June 15/16, 2019

Ask and You Will Receive

Prayer – Talking with God Series

Luke 11:1-13

Pastor Mark Kremer

When you mention the word prayer to the vast majority of people, whether they are followers of Jesus or not, we typically, immediately think of asking God for something. That's kind of our lens through which we view prayer—asking God for things. We've tried over the last two weeks to dispel that myth of just asking God for things. Prayer is communicating with God, talking with God. It's a relationship that God wants with us and so we talk to God about everything and we have access to God continually. He is involved and wants to be engaged in every moment and facet of our life, and prayer is the means by which we share that life—our life—with God. And it also involves not only us communicating with God things that we're thinking about and doing, but also listening as we talked about last week—listening by the Holy Spirit to what God is saying to us. That's part of prayer, but ultimately there is a sense deep within each of us that we do not often have what we need to just handle life, to deal with the situations and circumstances. As the old saying goes, "There are no atheists in foxholes," right? Every human being, at points, finds themselves in a place where we cry out to God and we ask for something. I don't know if you can remember in your own life the first time that you had a specific request of God and He answered that request right away, but I will never forget that moment in my own life.

My cousin and I worked together on our family farm and we had just gotten home from youth camp and had the kind of experience we were just hearing our kids share about on that video. So we were really kind of fresh and energetic in our desire to walk with God. We were assigned on the farm to go out to a very remote cornfield and walk the rows. We were irrigating, so it's walking through hot corn rows, counting rows, changing gates, moving pipe, and we had been sent out to this very remote field with an old World War II jeep, and the thing was archaic. I can't believe we still had it; it was the lowest on the totem pole and so we got the jeep on the farm. So we did our work out in the far-off field, and then when we went to get back in it to come back to the farm, it didn't start. Now this happened on occasion and so there was a list of things that we had been told that you do. You know: you try this and then you try this and then you try this and usually ninety-nine percent of the time one of those things worked…I mean to this point! We tried all those things and nothing worked, and all of a sudden it came to me, "Why don't we pray that God will start this jeep?" and I said to my cousin, "Let's pray," and he said, "Let's lay hands on the jeep." *(laughter)* I mean we were going to really go all out, right? We laid our hands on that jeep and we said, "God, we're out here in the middle of nowhere and we need You to start this jeep." When we got done and we turned the key, sure enough, it started right away. And I will never forget that. We went—of course there's no top on this thing—and we're hootin' and hollerin' all the way down the road, and we ran to tell the rest of the family, "You won't believe it! God just started the jeep!"

Now in the scheme of life that was a very small and insignificant thing. I mean I look back and say, "Really? you prayed about starting a jeep?" but I will tell you that was a faith-building moment for me. I knew that God heard and answered and cared about the things that were happening in my life and that was a beginning I think of just a continual journey of understanding that I can ask God for things—that He's present and He's there and He cares. And so that becomes a normal part, hopefully, of our life—asking God for various things.

Now, there is an incredible promise in the Scriptures related to prayer. This is one of the most amazing promises that God has made to us. It's found in 1 John, Chapter 5, and we're going to put it on the screen and I invite you to read together with me this promise. Let's read it out loud:

> **This is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us *in* whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests which we have asked from Him.** (*NASB, 1 John 5:14-15)

Is that not incredible? What it basically says is that when we pray according to the will of God, when we pray and ask God for the things that are in keeping with what He wants us to pray, that He hears us and that He will grant those requests. That's a bold, bold statement, and I hope we believe that this morning. But it does raise a very, very important question: What should we be asking for that's in keeping with the will of God? Because if what God promises is to answer the requests that are in line with His will, then it seems like it would be very, very important for us to know what God wants us to pray—what He tells us we can pray and ask Him for.

Well, Jesus gave us very, very clear instructions about that. He told us exactly what to ask God for and that's what we want to look at for the next few minutes. Turn in your Bibles to Luke, Chapter 11. Now as we look at what Jesus instructs us about praying, what to ask for, I would encourage you, as I've been doing myself, to use this instruction to evaluate your own prayer life. So, as we go through this, think about what you're asking God for, and then sort of see what Jesus tells us we should be asking God for. There may be an ouch or two this morning, and I want to be very clear about this—that I am not speaking to you this morning as someone who's got this all figured out. I mean this is a journey we're on together to learn how to talk with God, how to ask God, how to be about the things that He's about, and have our prayers in alignment with His good purposes. So I come to you as a fellow-learner this morning.

Now you will recognize this text as it is often called the Lord's Prayer. It's not the "Lord's" prayer. If you want to do the Lord's Prayer, it would be John 17, where Jesus is praying. This, instead, is Jesus' instruction to His followers on how to pray, and this same instruction comes twice in the Gospels, once in Matthew Chapter 6 and then here in Luke 11. Sometimes of course in Matthew, Mark and Luke—these are synoptic gospels so they often parallel and tell the same story—but I want to be clear here that this is not the same situation. This isn't the same point in time that Jesus tells us here in Luke 11 as it was in Matthew 6. Matthew 6 came in the middle of the Sermon on the Mount, and Jesus is teaching in this extended time with His disciples on the mount about a lot of things related to the kingdom, and part of what He taught them was how to pray, and that's actually a fuller explanation. He used more words there. This we're told here in verse one of chapter 11 comes in response at a different time by a question from one his disciples. So, look at verse 1:

> **It happened that while Jesus was praying in a certain place, after He had finished, one of His disciples said to Him, "Lord, teach us to pray just as John also taught his disciples."** (*NASB, Luke 11:1)

One of the things that would have been very evident to the disciples, those who were around Jesus, is the priority He put on prayer. Again and again and again Jesus would step away from the crowds, from the disciples, and go off by Himself and pray. And I'm sure for the disciples there's a lot of curiosity like, "What are You doing when You're out there?" and it's interesting because we do not have this recorded in Scripture, but evidently it was well known among the disciples that John had

taught his disciples—John the Baptist—how to pray. So this disciple asked Jesus, "*Teach us to pray like John taught his disciples to pray*," and Jesus again gives the same instruction. Now again, as we go into the content of what to ask God for—what we know as The Lord's Prayer—it's important that because these are very different texts, so I think it's pretty obvious that this is not just a prayer to be recited in a rote sort of a way because the wording is different in both places. Jesus would have said if this prayer is exactly how you're supposed to say it, it would have been exactly the same in His teaching in Matthew as it is in Luke. So, He's talking here about what to pray about.

Now there's nothing wrong with reciting the Lord's prayer but that's not really the point here. If you recite Luke 11, you're probably a guy because it's got about forty fewer words. *(laughter)* We don't like to talk…most of the time…but it's different; there's a general instruction. I've done the Lord's Prayer with my two youngest sons as a part of our bedtime routine for many years through elementary and middle school. Now they go to bed later than I do and I don't know if they pray that before they go to bed or not; I'm sound asleep. But let's look at what He tells us—both our approach to God and then what to ask Him for. So Jesus, in response to this question, in verse 2 says:

> **And He said to them, "When you pray say,**
> **'Father, hallowed be Your name.'"**

This is our approach towards God, and our approach to God is one of recognition that God is a **Father** who deeply loves us, is involved, caring, safe, for us. He's everything we'd want in a father but He's also **hallowed**. He's also *transcendent*. He's far above us. He's all powerful, all knowing. He's the creator and sustainer of all things and we should be very thankful that our Father in heaven is both of those things.

So I'm a father and I love my children and my children can ask me for things, but I am not all knowing, all powerful. I cannot do for them many, many things. So, if God were loving and kind but not all powerful you could ask Him for all you wanted but He wouldn't be able to deliver those things. If God were only transcendent and holy and *other than,* without being Father, we would be too afraid to step into His presence and dare to ask for anything. But He is both Father and hallowed. He's both transcendent and deeply involved in caring as a father. He's both of those things and that's the awareness when we pray. We should, whenever we're talking with God, be aware that we're talking to our hallowed Father, our sanctified set apart *other than* Father and that's really, really powerful.

So what should we be asking God for? There are four things he mentions here—four realms of prayer that we should be asking God about. Adding the end of verse 2:

> **'Father, hallowed be Your name,**
> **Your kingdom come.'**

Matthew adds to that:

> **'Your will be done.**
> **On earth as it is in heaven.'**

Now it's very interesting to me that this is the first thing Jesus said we should be praying about is *the coming of His kingdom*. It's not something we tag on at the end after we've talked about all our needs. Start first with praying about the coming of His kingdom. What is the kingdom of God? Well

the kingdom of God is the good rule and reign of God through Jesus. Jesus came the first time announcing the arrival of the kingdom and declaring himself to be King of and, ultimately, the ruler of the world. He was the creator of it and He wanted to rule the world as the good ruler of God. He came the first time in order to be established as the King, to defeat sin and Satan and death by His own sacrifice. We know from the New Testament story that He's going to come back again and His reign will be fully established and the kingdom will be fully realized. All things will be restored and made new and whole and Jesus will reign. And that's what we all long for is that good rule and reign of God that will ultimately come at Jesus' second coming. But I think here He has in mind that we pray for the coming of God's kingdom—both that He would come again and fully establish His reign. That should be part of our prayer. "Jesus, come quickly, come again; come and restore everything that's broken." That should be a deep longing in our hearts.

But I think there's also a coming of the kingdom now, that the kingdom is advancing. Now as people put their faith and trust in Jesus, they are transferred out of the kingdom of darkness, we're told, into the kingdom of His beloved Son, into the kingdom of Jesus. He becomes our King and we become a part of the kingdom. And so our prayer is that God would grow His kingdom, that it would advance and multiply and more and more people would come under God's good reign and rule by putting their faith and trust in Jesus. This is what the Father is up to in the world. This is what God is up to, right? This is His work in the world—to redeem and restore all the brokenness, all that's wrong by offering and inviting people to put their faith and trust in Him and then giving us His Spirit. So, when we're asking God to grow His kingdom, we're asking God to bring more and more people into the kingdom and to make His rule and reign even in our own hearts and lives, that we would allow Him more and more to rule and reign in us. Less of us, more of Him, and I think all of that is implied here. So, on a very practical level I think of concentric circles as you and I pray. We should pray, "God, let Your rule and reign grow in my own life, and then I want You to rule and reign in my family, in my church. I want Your good rule and reign through Jesus to come to the people that don't know You, that are in my circle of friends, my neighborhood, my community and ultimately into the world. So this is the first thing that Jesus says we should be praying about. We should be praying for the advance of His kingdom, for the gospel to take root, and then we're told that we should pray for those who are out working to see God's kingdom advance, and we're also to pray, Jesus said, for more workers, so there are more people who are involved in building God's kingdom.

We're also told in alignment with this prayer, this asking, that we should pray for kings and rulers and those in authority, because they have an impact on the kingdom. It says we should pray that we could live peaceable lives because God desires all men to come to a knowledge of Him to be saved. So all of our praying for those who are in authority and kings and for our friends and for the advance of the gospel and for missionaries—all of that falls under **Lord**,**Thy Kingdom Come**—make Your kingdom grow and come, and this, because we are followers of Jesus, is our first priority in prayer. This is the family business and we're heirs. We're sons of the King. This is our business and so we're talking to God and asking Him to do His good work. And we want to be a part of it, and so the last part of our prayer for *thy kingdom to come* should always be, "God, what do You want me to do to grow Your kingdom?" So think about your own prayer life as I've thought about mine. Do I always start by asking God what He's doing in the world and by asking Him to do more, to grow it and to make myself available to be a part of it? That's our first realm of prayer that we should be asking God for—**Your kingdom come.** Verse 3:

'Give us each day our daily bread.'

This is an understanding that we need daily provision, right? There are things that we need, and God, ultimately, is our provider and so we're asking Him to give us what we need for each and every day. Now in the old times—in the New Testament times—obviously there were no refrigerators; there was no storage. Making provision was really a very important thing every day. You couldn't save it or store it. So, "God, today I need Your provision," was a very real thing in the material realm. We may not have the same sense of need in the material realm, but we do have a need for God's daily provision don't we? Strength…wisdom…courage—what we need in the moment for every moment that we face. We need God to be providing for us all the way through each and every day. We're very much in need of God's provision and I can think of a hundred thousand times over the course of my life where I have been aware of, "I need You, Jesus, to help me in this moment. I need wisdom for this conversation. I need strength to do this thing You're asking me to do. And again and again and again I need a word of encouragement, God, because I'm discouraged. This is the daily provision that we should be asking God for. "Give me today what I need to do what You've asked me to do."

I remember a time in my life when we were living with a lot of uncertainty as a family, and I was not sure what the future held. I was discouraged and it didn't seem like we were seeing much happen, and I remember just saying, "God, I just need encouragement today," and I had no sooner uttered that prayer than the phone rang and a friend five hundred miles away said, "You know, you were in my heart and mind today and I just wanted to call and let you know we're praying for you." It was just what I needed in the moment—it was the provision of God! This also goes beyond just our individual provision. There are times when as a church or maybe in your business that there's a need for God to provide for us. We had a moment—like one of many moments here at church—when we were building this auditorium and we were five hundred thousand dollars short of what we needed just to make the construction payments. We had no idea where that was going to come from and so we were, as elders, gathered in this room. Only part of the floor here had poured concrete, and we sat our folding chairs right down here. Section 5, it's a holy section right there, *(laughter)* and we prayed for an extended period time. "God, we don't know what and where this is going to come from. We don't see anything but we know that You know what we need and, by faith, we just asked Him to provide. And within just a matter of days, a neighbor to the east called and said, "Hey, would you ever be interested in selling a part of that property on the far east side?" and we said, "Well, what are you willing to pay?" and it was exactly the dollar amount that we were short. Again and again and again God provides, so our prayer should be, "God, give me today. Give me in this moment; give me this week…this month…this year the provision I need to deal with what I'm facing in my life. Verse 4:

> **'And forgive us our sins,**
> **For we ourselves also forgive everyone who's indebted to us.'**

A part of what we're asking God for on a regular basis is *forgiveness*. We sin and we fail, and we have to come before God on a regular basis and say, "God, forgive me. Cleanse me from the offenses that I have committed against You, and all my sin." Whether it's toward someone else or anything else, it's against God and, as God's children, we know that we are forgiven because of the work of Jesus. But He's asked us to come and confess, to come and acknowledge our sin before Him and to confess it and to ask for forgiveness. And when we do, He says He's faithful and just to forgive us and cleanse us from that unrighteousness. So, a part of our asking for God, every time we

talk to him is, “God, forgive me; make me aware of the things that I say, do and think that are offensive to You. Make me aware and then I acknowledge, and I confess that.

Now there's a very interesting caveat on this particular request of God and that is, “*Forgive me, God, as I forgive those who have done things towards me.”* This is a consistent theme in Scripture, that God's forgiveness is tied to our willingness to forgive—like when we cry out to God for mercy and then show no mercy. That's not acceptable. That is a sin in and of itself, so to not forgive is then a sin. I have to confess that and ultimately I need to forgive others as I ask Him to forgive me. So, whenever we confess, we ought to say, “Okay, God, and who else do I need to forgive?”

The Barna organization is a Christian research organization that looks at the church and culture and the advance of the gospel—a lot of great research. I got an e-mail about a month ago and they had done a lot of research on forgiveness and mercy and the reason for the e-mail was that they were absolutely alarmed that Bible-believing-church-attending followers of Jesus were no different than the world in their willingness to forgive—that over one quarter of all Christians say that there was someone that they would not or could not forgive, and they were so alarmed by that they teamed up with another ministry to say, “We have got to address this from a discipleship issue. We are continually asking God for forgiveness and mercy but we must also in the same token be willing to forgive and show mercy and Jesus makes that very, very clear.” Now here's the last thing he says end of verse four:

‘And lead us not into temptation.’”

Now we all know that God does not tempt us; God is not enticing us to do evil. So that's not what this means. Matthew adds:

‘Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil’ (or from the evil one).

So, this is a prayer for God's protection and deliverance from the traps and tricks and schemes of the world and of Satan himself that would try to derail us, destroy us, defeat us. There are baited traps all over the place, are there not? The world has all kinds of enticing things that try to draw us off track, get us to move away from God, to think we can find life and fulfillment somewhere else and, if we're not firm and strong and growing and maturing and depending on the Holy Spirit, if we're not crying out to Him for protection and wisdom, we can fall quickly and easily—take the bait—and find ourselves defeated and discouraged and not very useful in the kingdom work.

We understand this better today because, I would say just in the last five years that the proliferation of schemes and scams is just unbelievable. I mean, I check my junk e-mail every day—where it sort of weeds out a lot of those things—and there are literally hundreds of scams and schemes sent to every one of us every day. We get phone calls at home; you get the computerized voices saying, “You will be arrested if you don't call this number.” We're concerned about elderly people. I call my mom and say, “Mom, do not answer the phone; if it's important they’ll leave a message and, by the way, don't believe every message you get either; call me before you answer the call because there's traps and schemes.” People are trying to take advantage of people—trying to steal and kill and destroy your life. It’s a picture of what exactly was happening in the spiritual realm and Jesus said, “We should pray every day for God's wisdom and for the fullness of the Holy Spirit to stand against that.” “Everything we need,” Peter said, “for life and for godliness has been given to us through Jesus,” but he said, “you need to continually focus on growing and maturing in your life so

that we are not enslaved or entrapped—that we will not ever find ourselves not useful, not prepared in this world." So we need to ask God for this for ourselves. We need to ask God for this for the people that we care about, for people in our church, that God would protect us, that we would grow to maturity, that we would have wisdom and understanding from God, that we would be full of the Holy Spirit. When you read Paul's prayers in his letters to the churches, this is the focus of his prayer most of the time. In Ephesians chapter 3 he goes through an extensive prayer where he says, "This is what I'm praying for you, that God would fill you up with the knowledge of Himself so that you would be full of Christ, that you would be able to stand firmly because you're full of the Spirit; you're full of wisdom." James said, "When you lack wisdom, ask of God who gives generously." This is what this prayer is all about, "God, give me wisdom. Help me to keep growing and maturing and to know and apply the truth in my life so that I am not caught up in a trap or a snare."

These are the things that God has told us we can pray about. These are the things that we are to pray in accordance with. These aren't just nice suggestions from Jesus, "Hey, here's some things you ought to pray about." He's saying these are the four things that should be the focus of our prayer life—the advance of His kingdom, our daily provision, the forgiveness of our own sins, and spiritual wisdom and protection, so that we are not caught in the snare trap.

So, how does your prayer life look compared to how Jesus told us to pray?

There are two quick stories that follow this instruction, and they tell us something about how we should pray. We've been told now what to pray, but now He talks about *how we should pray.* By the way, if you read the Matthew text, the teaching on what to pray is preceded by two quick short stories about how to pray. One, it says: go in secret; pray in secret—don't make a show of it—and the second was: keep it simple. Don't use a lot of meaningless words and repetition, thinking you're going to get heard more from God. Just keep it simple—let your request be known, simply. That's what Matthew said; here's the two quick stories in Luke. Verse five:

> **Then He said to them, "Suppose one of you has a friend, and goes to him at midnight and says to him, 'Friend, lend me three loaves; for a friend of mine has come to me from a journey, and I have nothing to set before him'; and from inside he answers and says, 'Do not bother me; the door has already been shut and my children and I are in bed; I cannot get up and give you *anything*.'** (Vs. 5-7)

You've got to realize this is probably a one-room house—probably a hundred and ten kids. The last thing you need in the middle of the night is disruption, so he says, "Nope, I'm tucked in. I'm not getting up. I'm not waking this whole clan up. I just got 'em to sleep." So, verse 8:

> **"I tell you, even though he will not get up and give him *anything* because he is his friend,** (in other words friendship with this man is not enough to get this guy out of bed in the middle of the night) **yet because of his persistence he will get up and give him as much as he needs."**

That word **persistence** here—some of you might even have a different translation and might say shameless persistence; the actual word is shameless audacity; because of your shameless audacity in asking and asking and asking and asking, he will get up. That's more powerful than the friendship! And notice what Jesus says in verse 9:

"So I say to 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 he who seeks, finds; and to him who knocks, it will be opened." (Vs. 9-10)

The encouragement here from Jesus is to be shamelessly persistent in our praying to God—shamelessly persistent! We are His children and, not just because of God's care for us in His friendship, but because of our persistence it says, "*Knock, seek, ask*." Keep asking God; be persistent in your prayers. The second short story, verse 11:

"**Now suppose one of you fathers (**good thing on Father's Day, a couple of father references) **is asked by his son for a fish; he will not give him a snake instead of a fish, will he? Or *if* he is asked for an egg, he will not give him a scorpion, will he?"** (Vs. 11-12)

So there's a child and the child is hungry like, "I need a fish. I need something to eat. I need an egg. I need something to nourish me." And he says, now the father, when asked for food— something that's good that he needs—is not going to turn around and give him something harmful and dangerous is he? Fathers don't do that; they don't say, "Hey, I'm not going to give you any food but by the way here's a scorpion that could kill you." So he says, verse 13:

"If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will *your* heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him?"

I think the core of this teaching here on how to ask is that we should ask with the assurance that God will always give us His best, and what is the best thing that God has to give us? It is His very own presence. This isn't us needing to ask God for the Holy Spirit; we know when we believe in Jesus, we immediately receive the Spirit. But this is saying God will give us the power and wisdom and fullness of the Spirit. He will give us Himself when we ask and that's the best! It doesn't matter what we're going through, we can know that God is in it with us…beside us…for us…will walk on the journey with us…and that is the best! So we ask with assurance and confidence that God will give us His best. We ask with shameless persistence.

So let me conclude with a couple of questions. Are there prayers that God does not answer? And the answer is, "Yes"—the ones that are never asked. James said, "You have not because you ask not." So, if you don't ask God for anything, obviously He's not going to answer; so we ought to ask.

Are there prayers that God says, "No," to? Yes, as a matter of fact, in the very same text in James He says when you ask, and you're asking God for all kinds of stuff but it's harmful stuff. It's scorpions and snakes and you're asking so you can spend it on yourself for your own pleasure, and God says, "No, I'm not going to give you something that's harmful and dangerous." He says "No," and we ought to be thankful that God says no.

Do all other prayers that don't fall into not being asked or God doesn't see fit—that it's not the best—does He say, "Yes," to everything else? Yes, He does, with two ways that can be answered. Sometimes it's an immediate—right now He says, "Yes," and you get the answer. But, folks, I would say far more frequently the answer is, "Yes, but you're going to have to wait. You have to wait because My ways are higher than your ways and My thoughts are higher than your thoughts and I know just the right way and time to deliver that answer, and you're going to have to trust Me, that I'm not saying, "No, I'm just saying not right now."

This is a deep wrestling that we all have to experience. I've gone through this and I've had to come to the conclusion that this is a settled thing for me. There are things that I care passionately and deeply about that I have been asking God for, for some time—for ten, fifteen, twenty years. I've been praying, and here's what I've learned and what I think God said to me. "Mark, are you okay if I don't answer that prayer until after you're gone? Are you okay if I actually answer that prayer when you die? Maybe your death is even the trigger mechanism that makes that thing begin to happen. Are you okay? Can you trust Me when I'm saying, 'Not yet; I'm not saying No, I'm just saying, 'Not yet?'"

That was the whole story of Hebrews 11 wasn't it? They all were asking for this kingdom to come. They wanted to see this realization and it said they all died, not having received it. But they're still watching…right there still watching and seeing it fulfilled today. Can you and I be okay with that? Can we trust God enough that we can ask Him and know He's saying, "Yes," but just trust His timing?

God has given us an audacious, wonderful promise. We'll put it on the screen again. 1 John 5:

> **This is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us *in* whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests which we have asked from Him.**

God, help us to pray as Jesus directed us to pray, and then watch what God can do!

> *Father, teach us to pray. We know the instruction but now teach us to literally live this out tomorrow, Tuesday and Wednesday. God, teach us to pray according to Your will and give us the faith to believe that You will answer, that You can do exceedingly, abundantly beyond all we could ask or even imagine. To Your glory and to the advance of Your kingdom. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

Taken from the NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE
Copyright 1960, 1962, 1963, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1987, 1988,
The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission.
Lincoln Berean Church, 6400 S. 70th, Lincoln, NE 68516 (402) 483-6512
Copyright 2019 – Mark Kremer. All rights reserved.