

The Gospel of Luke

Lesson 16: Teaching on Prayer and Confronting Hypocrisy -- Luke 11:1-54

One of the disciples has been watching Jesus pray. We are not told which one, and it does not matter, because every one of us has been that disciple at some point, standing at the edge of someone else's prayer and feeling our own thin and dry by comparison. When Jesus finishes, the disciple does not ask for a technique or a formula. He asks for something more honest and more vulnerable: "Lord, teach us to pray" (v. 1). It is the cry of a person who has tried and stalled, who suspects there is more, who wants what he has just seen. And Jesus, instead of brushing the request aside, gives him words. Simple words. Words a child could memorize and an old saint could spend a lifetime unpacking.

What follows in this long chapter is a study in contrasts that runs straight to the heart. On one side stands the Father, who gives good gifts to His children, who answers the friend who keeps knocking, who is far more eager to give the Holy Spirit than any earthly father is to feed his hungry child. On the other side stand the Pharisees and the lawyers, religious to the bone, scrubbing the outside of the cup while greed and wickedness slosh around inside (v. 39). Between these two pictures, Jesus casts out a demon, fends off the slander that He does it by Satan's power, and announces that the kingdom of God has come upon them right then and there (v. 20). The lines are being drawn, and they are not drawn where the religious experts expected.

There is a warmth in the first half of this chapter that we must not lose. Jesus genuinely wants us to pray, and He genuinely wants us to believe that God hears. The friend at midnight, the picture of asking and seeking and knocking, the father who would never hand his son a serpent when he asked for a fish, all of it is meant to pry our fingers loose from our doubts and put confidence back into our praying. But there is an edge in the second half that we must not soften. Jesus pronounces woe after woe on people who had mastered the appearance of godliness while their hearts had gone cold toward justice and the love of God (v. 42). He is not being cruel. He is being a physician, naming the disease so the patient might be healed.

Read this chapter slowly, and let it search you. It will teach you to pray with the boldness of a child who knows his Father's heart. It will warn you, just as surely, against a religion that looks impressive from the outside and is empty within. Somewhere in this chapter is a mirror, and the question is not whether we will look impressive to the people around us. The question is what God sees when He looks past the polished surface and into the room where no one else is allowed. Ask Him, before you begin, to teach you to pray, and to give you a heart that is clean all the way down.

Group Discussion: When the disciple said, "Lord, teach us to pray" (v. 1), he was admitting that prayer did not come easily even to a man who walked with Jesus every day. Where do you find

prayer hardest right now, and what is it about the way Jesus prayed that makes you want what He had? Talk together honestly about the gap between the praying you do and the praying you wish you did.

Personal Reflection: Jesus told the Pharisees that they cleaned the outside of the cup while the inside was full of greed and wickedness (v. 39). If you are honest, is there a part of your life that looks clean to the people who know you but is not clean in the room where only God can see? What would it look like this week to let God begin His cleansing on the inside rather than the outside?

Read Luke 11:1-54

Study Questions

1. 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?
2. 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?
3. 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?
4. 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?
5. 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?
6. 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?

7. 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?
8. 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?
9. 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?
10. 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?

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: Matthew 6:5–15, Jesus on praying in secret and the model prayer; 1 Samuel 16:7, the Lord looks not on the outward appearance but on the heart; Isaiah 29:13, a people who honor God with their lips while their hearts are far from Him; Colossians 1:13, having been delivered from darkness and transferred into the kingdom of the Son; James 1:22–25, being doers of the word and not hearers only who deceive themselves.