

Luke 11:1-13 The Keys to Effective Praying

I want to begin with a true but incredible story. Back in September 1996 a man named Edouardo Sierra, a citizen of Spain, was on a business trip to Sweden. He was driving through the Swedish countryside when he came upon a Catholic church. He decided to stop in for a few moments to say a prayer. The church was empty except for a coffin with a body lying at rest inside it. Edouardo decided to take a few moments to stop and pray for the man who lay in the coffin. Then he signed a book of remembrance left by the coffin. Apart from his signature, the book was empty.

Some weeks later, Edouardo received a telephone call telling him he was a millionaire. The body was that of a Swedish businessman, with no close relatives, who had left his fortune “to whoever prays for my soul first.”

This morning we are going to talk about the keys to effective prayer. I wish that I could promise you that if you pray using these keys you will receive the kind of return on your prayer that Edouardo received. That would be far better than the stock market. Pray for just a few minutes and become a millionaire. As you have probably already discovered, it really doesn't work that way. Unfortunately, often times, just the opposite is true.

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 disciples were very much aware of what an important role prayer played in Jesus' life. The references to Jesus praying are numerous just within the opening chapters of the Gospel of Luke.

Jesus prayed at his baptism (Luke 3:21).

He prayed during his temptation (Luke 5:16).

On one occasion he prayed all night (Luke 6:12).

On the day when he asked the disciples, “Who do the people say that I am?” he had been praying alone (Luke 9:18).

Afterward he went up onto a mountain to pray (Luke 9:28).

And now, on this occasion, Luke tells us, “He was praying in a certain place.”

Prayer was important to Jesus just as it ought to be to us. Martin Luther King, Jr. once said, **“To be a Christian without prayer is no more possible than to be alive without breathing,”**

The disciples saw how important prayer was to Jesus and so they asked him to teach them to pray. At that point Jesus taught them the most famous prayer ever prayed. Luke's version of the prayer is a little shorter than the Lord's Prayer that we use, but it gets right to the heart of what prayer ought to be. Here is what Jesus taught them.

“When you pray, say: ‘Father, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread. Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us. And lead us not into temptation.’”

Note how the Master begins by focusing our attention on God. “When you pray, say: ‘Father . . .’” This is important.

When we pray it is tempting to hop right in with our needs, our concerns. It is as if God is a peripheral player in our universe. Our focus is on the almighty me. That is the spirit of our times. Jesus began his prayer by focusing upon God.

“Father,” he began. What a revolutionary statement of faith that was, of course. Only Jesus would be bold enough to call the Creator of all the universe Father. “Father, hallowed be your name . . .”

That's an antiquated word—“hallowed.” A dictionary definition of hallowed would be **“Sanctified, consecrated, highly venerated.”** **Not only do we not use the word hallowed anymore, very few things in our world are regarded as sanctified, consecrated or highly venerated.**

“Father, hallowed be your name” He told us to begin our prayer by focusing on God and Who God is. Notice what he says next: **“Your kingdom come.”** **When Christ refers to God's kingdom, he is referring to any place God reigns in human affairs. Some of the ancient manuscripts like Matthew's gospel (6:10) include the words, “May your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”** That is why we include those words when we say the Lord's Prayer. But, again, the focus is on God and His eternal purpose for life.

Here is the chief problem in our prayers oftentimes. **We want to focus on our kingdom and our will.** Jesus understands that. In the Garden of Gethsemane, remember how he prayed that the cup of suffering would

be taken away from him. Nevertheless, when it came crunch time, he prayed, **“Not my will, but yours be done.”**

All prayer is based in the goodness of God. We can pray **“your kingdom come, your will be done” because we believe God’s will is always for our best good.** Notice how Jesus illustrates this truth later in this passage. He tells about a father whose son asks for fish and an egg. Will the father give him instead a stone, a serpent, or a scorpion? Of course not. **Jesus begins with God because all prayer is based in the nature of God. He is Creator, Sustainer, and Father of all that is. And His nature is Love.**

We need to see that, if God’s will is done, we will receive everything we need. **“Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness,” said Jesus, “and all these things will be given to you as well”** (Matthew 6:33). Sometimes we do not see that because we do not see life from God’s perspective. But God knows our needs and God will provide. When you pray, trust God. He knows your needs. **He is the source of our life. He is our hope for a better life. He is the Lord of all creation. Only after Christ has focused our attention on God and His kingdom and His will does he turn to our needs.** **“Give us each day our daily bread.”** It is interesting how much Jesus had to say about our physical needs only one line. That’s all.

Here again is why so much of our prayer life is ineffective. **You and I probably spend most of our prayer time on our physical needs. Yet Jesus devoted four times as much time on our spiritual needs as upon our physical needs.**

This is not to say that daily bread is unimportant. Jesus taught us to pray for it. God’s will is for our physical needs to be met. How can we be effective servants if our daily physical needs are not met? It is perfectly legitimate for us to share with God the pressing concerns of our life. But our physical well-being is just part of our deepest needs. Focus on God and His kingdom. **Begin your prayer by asking that God’s kingdom will come and that his will be done. Give priority to His priorities, then he will provide the rest.**

“Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us.” Wow! That is a hard one. Forgiving someone who has wronged us is tough. No matter how many physical blessings you have, if you are still carrying around anger and bitterness and resentment in your heart because someone has done you some wrong, you are carrying a cancer in your soul. Forgiving others is one of the most therapeutic exercises in which we can engage. Don’t you see? **You don’t forgive the other person for their sake, but for your own.** It’s easy to obtain God’s forgiveness. If you’re sincerely repentant, God will surely forgive. But forgiving yourself and forgiving others, that is what is hard.

“And lead us not into temptation.” We are sinners, with infinite possibilities for good, but sinners still. All of us need to wash daily in God’s cleansing streams. We need God’s help to escape the temptations that are forever with us.

It is Matthew who adds, **“But deliver us from evil . . .”** You know He will deliver us from temptation if we ask, don’t you? If you really want Him to. Many people, however, are quite happy to be tempted. Are you being tempted? Pray for His help. His main concern is your best good.

What are the keys to effective prayer? Focus on God and His goodness and His love. Ask for your physical needs, but remember your spiritual needs as well your need for forgiveness, but also your need to forgive and your need to be kept from temptation.

It was the early church that added those last lines with which we complete the Lord’s Prayer. But they represent the culmination of everything we believe about this loving God: **“For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen.”**