



Christ's School of Prayer
The Importance of Prayer - Part One

Well it is said of Caesar Augustus that he came upon Rome as a city of bricks, but he left it as a city of marble. Well far better than Caesar, one writer once put it, is to have a pastor come upon a group of average Christians and leave them behind as a praying congregation. That certainly is my hope and my prayer and my ambition not only with my tenure as a pastor here at this church, but certainly as we get into this exposition of Luke Chapter 11. My hope is that when we are done we will express in our lives much more clearly what our founding distinctives articulate and that is that we would be a congregation that genuinely relies upon prayer. That that would be the practice and the characteristic of our church.

Well Mike we would like to do that, but we're really busy. You have no idea. We're so busy, here in Orange County. We're busy. Well let me respond to that which is certainly the first objective most moderns make - the way that D.L. Moody responded to the Christians in the bustling downtown city of Chicago. He said if you have so much business to attend to that you have no time to pray well, well then you can be assured that you have more business on hand than God ever intended you to have. To put it in brief, if you're too busy to pray well then you are just too busy, and I can say that with the authority of scripture. Something's gotta give and something's got to change in your life. In reality that's merely an excuse for most people.

This is a discipline that is not easy. Cause some people would respond and say OK Mike Ok, if that's what the series is all about I'll just commit right up front, I'm going to pray more. I'll pray more. We're going to purpose to pray more. Well I wish it were that easy, but it is not. It is not that easy. I could open the microphone, and I could call just the seasoned Christians who've been around the block many times in the Christian life to come up, stand here, and testify to all of us just what a real challenge it is to pray well, to pray often, to pray broadly and to pray deeply. That's not easy. It's difficult. It's a lot of work, and Jesus knew it would be difficult for every generation of Christians, and so he left us these instructions among many others in the New Testament to teach us how to pray. To pray the way that we ought to.

Luke Chapter 11 is where we've come, and we're going to take six weeks to go through just 13 verses in this very very important topic in learning to pray the way we ought to. It is a good pace in my opinion. We'll take this very slowly, very carefully, digest every phrase. As a matter of fact, today we're only going to deal with the first verse and a half. That's all we'll get today to set the stage for what comes, but I want to read, as we begin our series, the entirety of this section where Jesus is teaching on prayer. So call it up on your device. Turn in your Bibles to Luke 11:1-13, put your eyeballs on those words. I'm reading from the ESV and let's read the totality of it as it says in verse number 1.

“Now Jesus was praying in a certain place and when he finished one of his disciples said to him, Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples. And he said to them, when you pray, say: Father, hallowed be your name.” Stop. We think, oh there it is. I've heard this. This is from the Sermon on the Mount. This is the thing that he taught. This must be a parallel passage. No. It is not a parallel passage. It's parallel only in that the content is similar, but remember where we've come from. The Galilean ministry up north by the Sea of Galilee, and now we've come

through Samaria - the 72 were sent out. He's come down to Judea. He's already been in Bethany with Mary and Martha. He is in this region now with a whole new set of disciples teaching them here in Judea what he's taught his disciples there in the Sermon on the Mount in Galilee so why these words doesn't match up perfectly is because this is a different setting. It certainly contains much of the same information, but it elaborates on a lot that we didn't get over there in Matthew Chapter 6.

“Father, hallowed by your name. [bottom of verse two] Your kingdom come. [Verse 3] Give us each day our daily bread, and forgive our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone who is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation. And he said to them, [after giving them this template here] Which of you who has a friend will go to him at midnight and say to him, ‘Friend lend me three loaves, for a friend of mine has arrived on a journey, and I have nothing to set before him.’”

Now you've got to think that's a pretty good friend of yours. Run over there at midnight and say I need some food. Now there's no mini-mart, there's no 24 hour grocery store so if you're going to get food for your famished traveling friend I guess you're going to have to borrow it. So he goes to this guy in the middle of the night, hey, help me out, and he says what I think a lot of my friends would say, verse 7, hey, don't bother me. It's late the door's shut. My kid's here are sleeping, there in bed here with me. I can't get up and give you anything. Verse 8. “I tell you, though he will not get up and give him anything [on the grounds that he's his friend, because he's his friend, yet because of his impudence because he's continual and he's unrelenting in this request. Well then his friend's going to rise and him whatever he needs.] I tell you, ask, [now we don't catch this in English, but we'll get into it when we get there, but this tense here, that ongoing impudence if you will, that kind of ongoing request which is the tense of this verb here. If you ask and keep asking] it will be given to you.” If you seek and keep seeking, it'll be shown. You'll find it. If you knock and keep knocking, that's the emphasis of the tense here, it'll be opened to you. For everyone who asks, receives, and the one who seeks, finds, and to the one who knocks, it will be opened.

Illustration now, verse 11, “What father among you if his son asks for a fish will instead of a fish give him a serpent; or if he asks for an egg will give him a scorpion; [well, wouldn't do that well] if you then, who are evil know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!”

We're going to take six weeks to go through this real carefully, but today as promised I'm just going to give you the setting and make some observations about the setting and draw from the setting something that will be very important to set the stage for where we're going in the next six studies here in Luke.

Verse 1. Let's get the context. Jesus praying in a certain place. That was his habit. We read that all the time. Matthew, Mark, Luke and John are always recording Jesus always out there praying and again he's praying in a certain place. He's got a place that he's going now, which is a new place from all the other places he'd had earlier in his Galilean ministries, and when he was



done and he comes back, what were you doing? Oh I was praying. Oh you know what, can you teach us to pray? One of his disciples spoke out. We'd like to pray and you know what, we know that's the pattern here cause John the Baptist he was known for praying and he taught his disciples how to pray. Well just teach us like John taught his disciples. And he said to them, now note this carefully in verse 2, he said to them, hahaha, I don't need to teach you to pray. Everybody knows how to pray. Just talk to God. That's prayer. Prayer, prayer, prayer... that's easy. Highlight all that. Is that there? Oh. This is the first observation we need to make. What's being taught in this text is not what most people do. Cause most people, if you said how do you pray, well I just, you just talk to God. You just if you've got a need you tell God what's on your heart.

You know that 75% of Americans report in survey's consistently anywhere between 70 and 80% of Americans say, I pray regularly. I pray, I pray as a pattern of my life. I'm praying. That's not the kind of praying we're talking about here, and I'll prove it to you. In the same survey they ask, when do you pray? And the answer that was most frequently given in this, when I feel like praying. Now just think about that. When I feel like praying. Now certainly Jesus is going to teach a kind of praying that's not that kind of just instinctual praying when I feel prompted to pray. Cause he's even going to talk about things like your daily bread. And speaking of that, and Jesus patterned this in the way that he prayed when he received his daily prayer. I mean certainly the kind of praying we're talking about is this daily sense of connection with God even over the little things like the food we get, and that same survey asked, do you pray before meals? Guess what the percentage was? 1 percent. So, whatever you're doing is certainly not in keeping with what we are dealing with here. Let's call it this, Number 1, Good Praying.

1. Good Praying Is Not Intuitive.

It's not instinctive. It's not what the rest of the culture is doing because everyone out there seems to be praying even, check this out, atheists. No, no. New survey 2004 asked, do you pray? Here it comes, 30% of atheists say, occasionally. Occasionally I do. 17% of the atheists said, oh I pray regularly. To who? I mean what is that about? You've heard the old line there's no atheists in the foxhole. When bullets are whizzing over your head everyone starts to get very religious, even people that don't believe in God. You know when they come home from a doctor's appointment where they just found out their wife has cancer guess what everyone does? God help me, God, if you're out there, and I don't believe that you are, but if you're there, please help me. See all you need is a crisis for people to start praying. All you have to do is ask people, do you pray? They say, yes. You say, when do you pray? Well when I feel prompted to pray. Well usually that's because I need something, and I can't seem to get it for myself. I have a need, I have a want, I have a desire, I have a crisis, I have something that pains me or scares me or something I can't fix. God, oh God, help me. Now that's a kind of instinctive praying. That's a kind of intuitive praying. That's a kind of praying that I'm not going to say is not praying, it's just not the kind of praying we're going to study for the next six weeks. That's not what we're talking about.

Biblical praying is different. I called it in this point, Good Praying. Jesus obviously is going to teach us good praying. John the Baptist clearly taught his disciples a good kind of biblical praying and that kind of praying is not praying and so it may be that you pray a lot like non-Christians pray. You may pray, oh, dare I make the comparison, you may pray like atheists pray,

whenever you feel like it. Whenever you feel like you're in trouble. I gotta, I can't, I need help! And then all of a sudden, hey, you're praying. Pastor comes and says do you pray? Oh yeah, I pray. See, we've got to be real careful about defining prayer, cause everyone's doing it, and clearly if everyone's doing it and they're doing it right then Jesus wouldn't have any instructions for us. But it's not only in this passage. We won't even get through the entirety of the Gospel of Luke without several lessons on prayer. He's going to teach a lot about prayer because it's not intuitive. It's not instinctive. It's not natural. Let me show you why.

Turn in your Bibles if you would. Keep your finger here to Luke 11 and turn with me to Matthew 26. A familiar scene, the scene of course is Jesus about to go to the cross. He's in the Garden of Gethsemane. He's going to get arrested there, and he's praying. And he's praying about something that really in his flesh, in his natural state, in his own desires for comfort and safety that we all have, he doesn't want to go to the cross, but he concedes in that wrestling in prayer, not my will, but yours be done. We talk about it all the time. Well one of the things in his prayer life there that he works through and that is the obedience of going to the cross when he doesn't feel like it, he calls his best friends, his closest disciples to pray with him, and you know how this story goes. They don't do very well. Verse 40, drop all the way down to verse 40, Matthew 26:40. "And he came to the disciples and he found them sleeping." Now can you pray with me? This is a big day, important day, it's critical. I have a lot I'm grieving over. Pray with me. No, they didn't do it. And he said to Peter, hey, wake up. You couldn't watch with me for one hour? Oh, ding ding ding ding, I'm already recognizing that whatever prayer is - that you're expecting from your disciples, it ain't the kind of prayer the world's doing. It's not even the kind of prayer that I'm doing. It's the kind of prayer that I don't know who does that kind of praying. Where an hour seems to be the low bar, and he says, couldn't even do it for an hour. What do you mean for an hour? If I could put the brainy-scope on your forehead and run the tapes back and find the last time you labored in prayer for an entire hour I just wonder how many names would be up on the screen right now? And when that would be - what year would be next to that? An hour of continuous, focused prayer. Are you kidding me? And Jesus is chiding them as though that's junior varsity praying. You couldn't even do it for an hour? Are you kidding me? Whoa, wow.

So, good praying, whatever it is, it isn't throwing up a quick one to God when I'm in trouble. It's not even saying a few words of thanksgiving before a meal which would seem impressive you know to the world. This kind of praying you're saying is assumed amongst the disciples? Why is it that we can't seem to do it? Well first he gives them the exhortation, do it, watch and pray, that you may not enter into temptation. Now here comes the explanation. Hey Peter, I'm not saying you've got some wicked, evil heart. No, the spirit is indeed willing, now note these last few words, five words, but the flesh is weak. You want to know why this is so hard? You want to know why it's not intuitive or natural? Well because you've got something that is a part of who you are that is going to fight it. It does not want to cooperate, and it will be hostile toward you're communication with God. The flesh is weak. You have an enemy to your prayer life, and it is your flesh. Now I know we like to make the clear distinction in at least our teaching that you are software incased in hardware. And we talk about software, that we're spirit and we're encased in hardware, that's flesh, and sometimes we think of those as separate entities, and they are. Yet you're a human being and that means that you are a consolidated, homogenous one. And in that, you need to know that there is a part of you the Bible defines as flesh that's



intertwined in who you are, that is, I like to call, your “fallen-ness” or your fallen humanity and in that it wants to have nothing to do with talking to the living God. The flesh is weak.

Now most Sunday school teachers teach this lesson this way. Must’ve been a hard day for Peter. He was sleep’n and ya know he got tired and just like a lot of you, you will get tired when you pray and so you’ll fall asleep. Listen. This isn’t because Peter, James and John had a really rough day. Wasn’t because they were up really late, and Jesus, can’t you pick a better time for a prayer meeting - it’s too late. Of course we’re going to fall asleep. You know it’s interesting that I could line you up with a hundred different events to do tonight at 11:00 when most of us reasonable people are already sawing logs. We could get you out of bed, and we could say, here, here’s a hundred things right now, let’s pick one. You could do it, and stay awake the whole time. Totally occupied, totally involved, totally focused. Oh, maybe we don’t want you in an air traffic controller tower or anything, but you will be awake, and you will be engaged the whole time. Well, you know, talking to somebody, really you know I have a lot of meetings where I’m really tired and I go into those meetings really exhausted and I’ve never fallen asleep in one meeting. No. Not when I’m talking. I stay awake. I do. I stay awake the whole time. I maybe tired. I may not say everything exactly the way I want to, but I stay awake.

Well, it’s different in prayer because God is invisible. I can’t see him. So, Ok, I could hand you a phone, and I can put you in the hallway of your house, and I can say, hey, I’ve got someone very important on the other end I would like you to talk to for an hour here. He’s a very interesting person and someone on your top 100 list to talk to. You don’t think - you think you’d be on the floor passed out -sleeping on a phone call with someone important? I doubt it. Talking to someone you want to talk to. Guess what? Your flesh cooperates in all those situations.

Your flesh is going to be your enemy when it comes to your prayer life when we say, sit down and talk to the living God. Express your words, your thoughts clearly and cogently to the King of Kings, your creator. No one more important than that. Why is it so hard? Because you have something going on in your flesh that will fight you. You need to understand that. You need to know the enemy is within when it comes to this, and he’s also without because your flesh has a cooperative agent that works with your flesh to make sure your flesh fights the communication, and he will fight your communication.

Jot this reference down if you would. Ephesians 6:11 - 18. Familiar passage. There is an external foe to your praying, and it’s listed here at the end of that analogy of the Christian virtues and the Christian life, and all the armor that we’re supposed to put on... you remember the passage? Helmet of this, and breastplate of that, and the sword of that, and all of that analogy there. And at the end it gives us one last virtue that is so important that it doesn’t even get any piece of armor. It really encompasses the whole of it all, and that is when it ends this whole battle, which is by the way against, as it puts it at the beginning of this, the schemes of the devil wrestling against the rulers, the authorities and the cosmic powers over this present darkness. You have a spiritual enemy that’s your enemy because it’s God’s enemy, and he is your enemy because you happen to be allied with God, and therefore, he’s going to attack you. And so what do we need to do? Well it ends this way. And praying at all times in the Spirit. Well wait a minute. What kind of prayer is that? Well it’s not instinctive. It’s not the kind that atheists, agnostics and God-fearing people out there in society do. It’s the kind that only Christians can



do in cooperation with the Spirit that's going to focus our attention against the flesh. It's not going to be just natural. It will be counter-intuitive. It will be the kind that the Spirit is training and teaching us to do through the words of Christ in this text. It's a kind of praying you're going to have to work at. It's the kind of praying that's tough. It needs instruction. It needs discipline. It needs practice. Pray at all times in the Spirit with all prayer and all supplication keeping alert with all perseverance, can you see the battle there, making supplication for all the saints. All these prayers. All the intensity, supplication for all the saints. Can you see in this the breadth of who we pray for? It's not just the same eight people. The depth of this - the words like supplication - we'll get into that later in our series. And the extent of this, the duration of it, with all endurance or perseverance. See to pray well, to pray broadly, to pray deeply, to pray with extended times of focus communication with God... it's not easy. And Christians have known this for centuries.

Fourth century, most famed pastor, who was the pastor in Constantinople, John Chrisostom. John was his name. Chrisostom was his nickname. Chrisostom simply means in Greek the golden mouth one. He spoke so eloquently, so well that they said, the golden mouth one, what a great preacher. Well he said this to his congregation, his growing and huge congregation in Constantinople. He said, you know guys the devil knows how great good praying is, and therefore, he presses heavily upon us when we pray. He does not want you in contact communing with God cause he knows there's too much at stake. Not to mention the weakness of your flesh. We've got enemies when it comes to praying, and I could open up the mic as I said get seasoned Christians up here saying you know what it doesn't get any easier. It's a life long struggle. It's hard. The Spirit is willing and I think that's important for us just to quickly note. All of us here that are truly regenerate in this room would want to say, I want to pray more. I want to pray more broadly. I want to pray more deeply. I'd like to pray in longer sessions, and I would like to pray in a way that would be described Biblically as good praying. I'd like to pray well. We want that, but we've got some enemies. It's not going to be easy. Instinctive praying - easy. Next time you get bad news you're going to pray. I'm talking about the kind of prayer that's going to be described in this passage. It's going to take discipline and instruction. Good praying is not intuitive. I just think that's important for us to note.

Secondly, I would like to note who it is that is being called upon to teach prayer. Well, it's John the Baptist in the bottom of verse 1 and it's Jesus at the top of verse 1. This is Luke Chapter 11. Jesus was praying. They saw him praying. They know that he's given to prayer. He's a man of prayer, and they say, teach us to pray. They use as an example this parallel paradigm and that is, you know John was known for prayer. This man after God's own heart in the desert. The one that Jesus said is the greatest prophet of all. That John, he was known for prayer, and his disciples came and said, hey we see you praying. You're praying all the time. Teach us to pray. We want to pray like that. Even the people asking the question knew it wasn't intuitive. There's something special about the communication that John had with God, and there's something special that Jesus had going on in his communication with the Father. And these guys were known for praying because they did it all the time. I know this is a very simple observation, but jot it down.

2. Godly People Pray A Lot.



They pray a lot. Godly people pray a lot. They start to become known for their praying. Now let's expand this a bit. Something about Jesus and John that is so exemplary they are praised and clearly at the top of the heap. Jesus said no greater prophet than John the Baptist - pick Isaiah, pick anybody, pick anyone you want in the Bible - Jesus says there's the greatest one, and he's the one that people that are near him say, teach us to pray like you pray. They're known for praying. Godly, exemplary, honorable, righteous people. They pray. Now let's just think that through for a second. People that seem tight with God are people that talk to God a lot. You will never be tight with God. You will never have that reputation. You will never have that connection with God unless prayer is a more meaty part of your life. It takes up more of your time. You're known, even in your own schedule for praying a lot. There's something about intimacy that we lack with God that is always going to be deficient when we don't pray well.

Flip that around. Here's another guy to add to this. How about Moses? Moses was a man, I think in Chapter 8, the plague of the flies. They begged for relief and so he leaves Pharaoh's presence, and they said pray, and it says Moses prayed. I think that's verse 30, and the next verse 31, and the Lord did what Moses asked. Now that's the kind of depiction that we're going to get to in our text, and that is, you ask and it happens. You knock and it opens. You seek and you find. Well Moses had that kind of relationship with God. They were tight. Several chapters later, Chapter 33 it describes the relationship that Moses had with God. And it said you know their relationship was like two friends speaking to one another face to face. Now did Moses see God's face? No of course not. This is metaphorical, and it's used on more than one occasion that Moses and God they were like face to face talking friends. How do you get there? Well you're known as the kind of person that is fervent and effectual in your praying to where when you pray, things happen. God responds. Prayer, it will be the difference between your godliness, your holiness, righteousness, your devotion to God, the notability of your Christian life. Praying makes that difference.

Let's unpack this word godly for a minute. Godly people are people that make an impact. Godly people are, here's the New Testament word for it, fruitful. You know what God wants. He wants people that produce much fruit. I'm quoting now John 15. I called you to be my disciples that you will go and bear much fruit, and if you're bearing fruit the Father is going to come and prune you, and you'll bear even more fruit, and I just want you to bear a lot of fruit. Now does everyone bear the same amount of fruit? No. In the parables, Jesus said some bear fruit some thirty, some sixty, some hundredfold. Everybody's different. In the Book of Daniel you've got some that shine super bright out there in the kingdom - all differentiations. And you know when it comes to my life, I would like to be a hundredfold kind of Christian, and I think you would too. I want to be maximally effective producing fruit. Doing things that are making an impact in this world. I know people that are known as leaving a legacy, though we don't bring it to the surface of every sermon about legacy. I guarantee a part of that is prayer.

Hannah produces the greatest prophet in the age in which she lived. How was she introduced to us? Hannah who gives birth later to Samuel is introduced to us as a woman when she has a need. She goes to the worship center, and she sits there and prays. And she prays with such fervency that the presiding priest, Priest Eli, sees her praying... Oh, we've got a drunk one here. Look at her going. What's wrong with her? Mouth's moving, not talking, don't hear anything... crazy. Hey woman, put away your alcohol. That's the first encounter Eli has with Hannah. And she



goes I'm not drunk. What are you talking about? I'm praying. I'm praying. Now it's kind of sad that there's no real fervency in praying around the worship center that this becomes an oddity for him, and yet I'm just trying to point out how fervently and intently and profoundly Hannah was praying. And what does she do? She ends up having a child that changes the face of Israel.

You know you may not see guys like Isaac and Jacob as the paragons of righteousness in the Bible, and you've got a point. I mean you see enough of their history. You realize these guys have clay feet. There's no doubt about it. And yet in Hebrews Chapter 11, a chapter about faith we have here an emphasis on their faith and how it's expressed, and while the word prayer is not there listen to these two verses, verses 20 & 21 of Hebrews 11. It says, "By faith, Isaac invoked future blessings on Jacob and Esau." Now think about this. Invoked future blessings. Take those three words. What is that? I know that sounds mystical. That's not what's going on here. You know what future blessing is? Faith filled praying, is it not? I'm praying that you would be blessed. I'm invoking as best as I can as an intercessor God's grace for good things in your life and here's what he does. And he blesses Jacob. Now Jacob of course the more we know about him, he's certainly not a paragon of righteousness, and it says in the next verse, Jacob then who learns apparently what it is to have some faith filled praying when he was old, when he was dying. He did the same thing. He invoked future blessings. He blessed each of his own sons "bowing in worship over the head of his staff." Now here's an old man who's praying, and if you know the prayer of Jacob at the end of the book of Genesis, you'll see all these prayers. We call them blessings, but these prayers that are faith filled invoking of God's this and that on these people and those people and all those twelve tribes that effected generations after him. The scepter will not depart from Judea. That's not some weird decrees coming out of his mouth. He's praying for that and did it? No of course not. God answered that prayer.

There is in every productive fruitful Christian, prayer, and if you tease it out long enough. If you look for it, you find it. My wife was on this platform yesterday teaching about Betty Chambers. Betty Chambers was one of the most productive widows you could ever find. Who does so much, thousands. I've got a fourteen hundred page tome in my library of all the things that she transcribed and put out to change peoples lives for hundreds of years. I mean it's gone on for years and years now. She's made a difference in people's lives since World War I. Now think about this. Was she a woman of prayer? You could ask my wife about that. Don't have time to give every aspect of every person's life, but I guarantee you everyone who leaves a lasting fruitful impression for good and godliness, prayer's a part of this - has to be. It's part and parcel of these folks.

Anna, we learned about her briefly in Luke Chapter 2. She's on the temple mount. She now has a title. I mean talk about honor here and I guess that's the third aspect we should look at. There's godliness, there's fruitfulness and then there's this honor that God bestows on men and women of prayer. Anna is described in Luke 2 as always praying, and God slaps this label on her in the New Testament, the prophet. She's the prophetess. She speaks forth God's truth. I mean this is a huge, noble title God endows her with in the inspired text of scripture, and the only thing we really know about her is, man she prayed all the time. Prayer. Godly people pray a lot.

I mentioned Daniel talking about the stars being in different brilliancies in the kingdom one day.



You want to talk about a guy that was honored by God. Who will be rewarded by God. You want lunch with Daniel in the kingdom. Your line is going to be long to have lunch with Daniel. He is a great man of God. And when we see him in his own autobiographical prophecy we find out without him ever trying to polish you know his badge that he was a man of prayer. Chapter 9. Let me read you just a couple of verses for you. Daniel Chapter 9: 20. He says, "While I was speaking and praying, and confessing my sin and the sins of my people." You want to talk about breadth of prayer. I'm even interceding in terms of the bad things that other people have done. Praying to God about what they've done wrong as best I can. Standing in the gap and praying God, please forgive them. Here's a praying man. I was presenting my plea before the Lord my God in my prayer spot in the holy hill of God. I was speaking in prayer and then all of a sudden here comes Gabriel. Gabriel in his vision shows up, and he says, man from the time you started your pleas for mercy the word went out, and I've come to tell you. I'm going to give you the answer for - listen to this - "for, you are greatly loved." Now that's an interesting statement. And even that word, some translations translate "you are highly esteemed." God's looking from heaven at guys like that who are giving themselves to pleas of prayer, confessions of sin whose giving his requests before God, and God of heaven is looking down with a special kind of honor on those people.

Now I know that some people have been taught in churches that don't teach very well that spiritual ambition is a bad thing. It's not at all. I'd like to be godly. I'd like to be fruitful. I'd like one day to be honored and hear one day, well done good and faithful servant. I would like all of that. That is a good and godly ambition. As a matter of fact, the problem with ambition is not ambition, it's where we place that ambition. Here's something to shoot for. To be a godly man, a godly women, a fruitful man, a fruitful women, one who will be honored and highly esteemed by God. That's a good thing. And all I can do is tell you if you go through the Bible and look for it, these people are people of prayer. Any time you see someone hailed - think of David - you think of his problems. Man after God's own heart - why - read the Psalms. Prayer, prayer, I cry out to God. I lay my requests before God. I pray to you. You'll answer me. Man of prayer.

Godly people pray a lot. I'd like to join that group. I'd like to be a part of it. I'd like to have some share in that group. Well Mike it's about your prayer life. I'm so busy. Maybe you're too busy. But are you really busy? I read that and I said mostly that's an excuse. That is an excuse. Think about it. There's a lot of things - I can give you court side tickets to something and most of you will find time to go to that game. Amazing how your schedule just opened up. Think about it. I give you these great seats, reservations, great food, great steak... here go to this place all expenses paid, you're going... if I gave you a week in Maui, I guess you'd find a week some how to spend your whole week there. How is that? Cause you've got time when you want to make time. You've got time for everything you "want" to do. If you really want to do it, my dad always used to say, "people do what they want to do." And you want to pray. You're going to pray. Gonna be easy? No, it's going to be a battle. It's going to be hard. You've got enemies, spiritual enemies. Your flesh is not going to cooperate, but you know what? If you want to be known as someone who knows and communes with the living God, you better make prayer a priority. Godly people pray a lot.

Now some more observations on the whole of this introduction. He's going to teach them to



pray, and we just got up to this place where he says, “when you pray say this.” We’ll get into that next time. Right now though let’s just make some basic observations that are assumed in this text that I want to assume in your life before we go any further in this series. Number 3 on your outline. Let’s talk about prayer life assumptions. Things that we can rightly assume.

3. Prayer Life Assumptions.

Here’s what I’m going to assume about the two people that are described in verse 1 as being the mentors of prayer, Jesus and John. I know this for sure about them and I can safely assume this about the people coming to ask them. The seventy-two, the twelve, the disciples of John who’ve heard John teach and have followed John in his teaching. Well these are people that have a relationship with God.

A. Have a Relationship with God.

They have a good, real, genuine relationship with God. John’s disciples who were learning to pray clearly had responded to the message of John which is “repent, the kingdom of God is at hand.” Surely the disciples of Christ in this new big growing gang of the seventy-two are looking at Christ, and saying, well we buy the message that we are now emissaries of, of course they have. They’re what we would call Christians.

Now here’s the problem. There are people in this room that may hear about prayer cause even atheists and non-Christians pray and they’ll say, well I’d like to pray more. I want to see what I can learn from this series. It will really do you no good because what I’m going to talk about in the next 5 sessions of this series as we go through verse by verse and phrase by phrase are things that are going to assume that you have a real, genuine relationship with God, and there are some people in this room that just don’t. And you know and some of you don’t know. Some of you think going to church makes you a Christian, and you know that’s not the case because Jesus said, there’ll be plenty of people with a resume to quote and spout at the judgment, and he’ll say, “depart from me. I never knew you.” Not, you didn’t measure up. Not, you weren’t good enough. You didn’t give enough in the offering. You didn’t attend enough weekends. None of that. “Depart from me. I never KNEW you.” I don’t have a relationship with you. And doesn’t verse 11, in Luke 11 give us that as an analogy. We’re talking about a relationship between father and child. Father, giver, child, asker - that’s the relationship.

If you’re not a child of God, all this series is going to do is frustrate you. Cause you’ll never move from intuitive praying to counter-intuitive praying. You’ll never go from natural praying and the kind of just responsive praying to real active praying. The kind of praying that we’re going to deal with. You’ll never get there. As a matter of fact, some of you can testify right now, I think it’s more than just my flesh and some spiritual battle. I just feel like always whenever I try to pray, I just feel like my prayers are hitting the ceiling. I won’t be able to help you. Unless you are ready to do what the disciples of Christ and the disciples of John had done and that is accept the message of Jesus and John and that is that you need to repent of your sins, and you need to trust in Christ, and you need to be willing to follow and obey the Lord Jesus Christ which is the fruit of real repentant faith. You’ve got to be there and if you’re not there then you’re just a church attender, and I really can help you with the prayer life. You’re going to



be like everybody else praying when you “feel” like it, and that’s not what we’re talking about. See, you need a relationship with the living God.

Well are you saying God doesn’t hear the prayers of non-Christians? I hear that question all the time. Does God hear the prayers of non-Christians? Now, I don’t mean to make fun of people that ask me that question, but I say, what do you think? God’s doing this (fingers in ears) lalalalalal. I mean what are you talking about? Of course, he hears the prayers. Do you believe God is omniscient? Well, yeah. Well then of course he hears the prayers. Well, you know what I mean Pastor Mike. I mean does he answer them? Well I know the analogy in our text and clearly in the Bible. There’s something about Father and child, and the asking and the giving in that relationship that is different than someone that is not a child. But you need to understand, God is not, as I like to say - let’s just analogize it this way, he’s not a smart phone that needs the passcode, and until you put the passcode in you aren’t going to get any information or any responsiveness from God. Is that the way the Bible presents the God of the Bible? No, of course not. He’s not a smart phone that needs a passcode. Now is there a passcode? Absolutely. If you want to be right with God. You want to be adopted into his family - you’ve got to understand the gospel and rightly respond to it, but... can the Father give a egg or a piece of bread or a piece of fish to a neighbor kid? Absolutely. But it’s not his child. I understand that. It’s grace that’s what it is. He let’s his sun rise on the evil and the good. He drops his rain on the fields of the evil and the good. And I’ll bet some of those evil guys have even asked for that rain. Wouldn’t you agree?

Matter of fact, as long as we’re talking about opening up the microphone, let’s get the microphone open, get you on the stage, clearly differentiate you’re life between non-Christian and post-Christian life, I became a Christian and my life here as a Christian, I prayed and God has answered and here I also prayed before I was a Christian. Just like you did. Did God ever answer those prayers? Oh yeah. All the time. I can’t say like when I started to learn to pray to my Father, but I can tell you, it’s not that God doesn’t hear it. It’s not even that God doesn’t sometimes graciously respond, but I can tell you that one heartfelt prayer that God will always answer that a non-Christian prays. Might want to jot it down. Joel 2:32. It’s quoted several times in the Bible. One in particular you might be thinking of. Romans Chapter 10 when it says this, “all who call upon the name of the Lord” - that’s prayer, is it not? - “all that call upon the name of the Lord will be saved.”

I know one prayer that is effectual every time a non-Christian says it because at that moment they’re becoming a Christian. At that moment God is endowing them with the ability to respond to God in faith. That’s the prayer of repentance. That’s the prayer of trust. So it would be good for you to start this series on prayer by making sure that you are a Christian. I’m saying to all of us, let’s test ourselves to see if we’re of the faith, but beyond that, you maybe sitting there saying, I don’t think I am a Christian. Well great, that book I passed out earlier in the service and I told you to give to a non-Christian - you’re the non-Christian. Read it. Study it. Look at all the components. Look up all the passages and look at what the gospel is and make sure by the end of page 33 - it’s a short little book - you say, I’ve got it right with the living God. Then when you pray we can start. Let’s figure this out. What is it like for me to be asking my Father for the things he’s describing in this test. Got to have a relationship with God.



B. Focused Times of Prayer.

Let's put it this way and then I'll explain it. What we're going to be dealing with in this passage and clearly is in place even in the mind of the people asking Jesus and John to teach us to pray, is a kind of praying that's not like the kind of praying you may be thinking. This is regarding, here it is, Letter "B" focused times of prayer. Focused prayer times. That's what we're talking about, and that's the best I can do to describe it for you, but let me describe it even further. I'm not talking about - best way to describe it is to describe what I'm not talk about. I'm not talking about the kinds of prayer that maybe the thing you hold up as listen, I pray, when you're just sporadically discussing things with God. Now if Jesus is going through his day doing all that he does and all that he's doing is throwing up a few thoughts to the Father as he goes about his day, which I'm not opposed to 1 Thess 5:17 says, "pray without ceasing." There's a kind of awareness of God and expressing ourselves to God that's very important, but if that's all he did all day long and never went away privately to pray, no one would say, hey, teach us to pray, and that's how it's introduced to us. Jesus was praying in a certain place. Now he had places up in Galilee clearly he was establishing places wherever he went. To do what? To get alone by himself. Quick. Three passages.

Luke 5:16. "He would [often] withdraw to desolate places and pray." That's what he did in Galilee.

Mark 1:35. He had to have times where he wasn't going to be disturbed "rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark" he would get away a pray.

Matthew 14:23. "he dismissed the crowds." So this isn't just conversational throwing up sporadic thoughts to God. He dismissed the crowd. He went up to a mountain by himself, and he prayed there all night. You're going to say, where's Jesus? Oh, he's by himself praying again. So we're talking about focused times of prayer.

Now it helps maybe if you think through fellowship in terms of chairs side by side and chairs face to face. Is that new to you? We describe that we here together. Come together for church and you sit with your chairs side by side and you encounter the teaching, but what we're saying is church is much more than that. You need to have times when your chairs get face to face. That's what I'm trying to say about prayer as well. There is a kind of praying that's chairs side by side praying and that's when you're going about your attentive work. You're talking to people. You're doing your tasks, and you're throwing up thoughts to God.

One of the classic examples is Nehemiah Chapter 2. The cupbearer to the king. He's there. He's down because the gates of Jerusalem are broken down. He's grieving over his home city, and the king asks him, what's wrong? What do you want? And it says the king asked him the question, and it says, Nehemiah, it says, I prayed to the Lord and I answered him. Now what kind of praying it that? Chairs face to face or chairs side by side. Chairs side by side. God help me know. I've just got a question. I'm going to answer it. There's not a period of time between those two. There's a split second here between question and answer, but he's praying. Now do you do that kind of praying? Great. Great, but if you sat there earlier in this sermon when we started to feel the need of our conviction of our need to pray, and you said, ah, you know what?



I'm doing alright. I pray all day long. I have people... "I pray all day long, pray all day long to the Lord." That's great. And I don't mean to make fun of that. Nehemiah could say the same thing, but that's not the kind of prayer we're talking about in this passage.

The reason the disciples of John the Baptist came to John the Baptist was cause John the Baptist was known, just like Jesus, for getting away to pray. As he says in the Galilean sermon where he preaches on this modeled prayer he starts it with this, "When you pray, go into your room, shut the door and pray in secret." That's the kind of praying when other things have to stop. That's why we started with time is going to be a factor. Scheduling is going to be a factor. Priorities are going to be a factor because this is going to take you focusing on, Ok this is where everything else gets shut out. The kind of presumption we are making about this teaching on prayer is it's a kind of focused prayer, face to face if you will. I know that's metaphorically, but face to face, I'm now praying, everything else is off the table, this is my time to talk to God.

And speaking of focus there's so many passages in the scripture I quoted earlier in Ephesians 6, after all this armament and then it says praying at all times and some of the words there in the text - I'll just reread them. It said, "keep alert with all perseverance making supplication for all the saints." Keeping alert with perseverance. Well the Bible has so much to say about that as it relates to prayer. Let me read you one more. If you're a note taker, jot it down. 1 Peter 4:7. It says this, "be self controlled, be sober-minded for the sake of your prayers." Now follow this, focused times of prayer clearly involve your mental focus, your alertness, your awareness. This is an active thing and not a passive thing.

Now this would seem foolish for most of church history leaning over the rails of heaven and listening today which I doubt they're all listening, but it may a million or two, who knows. They're going what in the world is he talking about? If they haven't been paying attention in church history in the last hundred years, most of church history up there looking down at us are saying what are they talking about? Who would ever think prayer could be a passive thing? Well it's become very popular in our culture for the last hundred years. It started very small, but now it seems most people think, oh yeah, that's what you do and you know people like that don't you? They sit around and think, well you've got to pray - real praying and really connecting with God, you kind of go, turn your mind off and whoooo, ooooo, oooooooooo up, now I'm praying. What are you thinking about? I don't know. I'm just going. Blooooo, whooooo, ooooo. What is that? Well it's not sober-mindedness. It's not alertness. It's not focusing and clearly communicating to God. It's this weird kind of Eastern mysticism that creeps into a lot of modern theology that makes you think, listen mind goes off, mind settles down, mind relaxes. You get passive. As a matter of fact, don't think of anything. Some of you have come from these backgrounds... just repeat this little syllable. Listen that's not Biblical prayer.

Ah, 1 Corinthians 14 Pastor Mike. You know about fourteen to eighteen times. Chapter 12 through 14 make this point. The spiritual gifts were given to edify others, to edify the church, to build up others and that one verse in chapter 14 where it speaks about a kind of Greco-Roman and religious mystical babbling that's described in that passage, it says, oh that person edifies himself. That's not a statement of commendation. That's a statement of condemnation. Well you're going to have to convince me on that cause I've learned otherwise. Well, nineteen centuries of church history has taught otherwise, it's just lately you're so conditioned in this



culture. Particularly in this little corner of geography to think turning minds off may be how you pray. It's not. It's really not. If you need more on that, I didn't even have enough room to list it on the suggested sermons on the back. You can just go to Focal Point and look up the teaching on 1 Corinthians 14 if you need help on that.

You need to be open to rethinking some things about prayer when it comes to what the prayer that we're going to be learning about is all about. It's mentally active. It's not reactive. It's alert. It's concentrated. It even has a sense of urgency to it. And speaking of one more thing and that may not have been your background. You weren't in that little group. You were in this group and that is, say your prayers. And by that, repeat this, say that, repeat this, say that and say it again, and I'll give you something to count so you see how many times you said it. What in the world are you doing? I'm praying! How many times did you pray it? Twenty-one times. How many times did you pray it? Forty-two times. Why, been praying a lot. No, you haven't been praying. Did you grow up in that background? That's not prayer. Jesus after saying, go into your room, lock the door and pray to your Father in secret, says this, and make sure you don't, love this, verse 7 Matthew 6, "heap up empty phrases." Here's another implication of the word "focused". If you're brain is not engaged in the meaning and the content of what you're saying, you maybe saying things that at one time meant something to someone, but it isn't praying. A bunch of heaping up of empty phrases, and we're not talking about rote recital of things. Even if it's the words of the Lord's prayer, the so called Lord's prayer. That isn't going to cut it. That's why we're going to look at this very carefully to understand. Even when Jesus taught it in Judea verses in Galilee he words it differently. This is not about a rote payer to recite. Focused times of praying is sincere communication, focused communication, communication that shuts out other people and other tasks and other activities.

Lastly, let me end this sermon with something that I hope will be the commencement of your attitude for the rest of this series. Letter C, this should be obvious. You can think about John's disciples and Jesus' disciples and think well there's got to be some pretty Godly people in there that already know how to pray. I'm sure there were, but they came, and Jesus was going to teach and hope that all of them grew in their praying, and I'll put it this way...

C. We Can all Improve Our Prayer Life.

And you need to start this series, I trust and I exhort you as your pastor to start this series with an appetite and a desire to improve in your praying. Oh, Pastor Mike I'm a great prayer already. Well I don't know there may be three of you saying that. Maybe you are the greatest prayers ever and you may be saying I pray more than you Pastor Mike. Ok, maybe you do. Fantastic. But "King of Prayer" hear this. Ok, 1 Thessalonians 4:1 says, if you are doing everything when it comes to what it is to walk in a manner pleasing to the Lord, that's how it's put not only in Colossians 1 it's also put that way in 1 Thess 4. It says, see to it, we urge you, I love that paraclaya, we urge - we ask you and we urge you to excel still more and more. We need you in this church. If you are the "King of Prayer" I'm so glad you're going to this church and I need you to be the "super King of Prayer." I need you to pray even more. I need you to be even better in this. So this series isn't about the "L shaped" amen - yeah I've got a prayer-less brother over here. That may be. I hope all of us go from being where ever we're at just to the next level. I just want us to know there's a lot left on the table when it comes to our prayer life.



And from the very beginning God was trying to say that to his people. I can't even think about prayer or preach on prayer without my mind going back to Deuteronomy Chapter 4 where here this fifth book of the Pentateuch was given to the people of God and there was this great confession. It says, what nation - this is verse 7 - "what great nation is there that has it's God near them the way our God, [the real God] is near us every time we call on him." Here's the motivation for the covenant people of God. Can you start praying to the living God and not say, well you know what I've tried. I'm tired. I can't seem to get seem to get it. I've got no time. I'm busy. Let's recognize we can all improve on this and God certainly beckons us with a great invitation that I hope encourages us by the greatness of the privilege of prayer.

Well there was one preacher that turned his congregation into a congregation of bricks into a congregation of marble if you will. Great, hadn't Robert Spurgeon who was not only a great preacher, but he was a great coach in trying to get people to pray and on this very May weekend in 1878 he stood before his congregation in London and he said this. "I know we all find ourselves at times in a cold state in reference to our praying, but brothers I believe that when we cannot pray that it is in that time that we ought to pray more than ever. And if you answer, well how can that be? I would say that you start praying to pray. You pray for prayer. Would you pray for the spirit of supplication. Do not be content to say I would pray if I could. No. But if you cannot pray, pray until you can."

You might remember back at the opening of our study of Luke 10, I just had you pray something very simple. I want to do the same with this series. There's a lot we're going to learn about prayer I trust, but right now I'd just like you to start praying between now and our second installment of this series, just to pray for your prayer life. Now pray for all the other things you pray for, but pray for your prayer life. But even as I've started to hint as we talk about the breadth, the depth, the frequency, the duration and the quality of our praying that it might all get better. But you can say, I'm going to leave today anticipating what we're going to learn, starting to work on my prayer life by saying, God I want to pray a lot more this week. I want to log in more minutes and who knows maybe some more hours in just praying for prayer. It would be a great start for this series and prepare your heart I trust for us to be more like we ought to be when it comes to talking to our God.

Let's pray now about prayer. God help us become better prayers not so we can like some Boy Scout polish some badge, some merit badge and say we're good at praying. But God because what it really means to know you and commune with you. As Francis Shaffer used to say, that very unique characteristic of our image of God and man is that we're able to communicate. That we can communicate to you and as the Psalmist said, pour our hearts out to you. Not just saying whatever we want to, but really learning as this passage is going to teach us to pray intelligently about the things that are important to you. To start to shape our prayer life and I know something that's important to you in our prayers is praying for good praying. So God help us to do that. Let it be the thing we begin our prayers with. Let it be the thing that we focus on this week just to say, God I would like my prayer life to improve. I know that so much is hinged on this. That it's not just about me and the future honoring or reward in heaven, but God how effective we will be here on earth. The effect of fruitful, productive, impactive lives that are described in the Bible are those that are known because they prayed. They prayed well. They prayed long. They prayed deeply. They prayed broadly. So God we just want to start by



praying for our prayer life. Do that God so this can be a congregation, a praying congregation. In that opening analogy - that city of marble. Let this just improve in terms of quality not just for the sake of quality, but for the sake of what a church can do when it is healthy, and connected, and communing with you in good prayer. As our founding distinctives make clear. Distinctive number 5, let us be genuinely reliant upon this discipline in our lives. I pray that in Jesus' name. Amen.