

Series: Invited to Ask

## “Follow the Leader”

### Luke 11:1-4

Today as we open God’s Word, we are in the second week of a study called “Invited to Ask.” We are focusing specifically how God has invited us to come before Him and His throne of grace in prayer. God wants us to be a people who love Him, trust Him, depend on Him, and relate to Him in prayer. **\*\*ILL:** Last week I illustrated that by telling you a story from my teenage years. For many reasons, my relationship with my dad had become quite distant. He was usually busy, distracted, or just completely gone, and, frankly, I was probably distracted too. I remember vividly one day that my dad wanted to talk to me. His office was located very close to where my high school classes took place, so he called me into his office. He sat down behind his desk and I sat down in a chair facing him. We had small talk for a little bit and then, perhaps sensing the distance, he said, “Son, I want you to know that if you ever want to talk or if you ever need anything, just come talk to me. Just come to my office. My secretary will let you in, and I’ll drop whatever I’m doing.” I thanked him for the invitation, then left the office and continued on with my day. While I won’t tell you the outcome of that story just yet, I will say clearly that regardless of anyone’s evaluation or judgment of that situation, my father was giving me an open invitation to come to him at any time for any reason simply to talk, to share, and to ask. I confess, at that moment I didn’t realize the significance of the offer and I was very distracted by own pursuits and situations. Still, though, the offer stood clearly. “If you ever need to talk, just come. The door is open, just come. I’ll be waiting, just come.”

As a teenager, I didn’t understand the significance of that opportunity. And, frankly, the distance between us made it difficult to accept, but the invitation was given and the offer was extended. In a similar way, God has invited every single one of us to come to Him to talk, relate, and ask of Him. Not only has He invited us, but He has made a way for our prayers to be heard and guarantees that He will answer. All of this was made possible through Jesus Who came to this earth and gave His life as a perfect substitute in our place. At this very moment, He is at the right hand of God the Father interceding for us and pleading our case before Him. I am so grateful that by His grace He has invited us to come to Him and ask. But there are still many questions unanswered: “What does this look like? How am I supposed to pray? Where am I supposed to go? What posture am I supposed to take? What are the words that I should say? How do I know if I am doing it right?” If you feel uncertain or uncomfortable trying to pray, be encouraged, you are right where you need to be. In fact, you are not the first to feel that way. Believe it or not, even the 12 disciples of Jesus felt uncertain about it and asked for help. We read about them in our text.

Show Text

It should be clearly stated that as a Christian, one of the primary practices in our lives should be that we take time to pray. When I say “pray” I am referring to more than just a prayer before a meal or at bedtime. I am meaning a time of uninterrupted communication between you and the

Lord. This is a time of fellowship, relationship, and asking as you pour your heart out to God. Prayer is a vital part of the Christian life. As a Christian, one of the greatest privileges and responsibilities we have is to pray. **Dr. Jerry Falwell** often said, “Nothing of eternal significance happens apart from prayer.” I believe that this is a true statement. **There is no more vital subject for the disciple of Christ than the subject of prayer.** Jesus clearly desires for His followers to live a lifestyle of prayer. While this may sound daunting to some, it is important for us to recognize that Jesus didn’t simply demand it, He also demonstrated it. When He walked this earth during His earthly ministry, He modeled a lifestyle of prayer for His followers to see. In fact, it is His example that should encourage us and motivate us to do the same.

## **I. The Practice of Prayer (vs. 1a)**

When I say the practice of prayer, I am referring to it as one’s manner, lifestyle, and conduct. As believers we know that this should be our practice. **1 Thessalonians 5:17-18** instructs us, “Pray without ceasing; in everything give thanks; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.” **Colossians 4:2** explains, “Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with an attitude of thanksgiving.” **Philippians 4:6** directs us to, “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.” **Ephesians 6:18** says that, “With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints.” As individuals and as a church we must be faithful in our obedience to pray. It shouldn’t surprise us to see that the early church considered prayer a priority. In **Acts 1:14a** after Jesus had ascended to heaven they met there in the upper room. What did they do there? They joined in continual prayer. The text says, “These all with one mind were continually devoting themselves to prayer.” Then on the Day of Pentecost over 3,000 souls were saved and added to the church and what did the church do? **Acts 2:42** says, “They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of the bread and to prayer.” Later, the Apostle Paul told Timothy in **1 Timothy 2:1**, “First of all, then, I urge that entreaties and prayers, petitions and thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men.” He then explained in verse 3, “This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior.” Of all the things that Paul would encourage Timothy to do, he gave the highest priority to prayer. This was clearly the practice of the early church and the practice that the Apostle Paul preached. So, where did they get that? Where did they learn the importance of this practice? This didn’t begin with the idea of man or the self-righteous efforts of the Law. This began with the example of Jesus.

### **A. The Lord’s Priority**

It is amazing how we reveal our priorities in life. Some think that their words and loud professions accurately reveal what’s important to them. But, any wise person knows that the way to evaluate one’s priorities is to examine one’s actions. Our actions reveal what is important to us. I ask you this morning, “Is prayer important to you? Is it a priority in your life?” Prayer was such a priority in the early church that they did it all the time. In fact, all throughout the centuries of the Church, we see a people who are faithful to pray. They understood the significance of prayer. Why did they feel so strongly about prayer? This seems to go against our own understanding or perspective. What was it about prayer that

caused them to value prayer over all other Christian practices? I'm not sure that I know all of the answers to that question, but I do think it is likely that they learned this from Jesus Himself.

The passage that we've read this morning starts in a simple way. It says, "Now Jesus was praying." Have you ever thought about the high priority that Jesus placed on prayer? In His own life He showed how important it is. In Luke 3:21 we discover that when He was being baptized He prayed. As the crowds began to increase and follow Him, in Luke 5:16, He prayed. In Luke 6:12, we learn that He spent time in prayer before He chose the twelve disciples. We also see in Luke 9:18 that He prayed before He asked them for their confession of faith. At His transfiguration in Luke 9:29 He spent time in prayer. When Jesus was on the cross, He cried out to God in prayer. Are you seeing this clearly? Jesus made prayer an absolute priority. It wasn't that Jesus just prayed only at significant moments and times of crisis. It was His regular custom to get alone with the Father to relate through prayer. **Mark 1:35** says, "In the early morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house, and went away to a secluded place, and was praying there." This was so common of a practice for Him that **Luke 5:16** tells us that, "But Jesus Himself would often slip away to the wilderness and pray." I'm convinced that the greatest example that any of us should follow is the example of Jesus. We can follow the example of Paul or other saints that we have read of or know about, but at some point all others fall short. Jesus is the only Man who has ever lived a perfect, sinless life that was always in tune with the will of the Father. Listen, if Jesus Christ, the Son of God, realized His own need for fellowship with the Father, how much more do we who have fallen short of the glory of God? If Jesus would place such high priority on prayer, isn't it obvious that we should do the same?

### **B. The Lord's Place**

Luke 11:1 continues, "Jesus was praying in a certain place." Now, we don't know the exact location of this place. We aren't 100% sure what specific place He was referring to. However, we know that it was a special place to Him. The word "certain" here can also be translated as "particular or specific." While it is true that we can approach God in prayer about anything at any moment from anywhere, it is also important that the most consistent prayer warriors often have a consistent place. Because prayer is important, they are intentional to plan and prioritize the time. Jesus had a specific place to pray to separate from the crowd, including His closest disciples, so that He could talk to the Father. What was that place like? I'm not sure, but it certainly appears that it was a place of separation from the rest of the world and its distractions. It certainly appears that it was a place where He could be alone to pray. He knew it was essential for Him to stay connected to His Father because that was His Source of life, joy, power, and peace. Jesus needed to spend time with the Father. To do so He needed solitude and silence.

It is important to recognize that Jesus modeled this, but it also important to remember that Jesus taught this. In **Matthew 6:5-6** He said, "When you pray, you are not to be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners so that they may be seen by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. But you, when

you pray, go into your inner room, close your door and pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you.” Jesus wasn’t saying we can’t or shouldn’t pray in public. He Himself did so on numerous occasions. He is talking about our lifestyle of prayer. When the verse says go into your “closet” or “inner room” it is referring to a private chamber, a place where you go to talk to God, to pour your heart out to Him, a place to have conversation with your Father. He is teaching us that we all need to have a consistent, steady place of prayer where we can get away from the distractions and the demands of the world. Prayer was so important to Jesus that He made it His priority and He designated a place.

## **II. The Pursuit of Prayer (vs. 1b)**

Jesus was in His particular place praying and talking to God the Father, and the disciples were apparently aware of where He was and what He was doing. I anticipate that they watched Him from a distance. They observed Him and studied Him. There is no doubt that as they watched Him, they came to a clear conclusion – they had never really seen anyone pray like this. Please understand that the disciples knew a lot about prayer. They had heard about the many different people who prayed in the Old Testament. And, certainly, there were many in their own day that prayed. Sadly, though, most of what they saw was a lifeless, dead ritual. The Pharisees would pray long prayers in public to be seen and recognized by men. They would also pray the same words over and over again as if God was going to be impressed with the length of their prayers. This wasn’t the case with Jesus. His prayers seemed more like a conversation. Instead of being done for the motive of pleasing men, His prayer was focused on pleasing God. Jesus’ prayer seemed to touch the very heart of God the Father, and certainly impacted Himself. This was new to the disciples. As they watched Him pray, they quickly recognized their need to learn how to pray.

We see their pursuit for prayer in the way that they recognized their need and then requested this of Jesus. The disciples knew Jesus’ emphasis on prayer. They knew there was something different about His prayer life. So somebody spoke up and asked, “Lord, teach us to pray.” Now, it shouldn’t surprise us that they were asking Jesus to teach them. They constantly referred to Him as Rabbi and as Teacher. They knew that He was God in flesh and had all wisdom and authority. It makes sense that they would ask Him to teach them. Strangely, however, in this request we find the only single time that the disciples ask Him to teach them. This is a significant fact. When Jesus performed miracles and unimaginable mysteries like walking on the water or calming the sea, the disciples were amazed, but they never asked Jesus to teach them how it was possible. When Jesus sent out the 72 in Luke 10, He commanded them to heal the sick and proclaim the Kingdom, but not once did they feel the need to stop and ask how. In fact, they go in confidence and come back rejoicing for how God worked through them. However, when it comes to prayer, the disciples ask, “Lord, teach us to pray.” They are saying, “Jesus, we need to learn to pray like You. We know how to talk to our friends and to one another, we know how to talk to You when You’re right here with us, but prayer – we don’t know how to do this.” Friend, if you are uncomfortable praying, if you don’t know how to pray, if you’re not sure about this whole concept, be honest with God about it. Jesus didn’t rebuke them. He didn’t blast them. He

doesn't say, "Well, what's taking you so long? Haven't you been taking notes?" They admitted that they didn't know how to do this and admitted that they needed help. They were sincerely and honestly wanting to know how to pray. It is important for us to remember here that prayer is not a natural action. Sure, anyone can say a quick prayer, but to be consistent in our prayer we must be taught. Our growth in this area begins the very moment we admit our need for help, we look to Jesus and ask for help, and seek to learn from Him.

Charles Spurgeon would agree. He often stated that he would rather teach one man how to pray than teach ten men how to preach.

### III. The Promotion of Prayer (vs. 2a)

As soon as the disciples asked for help, Jesus began to teach them and explain to them how they are to pray. If the Lord allows, next week we will look at the specific details that Jesus gave them in His instruction. In summary, the words that He taught them are commonly known as "The Lord's Prayer." Truthfully, however, to be more accurate we should probably call it "The Disciple's Prayer" because Jesus was taking time to teach all of His disciples, including us here today, how to pray. It is interesting to realize that Jesus never once taught His disciples how to preach, but He certainly took time to teach them how to pray. This fact alone shows us the great importance of prayer. I am grateful for our times of worship. We are called to do so, and it is a joy to do so. But, Jesus didn't teach them specifically how to do that. Sometimes people will get bent out of shape and say, "Well, we are supposed to worship like this," but Jesus never said that. I am grateful for the preaching of God's Word. **Romans 10:17** reminds us that "So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the Word of Christ." But, Jesus didn't teach specifically how we are to do that. Sometimes we will think, "Well, it should be this type of preaching or this style of preaching." Again, Jesus never said that. We would all agree on the importance of these, but Jesus never gave specific teaching on it. However, when it comes to prayer, He gave crystal clear instructions. As a result, He promoted prayer, putting it on a platform for us to recognize, understand, and apply.

#### A. It is the Lord's Ambition for Us

As Jesus begins His instruction, He gives one simple phrase that has significant implications. The statement isn't even a complete sentence, yet it tells us wonderful things about His view of prayer. Jesus simply said, "When you pray." This statement means two things. First, it means that it is indeed His ambition and desire for us to pray. Yes, He modeled it clearly both privately and publicly, but here He promotes it in such a way that He is making it clear that He wants His followers to do as He has done. And as His followers, it should be our desire to honor Him and please Him in all that we do. **2 Corinthians 5:9** reminds us that our primary ambition should be to please Him. **Ephesians 5:8b, 10** instructs us, "Walk as children of Light...trying to learn what is pleasing to the Lord." The Lord desires that we have a faithful commitment to pray. This should be a daily practice in our life. **Andrew Murray** said it well, "It is indispensable to the spiritual life of a Christian to take time each day with God's Word, and in prayer to wait upon God for His presence and love to be revealed." I suggest to you this morning that this is where so many of us miss it. We see

prayer as an option. It's something that isn't that big of a deal. We treat God like He's our divine waiter who will come running whenever we have a real need. The problem with this perspective is that we are basically saying that we can handle everything else on our own. This is where we often miss out on all that God has for us. Many Christians live their lives without joy, power, and peace because they are living their life in their own strength. This leads us to burn out, bitterness, resentment, and confusion. Friend, this is not what God wants for you. God wants to meet with you. He wants to guide and direct you. He wants to lead you. He wants to heal you. He wants to restore you. These things are yours if you will only make Him the priority of your life. God does not impose Himself upon you. He invites and pleads, but you must respond and act. Missionary **Elizabeth Elliott** was once asked about the hardest thing she ever had to overcome through prayer. Her quick answer was powerful. She said, "The primary obstacle I face is myself – my laziness, preoccupations, worries, and lack of concentration. I must deal with these in the strength of the Lord. But I am responsible to do what I am meant to do. He will help me, but He will not physically move me to the quiet place or to my knees." It is the Lord's desire for us to do just that.

#### **B. It is the Lord's Anticipation of Us**

Not only is prayer His ambition for us, it is what He anticipates of us. It is presumed that all followers of Jesus will be people consistent in prayer. Here in this passage Jesus made a simple statement. He said, "When you pray." Please understand that He is not just saying, "Well there are some things that you need to know and apply whenever you get around to praying." Instead, as Jesus speaks, He is assuming that His disciples have a lifestyle of prayer. He is assuming that their lives are characterized by regular conversations with their heavenly Father, that they are persistent in prayer. Christians, this should be the same in our lives. Prayer must be a vital part of our lives. We should pray even when we don't feel like it and pray until we do feel like it. Prayer is vital to our relationship with the Lord.

#### **IV. The Privilege of Prayer (vs. 2b)**

I realize that this is the second week in a row that we are being reminded of the privilege of prayer. The first phrase of this prayer alone should be enough to encourage us to pray. What did Jesus say? He said, "When you pray, say: 'Father, hallowed be Your name.'" Because Jesus made a way for us to be rescued from our sins and adopted into God's family, by His grace we have the same standing before God that Jesus has. Jesus addressed God as Father and, through His sacrifice, all who have been saved can also address God as Father. When we come to God in prayer, we don't have to be afraid, anxious, worried, unsure, uncomfortable, etc. We come to Him as our good and gracious Father. **Ephesians 1:3, 5** praises God saying, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ...He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will." **Romans 8:14-16** tells us clearly, "For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are the sons of God. For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, 'Abba! Father!' The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God." Anyone can cry out to God, but not everyone can call Him Father. Many people live under

the assumption that we are all God's children. We are certainly all God's creation, but not all have become God's children. It is only through faith in Jesus Christ that we have the right to call Almighty God our Father. Jesus said in **John 14:6**, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me."

When it comes to prayer, Jesus is teaching us that our prayer happens in the context of a wonderful, authentic relationship with God. Our prayers aren't to be some memorized repeating of words, some religious ritual, or some outward performance to be seen by men. According to Jesus, our prayer is to be a conversation with God, our Father. How much more personal could we possibly get? The same God Who created heaven and earth and has all power is our Father. We get the impression from Jesus that, as our Father, there should be nothing that we can't sit down and talk to Him about. So often when we pray to God we come to Him as if He is a great distance away and we just hope that He will hear our prayers. Also, sometimes we come to God in prayer and use the same old prayers over and over again as if there is some magical formula to get God to work. But here Jesus shows us God's position so that we may learn to be personal when we pray. We can pour our hearts out to Him knowing that He will guide, direct, comfort, convict, and counsel us as a loving Father will do. Jesus prayed this way, and I am convinced that we would do well to follow His example and Follow the Leader.

Three Questions to Consider:

- 1) Do you know God as your Father?
- 2) Do you need to get back to your "certain" place and make prayer the priority once again?
- 3) Do you need to admit your need for help and ask the Lord for help?