

The Gospel of Luke, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 16: Teaching on Prayer and Confronting Hypocrisy

Luke 11:1-54

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

This chapter places two things side by side that the teacher must hold together: the warm invitation to pray and the sober exposure of hypocrisy. Doctrinally, the lesson must get the Father right. The God Jesus reveals here is not a reluctant deity who must be worn down, but a good Father who is more eager to give than we are to ask (vv. 11-13). The model prayer (vv. 2-4) sets the priorities of the kingdom, honoring God's name and seeking His will before our own needs, and it teaches that we approach God as children of a Father, not as strangers bargaining with a distant power. The teacher should keep this section warm and practical, sending students home actually wanting to pray.

There is also a kingdom statement here that must be taught with precision. When Jesus says, "If it is by the finger of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you" (v. 20), He is announcing that the kingdom was already breaking in through His own ministry. This is not a promise of a future earthly political reign. The reign of God arrived in the person and work of Christ and was established when the church began at Pentecost, with Christ now reigning at the right hand of the Father (Mark 9:1; Acts 2; Colossians 1:13). Help students see the kingdom as a present reality they live under, not a thousand-year empire still being awaited.

Finally, this passage was written to form the heart, not merely to inform the mind. The heaviest weight falls on the woes (vv. 37-54), where Jesus tears the mask off a religion that is clean on the outside and rotten within. The aim is not to make students feel superior to the Pharisees but to let the scalpel reach their own hearts. God sees the inside. He measures our religion by justice, by the love of God, by inward cleanness, and not by appearances. Send students home praying like trusting children and living like people who know that the God they pray to also sees straight through them, and loves them enough to want them clean all the way down.

Question 1

Student Question:

When the disciples asked Jesus to teach them to pray, He gave them a model that begins "Father, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come" and goes on to ask for daily bread, forgiveness, and deliverance from temptation (vv. 2-4). What does this prayer teach us about the character of God, about the priorities our praying should have, and about the kind of relationship a disciple is invited into with the Father?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Begin with the request itself, because it is striking. The disciples had watched Jesus pray many times, and what they wanted was not new information but a share in what they saw (v. 1). Prayer was clearly the engine of His life, and they wanted it to become the engine of theirs. The teacher should let the group feel the honesty of that request before moving to the words Jesus gives.

Walk through the prayer phrase by phrase. It opens with “Father” (v. 2), which sets the entire tone. We are not approaching a tyrant or a stranger, but a Father who welcomes His children. The first petitions are about God, that His name be hallowed and His kingdom come, which orders our priorities rightly. Before we ask for anything for ourselves, we align our hearts with God’s glory and God’s reign. Only then do we ask for daily bread, for forgiveness, and for deliverance from temptation (vv. 3–4).

Draw out the relational and the practical together. The prayer is short enough to memorize and deep enough to shape a lifetime. It teaches us that God cares about our daily, ordinary needs, our bread and our struggles, and at the same time that prayer is meant to bend our wills toward His, not bend His will toward ours. Notice too that asking forgiveness is tied to forgiving others (v. 4). A heart unwilling to forgive cannot pray this prayer honestly.

Land it pastorally. Many believers carry guilt about their prayer life, assuming real prayer requires eloquence or length. Jesus hands them something simpler and stronger: come to your Father, hallow His name, seek His kingdom, bring Him your real needs, deal honestly with sin. This is not a script to recite mindlessly but a pattern to pray our lives through.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God revealed as Father, who welcomes His children into intimate, confident prayer (Luke 11:2; Romans 8:15)
- The right ordering of prayer: God’s name and kingdom first, our needs second (Matthew 6:33)
- Prayer as the bending of our will toward God’s, not the manipulation of God toward ours
- The link between receiving forgiveness and extending forgiveness to others (Luke 11:4; Matthew 6:14–15)
- Daily dependence on God for ordinary provision and for deliverance from temptation

Discussion Prompts

- Why do you think Jesus put hallowing God’s name and seeking His kingdom before our own needs?
- What does it mean for your prayers that you approach God as Father rather than as a distant power?
- How does tying forgiveness received to forgiveness given change the way you pray?

Question 2

Student Question:

Jesus told of a man who went to a friend at midnight and kept knocking, and He pressed the point with “Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you” (vv. 5–10). Where in your own praying have you given up too soon, and what would change this week if you prayed with the kind of bold persistence Jesus is describing?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the first self-examining question, and the target is persistence in prayer. Jesus tells of a man pounding on a friend’s door at midnight, and the friend finally rises, not out of friendship, but because of the man’s shameless persistence (vv. 5–8). The picture is almost comic, and Jesus uses it on purpose. He then drives the point home with three present-tense commands: ask, seek, knock (vv. 9–10).

Be careful to teach the parable rightly. Jesus is not saying God is a reluctant neighbor who must be badgered. The logic is from the lesser to the greater. If even a grumpy man will eventually answer a persistent knock, how much more will a good Father respond to His children? The persistence is not to change God’s mind but to express and deepen our trust and our desire.

Press the group toward honesty about where they have quit. Many of us pray for a thing twice, hear nothing, and quietly conclude the matter is closed. Ask students to name the prayer they abandoned: the wayward child, the unsaved spouse, the besetting sin, the closed door. Jesus is inviting them to keep knocking, not because God is deaf, but because the asking itself is doing something in us.

Encourage them gently. Persistence in prayer is not nagging; it is the steady posture of a heart that refuses to stop bringing its burdens to a Father it trusts. Invite them to pick up one abandoned prayer this week and bring it back to God with fresh boldness.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Persistence in prayer as an expression of trust, not a means of overcoming God’s reluctance (Luke 18:1–8)
- The argument from lesser to greater: if a reluctant neighbor responds, how much more a good Father
- The ongoing, present-tense nature of asking, seeking, and knocking
- The way persistent prayer shapes and deepens the one who prays

Discussion Prompts

- What is a prayer you stopped praying too soon, and why did you stop?
- How is persistent prayer different from trying to wear God down?
- What would it look like to pick that prayer back up this week?

Question 3

Student Question:

After the friend at midnight, Jesus said that a father who would not give his son a serpent for a fish surely knows how the heavenly Father gives, and “how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!” (vv. 11–13). What does this teach us about the Father’s goodness and His eagerness to give, and how should that reshape the confidence with which we come to Him?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Here Jesus moves from persistence to the goodness of the One we are persisting with. No father, He says, would hand his hungry son a serpent when he asked for a fish, or a scorpion when he asked for an egg (vv. 11–12). Even flawed, sinful human fathers know how to give good gifts. The teacher should let the group feel the warmth of this, because it answers the secret fear that God is stingy or untrustworthy.

Then comes the climactic “how much more” (v. 13). If earthly fathers give good things, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask. Notice the supreme gift Jesus names is not money or comfort but the Holy Spirit Himself. God’s best gift is His own presence and help. This protects students from a transactional view of prayer in which God is a vending machine for our wishes.

Address the fear behind a lot of weak praying. Many believers approach God as though they were imposing, as though He gives reluctantly, watching the clock. Jesus dismantles that picture. The Father is eager to give good gifts. He is not waiting to be impressed; He is waiting to be asked. This is the foundation of bold prayer: not our worthiness, but His goodness.

Bring it home. When students truly believe the Father is good and eager to give, their praying changes. Fear and bargaining give way to trust. Ask the group where a wrong picture of God has been shrinking their prayers, and invite them to come to a Father whose goodness is greater than their doubts.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The goodness and generosity of God the Father toward His children (Luke 11:13; James 1:17)
- The argument from lesser to greater applied to the Father’s eagerness to give
- The Holy Spirit as God’s supreme gift, His own presence and help, not merely material blessings
- Bold prayer grounded in God’s character rather than in our worthiness
- The correction of a transactional or fearful view of God in prayer

Discussion Prompts

- What does it tell you that the Father is more eager to give than you are to ask?
- Why might Jesus name the Holy Spirit as the supreme gift the Father gives?
- Where has a wrong picture of God been shrinking your prayers?

Question 4

Student Question:

Jesus said, "Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters" (v. 23), drawing a line that leaves no neutral ground. In what specific area of your life have you been trying to stay on the fence with Jesus, neither openly against Him nor wholeheartedly with Him, and what is He calling you toward?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-examining question turns on one of the sharpest lines in the chapter: "Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters" (v. 23). Jesus spoke it in the context of the Beelzebul controversy, but its reach is much wider. He leaves no room for spectators. There is no neutral ground with Jesus.

Help the group feel how counter-cultural this is. We prefer to keep our options open, to admire Jesus without committing to Him, to be vaguely on His side without letting Him claim everything. Jesus says that posture is an illusion. To fail to gather with Him is, in fact, to scatter. Lukewarm neutrality is not a safe middle; it is quiet opposition.

Press for specifics without shaming. Most of us are not openly against Christ in any one big area; we are fence-sitting in several small ones. A relationship we have not surrendered. A habit we keep negotiating with. A part of our money, our schedule, our private thoughts where we have not let Him be Lord. Ask students to name the place where they have been hedging.

Point toward wholehearted discipleship. The call of Christ is not to admire Him from a safe distance but to gather with Him, to be wholly on His side. Invite each person to identify one fence they need to come down off of this week and step fully onto Christ's side of.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The impossibility of neutrality toward Christ; we are either with Him or against Him (Luke 11:23)
- Discipleship as wholehearted allegiance, not casual admiration (Luke 9:23)
- The deceptiveness of lukewarm faith that imagines itself safe (Revelation 3:15–16)
- The lordship of Christ over every area of life, not only the religious part

Discussion Prompts

- Where have you been trying to stay neutral toward Jesus?
- Why does Jesus say there is no middle ground between gathering and scattering?

- What is one fence you need to step off of and onto Christ's side this week?

Question 5

Student Question:

When His enemies claimed He cast out demons by Beelzebul, Jesus answered, "But if it is by the finger of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you" (v. 20). What does this declaration teach about when and how the kingdom of God arrived, and why does it matter that Jesus speaks of the kingdom as something already breaking in rather than something only to come?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question handles one of the most important doctrinal statements in Luke. When accused of casting out demons by Beelzebul, Jesus first exposes the absurdity of the charge: a kingdom divided against itself cannot stand (vv. 17–18). Then He delivers the key line: "But if it is by the finger of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you" (v. 20). The teacher must slow down here.

Notice the tense. Jesus does not say the kingdom will someday come; He says it has come upon them, present and active, in His own ministry. The casting out of demons is evidence that the reign of God is breaking into the world right then, in the person and work of Christ. The strong man (Satan) is being bound and his goods plundered (vv. 21–22). This is the language of a victory already underway, not merely a future hope.

Teach the kingdom with precision, because this is where error often enters. The kingdom of God is not a future earthly political empire that Jesus failed to establish and postponed. The reign of God arrived with Christ's ministry, was preached as at hand (Mark 1:14–15), and was established with power when the church began at Pentecost (Mark 9:1; Acts 2). Christ now reigns from the right hand of the Father over His church (Colossians 1:13). There is no thousand-year earthly reign still being awaited.

Connect this to the believer's life now. We do not stand on the outside of the kingdom looking forward to its arrival. Through obedience to the gospel we have been transferred into the kingdom of God's beloved Son (Colossians 1:13), living under His present reign. The same power that bound the strong man in Jesus' ministry secures us now. Let students marvel that the kingdom they belong to is not a distant dream but a present, reigning reality.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The kingdom of God as a present reality breaking in through Christ's ministry, not only a future hope (Luke 11:20; Mark 1:14–15)
- Christ's binding of the strong man as evidence of His authority over Satan (Luke 11:21–22; Colossians 2:15)

- The establishment of the kingdom with power when the church began at Pentecost (Mark 9:1; Acts 2)
- Christ's present reign at the right hand of the Father over His church (Colossians 1:13; Acts 2:36)
- The error of a future earthly thousand-year reign; the reign of God is now
- Believers transferred into the kingdom now through obedience to the gospel (Colossians 1:13)

Discussion Prompts

- Why is it significant that Jesus says the kingdom has come, not merely that it will come?
- How does the binding of the strong man show Christ's authority over Satan?
- What does it change for you to know you live under Christ's present reign rather than waiting for the kingdom to begin?

Question 6

Student Question:

Jesus described an unclean spirit that leaves a person, then returns to find the house "swept and put in order" but empty, and brings seven other spirits so the last state is worse than the first (vv. 24–26). Where in your life have you swept out an old sin or habit but left the room empty rather than filling it with Christ, and what would it mean to fill that space rather than just clean it?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-examining question grows from Jesus' sobering picture of the unclean spirit (vv. 24–26). The spirit leaves a man, wanders, and returns to find the house "swept and put in order" but empty. So it brings seven worse spirits, and the man's last state is worse than the first. The teacher should help the group see what the parable is warning against.

The danger is reformation without replacement. The house was cleaned but left vacant. Jesus is warning that simply removing a sin, breaking a habit, cleaning up our behavior, is not enough if Christ does not take possession of the space. An empty heart does not stay empty; it gets re-occupied, often by something worse.

Make this concrete. Many believers have tried to overcome a sin by sheer willpower, sweeping it out, only to watch it return with reinforcements. The reason is that they emptied the room without filling it. Real change is not just stopping the old; it is being filled with the new, with Christ, with His word, with new affections and habits and community.

Move toward application. Ask students where they have been merely cleaning rather than filling. What would it mean to replace the swept-out habit with active devotion: time in the word, prayer, service, fellowship, the things that fill the house with Christ so the old occupant finds no room to return?

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The insufficiency of mere reformation; sin must be replaced, not just removed (Matthew 12:43–45)
- The danger of a swept-but-empty life that invites worse bondage
- The necessity of being filled with Christ and His word, not merely cleaned up (Colossians 3:1–10)
- Genuine transformation as putting off the old and putting on the new

Discussion Prompts

- Where have you swept out a sin but left the room empty rather than filling it with Christ?
- Why is willpower alone not enough to keep an old habit from returning?
- What would it look like to fill that space rather than just clean it?

Question 7

Student Question:

When a woman called out a blessing on the mother who bore Him, Jesus replied, “Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it!” (v. 28). What does Jesus teach here about what truly makes a person blessed, and why is it not enough merely to hear the word, admire it, or feel moved by it?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

When a woman in the crowd blessed the womb that bore Jesus, He gently redirected her: “Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it!” (v. 28). The teacher should note that Jesus is not dishonoring His mother; He is relocating true blessedness. It is found not in physical connection to Him, nor in religious enthusiasm, but in hearing and keeping the word of God.

Press the two verbs together: hear and keep. Many people hear the word. They sit under good teaching, they are moved, they nod in agreement. But Jesus joins hearing to keeping. The blessing belongs to those who both receive the word and do it. Hearing without keeping is, in fact, self-deception (James 1:22–25).

Guard against a subtle religion of feeling. It is possible to enjoy a stirring lesson, to feel deeply moved, even to weep, and to walk out unchanged. Emotion is not obedience. Admiration is not discipleship. Jesus measures blessedness by whether the word takes root and shapes how we actually live.

Bring it home pastorally. Ask the group what they tend to do with the word they hear. Do they file it away as information, savor it as inspiration, or carry it out as obedience? The blessed life

Jesus describes is not the most informed or the most moved, but the most obedient. Invite them to name one thing they have heard that they have not yet kept.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- True blessedness located in hearing and keeping the word of God (Luke 11:28; James 1:25)
- The inseparable union of hearing and doing; hearing without keeping is self-deception (James 1:22–24)
- Emotion and admiration as no substitute for obedience
- The word of God as the standard that must shape the disciple's actual life

Discussion Prompts

- Why does Jesus say the truly blessed are those who hear and keep the word?
- What is the difference between being moved by the word and keeping it?
- What is one thing you have heard from God's word but not yet obeyed?

Question 8

Student Question:

Jesus said, "Your eye is the lamp of your body," and that when the eye is healthy the whole body is full of light, but when it is bad the body is full of darkness (vv. 34–36). What are you allowing your eyes and attention to feed on these days, and how is what you look at shaping whether your inner life is full of light or full of darkness?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-examining question draws on the lamp and the eye (vv. 33–36). Jesus says the eye is the lamp of the body. When the eye is healthy, the whole body is full of light; when it is bad, the body is full of darkness. The teacher should explain that Jesus is speaking of the inner life. What we fix our attention on, what we let in through our eyes, determines whether we are full of light or darkness within.

Make the connection to the surrounding context. Jesus has just refused to give the crowd a sign because they would not truly see what was already in front of them (vv. 29–32). The problem was not their eyesight but their willingness to see. The eye that is bad is the heart that refuses the light God is offering.

Bring this into the world students actually live in. We are flooded with images, screens, feeds, and entertainments competing for our gaze. What we habitually look at trains the heart. A steady diet of darkness, whether bitterness, lust, envy, or cynicism, fills the inner life with shadow, while a gaze fixed on Christ and His word fills it with light.

Apply it specifically. Ask students to take an honest inventory of what they look at and dwell on: their screens, their reading, their daydreams, their attention. What are they feeding the lamp of

the body? Invite them to remove one source of darkness and replace it with something that lets the light in this week.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The inner life shaped by what we give our attention to (Luke 11:34; Matthew 6:22–23)
- Spiritual blindness as an unwillingness to see the light God offers (Luke 11:29–32)
- The heart filled with light or darkness according to what it takes in (Philippians 4:8)
- The call to guard the gaze and the attention as a matter of spiritual life

Discussion Prompts

- What have your eyes and attention been feeding on lately?
- How does what you habitually look at shape your inner life?
- What is one source of darkness you could remove and replace with light this week?

Question 9

Student Question:

To the Pharisees and lawyers Jesus pronounced a string of woes: they cleaned the outside of the cup while inside they were full of greed (v. 39); they tithed their garden herbs yet neglected “justice and the love of God” (v. 42); they loved the best seats and greetings in the marketplaces (v. 43); and they loaded people with burdens hard to bear while not lifting a finger themselves (v. 46). What do these woes teach us about how God evaluates our religion, about the deadly danger of hypocrisy, and about where true righteousness must begin?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the heaviest doctrinal question of the lesson, and the teacher should give it the most time and care. When a Pharisee was astonished that Jesus did not wash before dinner, Jesus exposed the whole system: “Now you Pharisees cleanse the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside you are full of greed and wickedness” (v. 39). What follows is a series of woes that lay bare the anatomy of hypocrisy, and they are meant to search every religious heart, including ours.

Walk through the woes one by one. First, the obsession with outward cleanness while the inside was full of greed (vv. 39–41). Second, the meticulous tithing of garden herbs, mint and rue, while they neglected “justice and the love of God” (v. 42). Jesus does not condemn the tithing; He condemns majoring on minors while abandoning what matters most. Third, the love of “the best seat in the synagogues and greetings in the marketplaces” (v. 43), a religion performed for the applause of others. Then to the lawyers: loading people with burdens hard to bear while not lifting a finger (v. 46), and honoring dead prophets their fathers had killed while resisting the living word of God (vv. 47–52).

Draw out the doctrine clearly: God evaluates our religion from the inside out. He sees the heart (1 Samuel 16:7). Outward religious performance, however correct and however impressive to people, is condemned when it covers an inner life of greed, injustice, pride, and a heart far from the love of God. The Pharisees were not irreligious; they were intensely religious. That is precisely why this warning is so dangerous to overlook. Hypocrisy is the besetting sin of the devout, not the careless.

Be careful with the application. The temptation is to read this and feel relieved that we are not like the Pharisees, which is itself a Pharisee's prayer (Luke 18:11). Turn the scalpel inward. Where do we keep the outside clean, the attendance, the language, the reputation, while greed, bitterness, or coldness toward justice and the love of God live inside? True righteousness must begin within. Jesus says, "give as alms those things that are within, and behold, everything is clean for you" (v. 41). Cleanse the inside, and the outside follows. Not the reverse.

End with hope, not just rebuke. Jesus exposes the disease because He is the physician who can heal it. The answer to hypocrisy is not despair but a heart laid open before the God who sees it fully and loves us enough to make us clean all the way down. Genuine, heart-deep discipleship begins inside, where only God can see, and works its way out into a life of justice, love, and integrity.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God evaluates religion from the inside out; He looks on the heart, not the outward appearance (Luke 11:39; 1 Samuel 16:7)
- Hypocrisy as the besetting danger of the devout, not the careless (Matthew 23:25–28)
- The condemnation of outward religion that neglects justice and the love of God (Luke 11:42; Micah 6:8)
- The folly of majoring on minors while abandoning the weightier matters
- True righteousness begins within and works outward; cleanse the inside and the outside follows (Luke 11:41)
- Genuine, heart-deep discipleship versus mere appearance and performance for human applause
- The seriousness of resisting the living word of God while honoring the form of religion (Luke 11:52)

Discussion Prompts

- How does God evaluate our religion differently from the way people evaluate it?
- Where are you tempted to keep the outside clean while neglecting the inside?
- What does it mean that true righteousness must begin within and then work outward?

Question 10

Student Question:

Look back across the whole chapter, from “Lord, teach us to pray” to the woes against the religious leaders. Jesus has shown us a Father worth trusting and a hypocrisy worth fearing. Name one specific way you sense Jesus forming you through these verses, whether in how you pray or in how honest your heart is before God. What is the single truth from Luke 11:1–54 that you most need to carry into this coming week?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Use this final question to gather the whole chapter into a single response. Jesus has shown the disciples a Father worth trusting, eager to give good gifts and even the Holy Spirit to those who ask. And He has shown them, in the woes, a hypocrisy worth fearing, a religion clean on the outside and rotten within. The two halves belong together: the same God who invites us to pray as trusting children also sees straight through us.

Resist the urge to introduce new material here. The aim is integration and response. Give students room to name what God has actually stirred, whether a fresh confidence in prayer, a conviction about a swept-but-empty room, or an honest reckoning with the gap between their outward and inward lives.

Press gently toward specifics. A vague resolve to pray more or to be more sincere rarely changes anyone. Ask each person to name one concrete truth from this chapter and one concrete response they will carry into the week, whether picking up an abandoned prayer, filling an empty room with Christ, or letting God begin His cleansing on the inside.

Close by lifting eyes to Christ. The One who teaches us to pray is the One who reigns now, who bound the strong man, whose kingdom has come. Let the final word be trust in the Father whose goodness is greater than our doubts and whose gaze, though it sees everything, is the gaze of love.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Integration of the chapter's themes: confident prayer, the good Father, the present kingdom, and the danger of hypocrisy
- The transforming purpose of God's word, which aims at changed lives and not merely informed minds (James 1:22)
- Personal response and obedience as the goal of studying Scripture
- Trust in the Father whose goodness is greater than our doubts and whose sight is the sight of love

Discussion Prompts

- What single truth from this chapter do you most need this week?
- What is one concrete way you will respond, whether in prayer or in honesty before God?
- How has this chapter changed the way you see both the Father and your own heart?