

If You Could Ask One Thing **Luke 11:1-13**

Introduction

Picture for a moment yourself walking along a sandy beach. Suddenly you somehow discover what appears to be a magic lamp. You rub the lamp, and just as it was taught in every children's tale you have ever heard, a genie appears and grants one wish – just one.

If you could ask one thing ...

What would you ask for? And you are not permitted to ask for three more wishes!

What if God appeared to you with the same offer?

What if God were to say to you: "Ask Me anything?" How would you respond?

- I suspect many of our responses would be very similar:
 - Good health for us or a loved one
 - A guarantee of heaven
 - A little bit more financial security

God DID make an offer like to a young, newly anointed king of Israel. His name was Solomon, and you can read all about him in 1 Kings 3. Solomon could have asked for wealth, power, a vast kingdom, a long reign, but instead Solomon requested:

... a discerning heart to govern your people and to distinguish between right and wrong. (1 Kings 3:9)

And God honored that, and gave Solomon so much wisdom people came from all across the world to seek his counsel. God also gave Solomon far more than he asked for.

In today's passage God does not extend that offer specifically, but one of the disciples makes a request anyway.

Lord, teach us to pray ... (Luke 11:1)

What a great request! Whether this disciple knew it or not, he asked for something that should be at the top of the "wish list" for every Christian, because everything about our spiritual life is tied to the matter of prayer.

Warren Wiersbe was the voice you heard for many years on the "Back to the Bible" radio broadcast and a former pastor of Moody Bible Church in Chicago. Wiersbe once said:

No Christian rises any higher than his praying. (Warren Wiersbe)

As a side note, before he died in 2019 Wiersbe donated his entire 13,000 volume library to Cedarville University.

Imagine the difference it would make in our individual lives if we really learned how to pray! Imagine the difference it would make in our homes, our churches, our world if the people of God were known to be "prayer warriors."

I want to think about prayer this morning as a "growth process." And I want to compare it to the journey we take through the education process. Let's call it a school of prayer. This school of prayer has four levels, and each level teaches a deeper lesson about prayer.

LEVEL #1: GRADE SCHOOL – PRAYING FOR OUR NEEDS

I heard a story of a ship that was caught in the middle of a major storm in the middle of the ocean. As the ship started to sink, the captain called out to the passengers and crew: "Does anyone here know how to pray?"

One man stepped forward and said, "Yes sir, I know how to pray."

The captain replied, "Wonderful! You start praying while the rest of us put on life jackets. We are one short."

There are times in our lives when we are incredibly aware of our need to pray. And sometimes we totally forget about doing it.

We don't know what prompted this disciple's request, but Jesus responded in a way that suggests prayer ought to be something regular in our lives.

He said to them, "**When** you pray ... (Luke 11:2)

Not if but when. The sense of the text is that prayer is a consistent of the life of one who walks with Jesus. It's not just when something scary is about to happen. That is the lifestyle that is modeled for us throughout the Scriptures.

Abraham prayed.

- In our Old Testament reading today, he interceded for the city of Sodom.

King David prayed.

- Most of the Psalms are prayers set to music.

Jesus prayed.

- There are at least 10 references in the Gospel of Luke alone about the prayers of Jesus.
- And if He needed to do it, how can we get by without doing it?

In this early phase of the school of prayer, our focus is on our needs, so we pray when we need something. But we grow. And we go on to ...

LEVEL #2: HIGH SCHOOL – PRAYING FOR WILL OF GOD

One writer said this:

Prayer is a mighty instrument, not for getting your will done in heaven, but for getting God's will done on earth. (Robert Law)

When you advance to the high school level of praying, you pray to discover what God wants. That's what the Lord's Prayer models for us.

Father, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come. (Luke 11:2)

When the Gospel of Matthew records this prayer, it adds the phrase "thy will be done." That's the version we use in our worship. Then it lists some of the ways in which God's will is accomplished in this world:

- Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us.
- Lead us not into temptation.

Another familiar passage tells us to not focus too much on what we will eat, or drink or wear. Instead:

Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. (Matthew 6:33)

I like the sentiment of this quote. I wish I knew who to credit for it:

Don't pray to escape trouble. Don't pray to be comfortable. Pray for the will of God in every situation. Nothing else is worth praying for.

In Alexander Solzhenitsyn's "A Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich," Ivan endures all the horrors of a Soviet prison camp. One day he is praying with his eyes closed when a fellow prisoner notices him and says with ridicule, "Prayers won't help you get out of here any faster." Opening his eyes, Ivan answered ...

I do not pray to get out of prison but to do the will of God. (From *A Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*)

And when we are in the upper grades of our school of prayer, we learn how to focus on God's will in a situation. But there is still room to grow.

LEVEL #3: COLLEGE – PRAYING AS A CHILD OF GOD

Don't miss what happens starting in verse 5. Jesus tells a story about friend who needs something at midnight, and then transitions that teaching into a series of question about what it means to be a child of God.

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? (Luke 11:11-12)

In Middle-Eastern culture, hospitality is very important. We talked about that last week as we looked at the Mary vs. Martha passage. When a guest arrives, the whole village is involved in entertaining him. Doing otherwise would be a breach of basic etiquette.

The people who heard these words of Jesus would have been mortified that anyone would ever say “don’t bother me.” But Jesus is making a point. If your neighbor will respond, imagine what your Father will do.

And the deeper we grow in the school of prayer, the more we come to understand that God is not the grocery store owner seeking to fill out our wish lists, but He is a loving, caring Father who takes good care of His children ... because they are His children.

Matthew tells us about the time ...

(Jesus) called a little child to him, and placed the child among them. And he said: “Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever takes the lowly position of this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. (Matthew 18:3-4)

That kind of Father/child relationship only happens over time. Which now brings us to the final phase of the school of prayer...

LEVEL #4: GRADUATE SCHOOL – PRAYING FOR THE BLESSING

Look at verses 12-13:

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!” (Luke 11:13)

We already have the Holy Spirit. That was a gift given to the whole church at Pentecost and to us individually at the point of our salvation.

- And it is not wrong to pray for your daily bread. Jesus modeled it for us in this prayer.
- Praying for things is not wrong, it is wrong to be content with staying at that level in your prayers. You don’t want to be one of those kids who only talks to their parents when they want something.

As you grow older, there comes a moment in time when you enjoy being with your parents. Not because they can do something for you. But because they are really cool people. You just enjoy being with them.

- Trust me on this one teens!

By giving the Holy Spirit to us, God gives us His presence. He is with us! And as we pray, we get to enjoy being with Him.

John R. W. Stott once admitted the truth that many of us have felt but failed to confess:

The thing I know will give me the deepest joy -- namely, to be alone and unhurried in the presence of God, aware of His presence, my heart open to worship Him -- is often the thing I least want to do. (John R.W. Stott)

But that is where the blessing comes. Being in His presence.

APPLICATION

I close with this prayer of Andrew Murray, one of the giants of faith who wrote a lot about the subject of prayer.

O my Father! With my whole heart I praise You for this wondrous life of continuous prayer, continuous fellowship, continuous answers and continuous oneness with Him Who lives to pray forever! O my God! Keep me abiding and walking in the presence of Your glory, so that prayer may be the spontaneous expression of my life with You.

Blessed Savior! With my whole heart I praise You for coming from heaven to share my needs and my pleas, so that I could share Your all-powerful intercession. Thank You for taking me into Your school of prayer, teaching me the blessedness and the power of a life that is totally comprised of prayer. And most of all, thank You for taking me up into the fellowship of Your life of intercession. Now through me, too, Your blessings can be dispensed to those around me.

Holy Spirit! With deep reverence I thank You for Your work in me. Through You I am lifted up into communication with the Son and the Father, entering the fellowship of the life and love of the Holy Trinity.

Spirit of God! Perfect Your work in me! Bring me into perfect union with Christ my Intercessor! Let Your unceasing indwelling make my life one of unceasing intercession. And let my life unceasingly glorify the Father and bless those around me.

Amen.