

Victory Lutheran Church- Jacksonville, FL  
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**Worship Series: *Focused***

**Service Theme: *Focused Prayer Claims What God Wants for Us,  
Not What We Want from Him***

**Sermon Theme: *Go Ask Your Dad (July 24, 2022)*  
*Luke 11:1-13***

*“Americans pray. And that’s a good thing. How much they understand about communicating with God, how they approach him, and what they expect from it is surprising. There is a demographic that isn’t sure about the value of praying and whether it would change anything.”* That’s what James Bolthouse, President and CEO of the Presidential Prayer Team said about a Barna survey about the prayer life of Americans. And I think that’s a pretty good summary.

The survey reported that 45% of Americans pray at least daily, 66% pray at least once a week, and only 15% never pray. When someone is facing troubling or uncertain circumstances, you’ll hear plenty of people promise, “I’ll pray for you!” When tragedy strikes, you’ll even find unbelievers saying things on Twitter like, “Prayers for peace and healing.” From survey results, and by simply observing others, it’s clear that prayer is still very much ingrained in our culture’s consciousness.

But as Bolthouse noted, there’s still a lot of confusion and uncertainty about it. What should we pray for? How should we pray? Does prayer really make any difference? The survey reported that only 39% of Christians believed that God hears and answers all of our prayers, while surprisingly, 14% of those who pray aren’t even sure that God hears and answers their prayers.

I think there are two primary reasons for that uncertainty. People don’t know what they should pray for; and they’re uncertain whether praying actually makes any difference. That means there are plenty of people who need to make the same request of Jesus as one of his

disciples did: **“Lord, teach us to pray.”** In our sermon text, Jesus teaches us the “What,” “How,” and “Why,” of prayer.

He starts with the “what” by teaching a model prayer—a template for what we should pray for-- what we call The Lord’s Prayer.

The Lord’s Prayer is beautifully simple, making it easy to memorize. But because people have it memorized, the Lord’s Prayer often is a victim of rote recitation, praying it to God without thinking about what we’re saying. So, let’s spend a few minutes reviewing what we’re asking God for.

In Luke’s Gospel, Jesus includes five requests or “petitions” to God. In worship, we pray the version recorded by Matthew which Jesus taught another time during the Sermon on the Mount, which includes seven petitions.

First, note who Jesus tells us to pray to. Basically, **Go Ask Your Father.** We’ll talk more about why that’s significant of later, but Jesus teaching us to pray to God as our personal Father wasn’t how Jewish people normally thought about God.

First, we petition our Father, **“Hallowed be your name.”** To “hallow” means to value something as holy, and special. So we’re asking God to lead and empower us to honor his name with godly lives and faithful testimony to his Word, and by restraining whatever would dishonor God’s name.

Second, we petition our Father, **“Your kingdom come.”** God’s kingdom is his saving activity on earth. So we’re asking God to continue ruling in our hearts, and in the hearts of others by faith. And finally, to establish his eternal rule over all things when he comes again at Judgment Day.

Third, we petition our Father, **“Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”** We’re asking God to make all things work on earth according to his perfect knowledge, and will that all people be saved!

Fourth, we petition our Father, ***“Give us each day our daily bread.”*** We’re simply asking our gracious Father to provide all the material blessings we need each day for our earthly lives.

Fifth, we petition our Father, ***“Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us.”*** As forgiven children of God through faith in Jesus, we’re asking God to move us to forgive others who sin against us, and for continued assurance of forgiveness for our own sins.

Sixth, we petition our Father, ***“Lead us not into temptation.”*** We’re asking God not to abandon us when we’re tempted, or allow us to be tempted beyond what we can bear.

And finally, we petition our Father, ***“Deliver us from evil.”*** We’re asking God to deliver us from both physical and spiritual harm in this life, and finally, to deliver us eternally from evil by bringing us safely to heaven.

What’s maybe surprising about Jesus’ model prayer is that 6 out of the 7 requests he makes to God are for spiritual blessings. Only one—daily bread—petitions God for physical blessings. When you think about your typical prayers, are they primarily for spiritual blessings? Or physical? If we’re honest, most people pray for physical blessings a lot more than spiritual blessings. It’s certainly not wrong to pray for physical needs—Jesus teaches us to! But the primary emphasis of the Lord’s Prayer is the spiritual needs of us and others.

Why? Why would God teach us to prioritize spiritual over physical, when we certainly have physical needs too? Well, spiritual blessings are primary because spiritual blessings are eternal. But all physical blessings are temporary. So, while earthly blessings might seem primary here and now, like Jesus taught Martha last week, spiritual blessings are the one thing needful!

What’s more, in the Lord’s Prayer, Jesus teaches us to pray back to God everything he’s already promised to do for us! Every petition in the Lord’s Prayer is for a blessing God has promised to give us. And that fills us with great confidence as we pray according to God’s will,

assured that he will answer those prayers with a resounding, “Yes!” It also gives us peace, knowing we’ve put our needs into the hands of one with the power and the desire to fulfill it for us!

Kind of like if you’re good friends with a plumber who promises to fix any issues you ever have at your house. If you do have issues, you don’t have to be afraid to call that plumber, because you’re just asking him to do what he’s already promised. Calling him gives you great confidence, because your problem is now in the hands of someone who has both the will and ability to take care of it.

And if you primarily focus on praying for spiritual needs, it’s not as if God won’t take care of your physical needs also! In the next chapter of Luke’s Gospel, Jesus tells his disciples, ***“But seek his kingdom, and these things [food, drink, clothing] will be given to you as well.”***

Now, understand, not every one of our prayers has to be the Lord’s Prayer word for word, but through it, Jesus gives us a template to understand what we should pray for. Focus primarily on confidently praying for the spiritual blessings God has promised, and he will care for your physical needs as well!

Then, Jesus uses an illustration to teach us “how” we should pray for the “what.” ***“Suppose you have a friend, and you go to him at midnight and say, ‘Friend, lend me three loaves of bread; a friend of mine on a journey has come to me, and I have no food to offer him.’”***

I’m sorry, if you show up on my doorstep at midnight asking for bread, I’m not even answering the door! But in the Jewish hospitality culture, this guy was desperate to avoid the shame of not providing for his unexpected guest. So while his friend at first tells him to get off his porch, the persistent man keeps knocking, “Help me, help me, help me!” And eventually, he gives him what he needs. As Jesus says, ***“Even though he will not get up and give you the bread because of friendship, yet because of your shameless audacity he will surely get up and give you as much as you need.”***

It wasn’t his friendship that got the man out of bed at midnight, it was the man’s audacious, persistent asking that did it. Now, Jesus isn’t

saying if you keep pestering God in prayer, eventually he'll break and give us what we want. But Jesus encourages that kind of boldness and persistence in our prayer lives!

If you're praying for something God has promised, but haven't received it yet, don't give up praying to him about it! Don't assume that he doesn't hear your prayer. Be persistent and bold to hold God to keep his promises! And if you're praying for something God hasn't promised, and don't get it right away, don't stop being persistent in prayer. Sometimes, God's timeline is just different than ours. That's why Jesus says, ***“Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.”*** In Greek, those three verbs—ask, seek, and knock are ongoing actions. Keep asking, keep seeking, keep knocking! So as we pray for the “what” Jesus has taught us, pray with the “how” of boldness and persistence!

And then finally, Jesus teaches us “Why” we can pray like that. Again, in the Lord's Prayer, Jesus tells us, “Go ask your Father!” Jesus concludes his teaching, ***“Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!”***

Jesus is using what's called an argument from the lesser to the greater, comparing earthly fathers to our Heavenly Father. Any dad who's even a remotely good father will do what he can to provide for his children's needs. Good fathers don't withhold things their children need, or intentionally give them things that will harm them.

If we can have that confidence in approaching sinful earthly fathers whose knowledge of what's best or most needed for their children is limited at best, how much more confidently, persistently, and boldly can we come to the all-powerful God of the universe who always knows what's best for us, and what is most needed; our heavenly Father who always acts with our best interest in mind! So when Jesus tells us, “Go ask your Father” in the Lord's Prayer, he's reminding us

that we're praying to the one who has both the will and the power to give us everything we need.

But why then do so many people, including us sometimes, struggle with praying to their heavenly Father, thinking that it won't do them any good? I think the struggle comes from thinking of God not as our heavenly Father, but as our personal genie.

You'd expect a genie to grant your wishes, and give you whatever you want, right? So, if we think of praying to God like asking a genie to grant us our wishes, it's easy to become skeptical, hopeless, or disgruntled with God if we don't see our prayers answered immediately, or in the way that we want them to be answered. Maybe you feel like you must not know what to pray for, since you didn't get what you prayed for. Or maybe you think praying is a waste of time, because you stop believing that God hears and answers our prayers.

But thinking of praying to God as approaching your heavenly Father changes your perspective entirely. What's a father's job? Not to give his kids whatever they want, but to give them what they need. Believe me, sometimes my kids think I'm the worst dad ever, because I didn't let them eat ice cream for breakfast, or stay up until midnight like they wanted. But as a Father, my goal's not to give them what they want, but what's actually best for them.

And when we petition our perfect heavenly Father for something he hasn't promised us, and he doesn't give us what we want, instead of assuming prayer doesn't work, or that he's the worst God ever, can we instead trust that if God didn't give us what we wanted, it's because he knows what we really need more than we do?

Sometimes, my kids will ask Kelly if we can get ice cream, and she'll smile and tell them, “Go ask your Dad.” And the kids smile too, because they know that Dad likes ice cream just as much as they do—maybe more. Because they know they're asking me for something I want too, the chances are good I'll give it to them. Even more so when we pray to God for the spiritual and physical blessings that he's promised to give us! And when I say no to my kids' plea for ice cream,

it's because I know they've had enough sugar, or there's something more important we need to do. Even more so, when we pray to our heavenly Father, we confidently know that he'll always answer our prayers according to his perfect will for what we need. So friends, Go ask your Father! Pray to him with boldness and persistence, because... Father knows best.