

A Door Will Be Opened

Luke 11:1-13

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July 27, 2025

Let us Pray:

God, you show us our chief ends. You give us our deepest why and most trusted how. Today may we brush against your sovereignty and take joy in your presence. May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our heart be acceptable to you, oh our rock and our redeemer! Amen.

The best way to learn to swim- is to swim. And the same goes for teaching a puppy how to swim- you go swimming with them. So, the other day I found myself swimming in a small pond ringed with large trees with Autumn. As puppies often do, she was struggling and treading water not knowing how to use her hind legs to level out and swim forward. Gradually, she started using her hind legs as I lifted the back of her life preserver and soon, we found ourselves paddling together, shoulder to shoulder. I could feel her soft coat brushing against me as we both doggy paddled through the glassy warm water. I was so pleased with her success, and enjoying the warm myself, I was surprised when sprinkles started falling and tapping the brim of my ballcap. I looked up to see a line of dark grey clouds, moving quickly, and then heard what I thought was the highway. But I knew it wasn't the highway- it was wind. Wind from the heavens came from over the clouds and roared down so hard it pushed and churned the water in all directions. The tall green trees bent ominously down towards us, their

leaves pulsating and tearing off and flying through the air. Piercing cracks of splitting wood filled the forest.

Then the heaviest sheets of rain imaginable swept over us like an ocean typhon and lifted the pond and raindrops back into the air. The space between the brim of my ballcap and the surface of the water- disappeared. I could not see but I could still feel Autumn steadily paddling next to me.

Where the lake ended, and the summer rains began - was lost on me. This unforeseen tempest - had made everything merge. It was as if on bending knee the heavens stooped down and greeted us little creatures. Now we were entangled between sky and sea, air and water, heaven and earth.

Just like a churning squall: prayer is meant to entangle us with God, with the Holy and with one another. And as always God is by our side, teaching us, holding us up, and building our confidence.

Today's gospel reading takes us back to the beginning. This is the beginning of praying **with** and **in**, our savior Jesus Christ. At the prompting of his disciples, Jesus first teaches is the Lord's prayer, he teaches us **how** to pray and for **what** we should be praying. He gives us words to address God: Father, "Abba", which is an immediate reference to intimate personal familial relationships, hoping of loving respect and honor.

Jesus then offers us words to praise and affirm Gods sovereignty and justice saying, "Hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in Heaven." Lastly, comes a series of petitions for the world at large for food & sustenance, forgiveness & grace, and fidelity to our one righteous God.

But then Jesus pivots and shares a well-known parable. It is a reaching story that concludes no matter the circumstance, a true friend will ultimately provide anything for their friend in need - because of their friend's persistence. He takes it a step further and notes that a true parent does not always give what their child asks for- but is generous and does provide for their true deep needs. He concludes by saying:

"How much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!" – Luke 11:13

All of this is a treatise, an invitation, and a series of profound lessons about the importance of communion with God through prayer.

I wonder, who taught you to pray? I wonder how and for what did they teach you to pray?

I also wonder how often are we willing to go into the deep and truly bathe in prayer to meet the God who lovingly stoops down to us little creatures?

Well, Christian prayer can take many different forms and uses many different means to accomplish their ends.

- Thomas Merton spoke of prayer as "communion of our freedom with God's ultimate freedom".
- Anne Lamott wrote that she has two basic prayers: "Thank you, thank you" and "Help me, help me."
- In confirmation we learn that:

To pray is to open ourselves to God. People often pray when they have wants or are afraid or thankful. Prayer can also be a way of life. As we practice prayer in our daily lives, we become more aware of God's loving

presence all the time- not just in emergencies. When we pray with Jesus, we “become prayer” and live within God’s promise to heal the whole creation, including us.

These definitions certainly contain some daunting aspirations. It is a steep request to approach God’s ultimate freedom or have prayer become a way of life, or “become prayer” itself. I would guess that such aspirations require sufficient cause as to become so profoundly entangled with the murkiness of spirituality and outwardly devoted to the riddle laden parable bearer known As Jesus Christ?

But we are not the first to ponder the weight of such fidelity.

The Westminster catechism, written in 1648, is a collection of questions and answers to define the Christian faith during the reformation of the Churches of Christ in the kingdoms of England, Ireland and Scotland. It begins with one of the most striking and short Q&A claims I have ever encountered:

Q. What is the chief end of humankind?

A. Man’s chief end is to **glorify** God,¹ and to **enjoy** him forever.²

And being the good Scottish theologians they were, everything from the Westminster Catechism, is proof texted from scripture.

Isaiah 60:21. Thy people also shall be all righteous: they shall inherit the land for ever, the branch of my planting, the work of my hands, that **I may be glorified.**

Luke 2:10. And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.

Philippians 4:4. Rejoice in the Lord always: and again, I say, Rejoice.

To Glorify and to enjoy God, to honor God through righteousness and praise God with extravagant adoration- this is how we are called to be in this world. These are the chief ends to which we have been created, our ultimate purposes, our great aim with the days we are blessed.

Who we have been created to be defines how we are to be. Prayer is the how. One theologian comments about the chief of humankind when applied to our prayer lives saying:

When this “law” is applied to the practice of prayer, it means that our prayers are legitimate only when they become mental marathons of self-abnegation and immersion into the ineffable Divine- an accomplishment that, for most of us ordinary mortals, is like an insomniac telling himself to get to sleep. We are burdened by centuries of exhortation and technique concerning “right” prayer. This is why the prayer Jesus taught his disciples is so wonderfully refreshing. It does not require of us that we become anything we are not already. It is a deeply human prayer. It is a prayer for human beings, that is, for creatures in need. – Douglas John Hall

I wonder how we, how you, are a creature in need? I wonder how God has provided for relationship with you, held you up so that you did not drown, and seeks to meet you in in this place?

Can you feel the warmth of the Spirit brushing against your shoulder?

Prayer is a doorway which isn't unlocked through our correctness, but through the hand of God in Jesus Christ, through the advocate of the Holy Spirit, faithfully outstretched in welcome and self-giving.

Here is the thing; all of us struggle with prayer. God knows this. God knows I have had more than one pastoral visit or personal moment- where words failed me. I did not know what to say or how to pray. All my training and study slipped away and the best I had to offer was perhaps an open hand, a long silence, a warm embrace, a tear shed from compassion or pain, a rolling belly laugh and broad smile.

Words often fail us, but not all prayer requires words. Because there are many ways to glorify God and enjoy God forever, to become entangled with the mighty one who kneels to hold this earth in his hands. Prayer is communion with God in Jesus Christ. And as far as the "how and what" of prayer- God has already sought us out, taught us some examples, and reminds us of the depth of God's desire to share in all our joys and sorrows, both now and forever.

So, I say to you, Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. 10 For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. – Luke 11:9-10

You know, the best way to learn to pray- is to pray. And the more we pray, the more we magnify God's glory and take joy in our every-present creator- well glory and joy just multiply.

Amen.