeks, so she began to think that there must be a story to this man and his commitment to praying at the wall. Therefore, one morning she decided to go down and try to meet the man before he goes to the wall. Sure enough, the man arrived just like he had every other day, and the journalist was able to engage him just before he entered the area where Jewish men pray. She introduced herself and explained that she had seen him praying at the wall for hours each day for weeks. She then boldly asked the man, “What are you praying for when you go down to the wall?” The old Jewish man responded by saying, “Well, I come in the mornings and pray for mankind. I pray for unity, brotherhood, and peace to be among all peoples. Then, I leave and go home. I enjoy a little cup of tea, some bread, and honey. In the afternoon I return and pray for all of those who are suffering

from disease, sickness, and illness. I pray and ask the Lord, if He would, to take away all the things that cause mankind to suffer.”

The journalist was moved by all that he prayed for each day because she had also witnessed his faithfulness to praying for weeks. She asked the man, “How long have you been doing this?” He replied, “I have been doing this for twenty-five years.” Without really knowing how to respond to such a commitment, she said, “That must be so fulfilling. It must be so moving. Can you tell me, what does it feel like when you come here to the Western Wall to pray for these things?” The old man looked at her with sadness in his eyes and said, “It feels like praying to a wall.”

For too many people, this is their experience when it comes to prayer. Our culture affirms this too. It tells us that this means nothing. Your prayers are like talking to a wall because there really is no God. There really is no resurrection. The world tells us there is no reason to pray because it is like talking to wall, and for many this is your Christian experience. You have taken your deepest needs, your strongest hurts, your most severe wounds, and the things that concern you the most to the Lord in prayer repeatedly and heard nothing. For that reason, you have begun to feel like prayer is useless.

Thankfully, the Bible, which we still believe is God’s inspired, inerrant, and infallible Word, describes for us both the need for prayer and the results of it. Hannah, in her barrenness, passionately pled with God over her desire to have a child, and God gave her a son named Samuel (1 Sam 1). Ezra prayed over the sins of Judah and the people were moved to confess their sin (Ezra 9-10). Nehemiah prayed over the ruins of Jerusalem, and he was moved to rebuild its walls. Daniel prayed for wisdom to interpret dreams, and he was given divine insight. Paul prayed for the churches. Epaphras prayed for the Colossians. John the Baptist and Jesus were also mighty in prayer. There are many great examples.

We may feel that when we pray it is like praying to a wall, but the clear testimony of Scripture is that there is a God setting on a throne who both hears and moves. Therefore, any problem we have with prayer is not on God’s end. The problem is on our end. Today, as we move into Luke 11, we come face-to-face with the Lord’s Prayer. There are four components of prayer that we should learn from this model that will make our prayer life more effective.

Read Luke 11:1-13.

**Inquiry:** According to Luke, Jesus was praying. It is not quite clear whether the disciples were with Him praying or close by while He prayed. Regardless, after Jesus finished praying, they asked Him to teach them to pray just as John the Baptist had taught his disciples. Now, it is probably not hard for us to picture Jesus praying. He is recorded all throughout the gospels praying. John, however, is not usually equated with prayer. We remember him as a prophet, a preacher, a baptizer, and a martyr. Yet, the Lord’s disciples remembered John as a man of prayer.

John was a miracle baby, who was filled with the Holy Spirit from the womb (Luke 1:13-15), yet even with all his spiritual advantages, John had to depend on God through prayer. Like everyone else, prayer was a spiritual discipline he had to learn and develop. You see, prayer is not natural. It does not come automatically. Effective prayer must be taught and learned. For this reason, there is no shame in not knowing how to pray or feeling uncomfortable in prayer. There is only shame if we do not ask to be taught and as a result spend years of our Christian lives ineffective in prayer.

As a Christ-follower, would you like to be more effective in your prayers? Would you like to sense that your prayers are arriving at the desired destination and properly describing the needs? If so, then you are in good company. Jesus’ disciples wanted the same thing, so they asked the Lord to teach them to pray. Jesus’ response to their request here is similar to His teaching earlier in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 6:5-15). There are also a few differences. Therefore, I think it is okay to believe He taught on this subject more than

once. Let's look at four components of prayer from this model prayer so that our prayer lives might be more effective.

## 1. Pray intimately.

In verses 2-4, we discover a pattern for praying. It is a model. Jesus is not instructing His disciples to pray these exact words every time they engage in prayer. No, He is teaching that these are the kinds of priorities that should shape their prayer lives. It is a template with two parts. It is both vertical and horizontal in its focus.

Vertically, prayer has to do with God. Jesus said, *"When you pray, say: Father..."* For us today after two millennia of Christian influence, it probably seems ordinary to address God as Father, but it was not so in Jesus' day. This title was revolutionary. The writers of the Old Testament certainly believed in the Fatherhood of God, but they saw it mainly in terms of a sovereign Creator-Father to whom they owed their existence. For example, God is only referred to as "Father" fourteen times in the Old Testament, and each time the mention is impersonal, referencing Israel as a nation rather than individual people.

Jesus changed this understanding of God as Father. Many scholars believe He used an informal Aramaic word commonly used by children addressing their father. That word is Abba, and it meant something like "Daddy" but with a more reverent touch than perhaps we may use it (Gal 4:6). A better rendering might be "Dearest Father." By using this term, Jesus transformed the relationship with God from a distant, corporate experience into an intimate, one-to-one bond. Prayer is to be a family type conversation.

*"When you pray, say: Father, hallowed be your name..."*

For the Jew, God's name referred to the reality of the essence and nature of God. His nature is holy. Therefore, praying *"hallowed be your name"* means, "May you be given in my life and home that unique reverence that your character and nature as Father demand."

*"When you pray, say: Father, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come."*

To pray for His kingdom to come is to pray for the eternal life the lawyer asked about in 10:25. It is to pray for the Lord's return, to resurrect the dead, and to bring in eternity where sickness and death are no more. It is praying for His love and joy to invade this space.

Effective prayer is intimate prayer that understands God as a loving Father who is holy and bringing His kingdom. With this vertical understanding of intimacy, Jesus' disciples are instructed to pray horizontally in three ways.

*"Give us each day our daily bread..."*

The literal reading of this phrase is, "Our bread of tomorrow give us today." This point is footnoted in the ESV. This prayer is a request for God to meet one's daily physical needs. However, praying for tomorrow's bread also requests that God meet one's needs with the bread of the ultimate tomorrow – the bread of eternity.

*"...and forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone who is indebted to us."*

Jesus' teaching here and in Matthew's version suggest that forgiveness for His disciples must be fulfilled as a condition before we can ask God for forgiveness. You see, true believers, those who have experienced the forgiveness of Christ, forgive and are forgiving.

*“And lead us not into temptation.”*

The final petition is not to be misunderstood that God is the tempter. According to James 1:13, God *“tempts no one.”* Life in this fallen world is saturated with temptation. In one way, disciples ought to view temptation in a positive light because it forces you back to the Lord for help and protection.

These horizontal prayer components call on believers to depend on God as Father for their daily needs both physical and spiritual. It is a call that reminds us that the Father wants to hear about everything in our lives, not just the big and scary things. He desires for us to pray intimately to Him.

## **2. Pray persistently.**

The parable in verses 5-8 calls us to persist in prayer. Having a pattern for praying is good, but seeing our prayer requests come to fruition will also require determination on our part. In this story, a man is awakened in the middle of the night by his friend who has a guest but no food for a meal. Hospitality in the Middle East was then and still is today a cultural norm. The man refused to get up and give his friend what was requested, but because of his persistence he finally got up and gave him the bread. Jesus' point was to say that if a grouchy friend can be forced by his friend's shameless persistence to give what he ought, then how much more will our loving Father respond to our shameless petitioning for what we need.

Therefore, Jesus instructed His disciples to ask, seek, and knock (vs. 9). “Ask” implies requesting assistance for a conscious need. “Seek” denotes asking but adds action to it. The idea is to get up and look around for help. “Knock” takes the asking and seeking and adds persevering. Each of these verbs are present imperatives, which speak of ongoing action. In other words, it is a call to ask and keep asking, seek and keep seeking, and knock and keep knocking. They are stacked on top of one another to make the strong point to be persistent in praying for things.

Disciples who pray persistently are people who believe God will answer. Their prayers are not works but acts of faith. They are a picture of reliance rather than ritual. Effective prayer is persistent prayer.

## **3. Pray expectantly.**

Verse 10 adds this third component. The one who is actively asking, seeking, and knocking does so because there is a confidence that he or she will receive, find, and that a door will be opened. How many times do Christians pray one time for something and quit? Why do we not persist in our praying over a matter? It is probably because we truly do not believe the Lord will hear and respond. We pray to check the box and be able to say that we prayed without ever really believing God would respond. Let us pray with expectation, believing God desires to hear and act on our behalf. Effective prayers are expectant prayers.

## **4. Pray believably.**

Jesus finishes His instruction on prayer with the theme of a father just as He had started (vs. 11-13). None of us can imagine, even a bad father, giving his son a snake instead of a piece of fish or a scorpion rather than an egg. Jesus is arguing from the lesser to the greater.

*“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!”*

God the Father has never given any of His children anything but the very best. Do we believe this about God? Do we trust His goodness and benevolence?

God gives His best. What is His best? It is the gift of Himself. He promises to give the fullness His Holy Spirit. As we learn to pray effectively, we will pray believing that our Heavenly Father hears and desires to move on our behalf.

**Conclusion:** In 2 Kings 19 and 2 Chronicles 32, we read of King Hezekiah’s prayer before the Lord when King Sennacherib of Assyria marched on Jerusalem. Listen to how he prayed. Read 2 Kings 19:14-19. We are told in 2 Chronicles 32:20 that he and Isaiah both cried out to heaven. The Bible tells us that God heard their prayers, and He sent the prophet Isaiah with the answer. Assyria would be struck down even before they attacked. Read 2 Kings 19:35-37.

What an incredible story of God’s faithfulness to prayer! We wish all our prayers were answered like that, do we not? The truth is, they are. God always hears, and He always responds. It is not always on our timing or in the way we envisioned it, but God acts on our behalf for His kingdom purposes. Today, if your prayer life is best described as “praying to a wall,” then I believe you need to change your perspective on prayer. Remember that is your loving Father and begin to pray intimately, persistently, expectantly, and believingly.