

**This One Thing:
Learning to Do This One Thing
Luke 11:1-13**

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Text Introduction: Last Sunday we began not only a series of study but also initiated a challenge that we will be calling “This One Thing.” “This One Thing” is a call for our church to pray as never before in the history of our church. That is actually a phenomenal challenge because our church has already been noted as a praying church.

In case you missed us last Sunday (and we have a number of first-time guests as well as other guests with us today) we considered as a background to this challenge the passage in Matthew when Jesus cleared the Temple of the ungodliness that was occurring. As He cleared the temple this day, Jesus said, “My house shall be called a house of prayer.” Of all that the Church is supposed to be, on this important occasion, Jesus said that the Church is to be a place of prayer. The challenge for the Church to be a place of prayer still faces us today. I want to call you to become a person of prayer and do your part in helping your Church become a people of prayer.

Think of it this way. Any measurement of a church and a disciple must include how we are doing in this area of prayer.

Last Sunday, I asked us as a church to take at least three actions steps. Let me repeat them.

1. This One Thing—Each week we will have a church-wide specific prayer objective. This week our central prayer objective is praying for UL. So Pray. Pray, every time you pray, for this one thing.
2. Prayer Revival—October 8-11—This is a specific set of days given to prayer. Unlike most revivals where a guest revivalist (evangelist) is enlisted to lead us, we are inviting guest prayer leaders to lead us in prayer. I am asking that you prioritize these dates on your calendar. Protect these dates. Be here those days. Let’s have a prayer revival.
3. A Personal Prayer Commitment—In the coming weeks, we will be unveiling week by week, personal prayer activities. One will capture your attention and you will commit to this being your personal prayer activity.

Now, if we are going to be successful in this challenge, we are going to have to learn to pray. There are some of you perhaps who don’t need this message today, because you are prayer experts. Be patient with the rest of us, because the vast majority of us are prayer wimps. We are not Ph.D.s of prayer; we are in Preschool.

And my assignment is to make disciples. Our church’s assignment is to make disciples. Well, we can’t very well be disciples until we learn to pray. I’m grateful for this passage before us today.

Text: He was praying in a certain place, and when He finished, one of His disciples said to Him, “Lord, teach us to pray, just as John also taught his disciples.”

² He said to them, “Whenever you pray, say:

Father,

Your name be honored as holy.

Your kingdom come.

³ Give us each day our daily bread.

⁴ And forgive us our sins,

for we ourselves also forgive everyone

in debt to us.

And do not bring us into temptation.”

⁵ He also said to them: “Suppose one of you has a friend and goes to him at midnight and says to him, ‘Friend, lend me three loaves of bread,⁶ because a friend of mine on a journey has come to me, and I don’t have anything to offer him.’ ⁷ Then he will answer from inside and say, ‘Don’t bother me! The door is already locked, and my children and I have gone to bed. I can’t get up to give you anything.’ ⁸ I tell you, even though he won’t get up and give him anything because he is his friend, yet because of his friend’s persistence, he will get up and give him as much as he needs.

⁹ “So I say to you, keep asking, and it will be given to you. Keep searching, and you will find. Keep knocking, and the door will be opened to you. ¹⁰ For everyone who asks receives, and the one who searches finds, and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened. ¹¹ What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead of a fish? ¹² Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? ¹³ 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?”

Introduction: Aren’t you glad to know we are not the first to struggle in prayer? In fact, the sign-up list for the class, Prayer 101, has some pretty distinguished names--John, James, Andrew, Simon Peter, and we presume all of the rest of the disciples. When one asked “Teach us to pray,” another disciple didn’t interrupt and say, “No, we don’t need that.” In addition, we must note, this is the only instance in which the disciples are asking Jesus how to do something. They could have asked, “Show us how to multiply the bread so that the lunch for a young boy feeds the multitudes.” Not once do we read in Scripture, “Teach us to heal, teach us to cast out demons, teach us to raise the dead.” They didn’t even ask Jesus how to preach and teach. They did ask Him how to pray. (Max Lucado, *Before the Amen*, p. 3-5)

Luke indicated Jesus to be in prayer on nine different occasions. In addition, Luke gave evidence of Jesus’ first and last words from the cross being prayer giving us a total of Jesus praying 11 times. (3:21, 5:16, 6:12, 9:18, 9:28, 9:29, 11:1, 22:32, 22:44, 23:34, 23:46) Jesus prays as He is baptized, He prays alone, He prays all night, He prays in private, He invites others to come with Him, He prays in the Garden before His arrest so much so that He sweats as though big drops of blood pour off of Him, and He prays from the cross.

Luke also gave evidence of Jesus’ teaching on prayer in 5 different locations. (11:9-10, 18:1, 18:9-14, 21:36, and 22:46.)

The disciples seemingly made the connection between His prayer and His power.

And, so they ask “Teach us to pray.” But, what prompts the question? They saw Him. They saw Him praying. They saw Him praying often.

Jesus exemplified a practice to follow.

The teaching is the result of a question, but they asked the question out of observation. They observed Jesus’ habit. They observed the place. One might argue that there is nothing special about a place of prayer, but a place often brings discipline. A place, though not necessarily theologically relevant to the answer of prayer has the potential to become for you practically relevant to the experience of prayer.

John Maxwell tells about his father’s place of prayer. His father was a Christian College president. When he retired, all of his furniture was moved out to welcome a new president with new furnishings. As they were showing the empty office space to the new president, he remarked at the sight of a worn place in the carpet, “Oh, this must have been the place where Dr. Maxwell had his desk.”

The person giving the tour said, “Actually, no, that is the place where Dr. Maxwell spent hours upon hours in prayer.”

But, mostly the disciples observed the power. They believed and made the connection that the praying of Jesus was the source of the miracles, ministry, and message that they observed and heard.

Why “This One Thing?” Why is prayer this one thing? Why not evangelism, or preaching, or music, or ministry, or missions, or ministry? Because, where we are right now as a church and as a nation tells me that all of these things follows prayer. If all of us pray as we see outlined in Scripture, my preaching ought to be better. Our fellowship ought to be better. Our evangelism ought to be more productive. God will call out missionaries. Everything follows, and the disciples saw that.

And so what they observed prompted a question, and Jesus answered.

Jesus instructed with a pattern to follow.

Now notice this. “When the disciples asked Jesus to teach them to pray, He gave them a prayer. Not a lecture on prayer. Not the doctrine of prayer. He gave them a quotable, repeatable, portable prayer.” (Lucado, p. 6.)

Let’s observe the prayer and so observe the pattern.

- We approach God out of relationship but also out of reverence.

He is accessible out of this tender relationship, but we keep that relationship reverent, because He is unequalled and unrivaled. And when it comes to prayer, we need both. We need a God who is relational, but we need a God who is capable to do all things beyond what we might ask or think.

- We acknowledge His coming Kingdom.

Our temporal requests make more sense in the context of His eternal will. Acknowledging His coming Kingdom ought to bring a perspective to our requests.

- We ask God about both the physical and the spiritual.

God meets our physical needs. I heard a story about a woman who believed God for everything. She prayed about everything. She prayed for her daily bread. She had a neighbor who was an unbeliever. He resented the fact that his neighbor, the woman, spoke of God in such personal ways. He resented the fact that she praised God for everything. Wanting to prove to his neighbor that her trust in God for her provision was in vain, he went out and bought the lady a sack full of groceries. He put them at the door, knocked on the door, and hid in the bushes. When the lady saw the groceries, as was her habit, she began to thank God for the blessing. The man jumped out of the bushes and said, "God didn't provide those groceries. I did." Immediately, the woman prayed again, "Thank you God for providing these groceries, and even using my neighbor to provide the groceries."

We can count on God, our Heavenly Father, to provide our physical needs.

And we count on God for our spiritual needs. The prayer references two of our greatest spiritual needs—forgiveness and deliverance from the things of this world that tempt us.

Jesus exhorted with a parable to embolden faith.

Before we leave this passage, we need to note the parables that Jesus used to reinforce His teaching on prayer. We will be encouraged by the parables when we understand them.

When observing the first parable, we need to know at least these three cultural factors that serve as the backdrop to the parable. First, houses in the first century world would not have had a lot of stored food. Second, the practice of "popping in" on someone was common. The only culturally, acceptable response was to invite the guests in for the night. Third, houses in those days would have been small—maybe even one room. So, all of these cultural clues converge in this story. The man doesn't have food, but he has to give his newly arrived guests food. He has a friend who would be willing, but this is going to require waking up the whole house. What's he's going to do? Because of the boldness (persistence) of the man asking for help, the man called upon answers. Why? The boldness. Why the boldness? Why the persistence? Desperation!

The second parable is a parable that has its understanding in the context of "how much more." If we know how to do this (give our children what we need), how much more will God, our Father, give us what we need—especially what we depend upon Him for spiritually.

As a parent, grandparent, aunt, uncle, anyone in relationship to a child, how do you feel about these statements?

- (1) I need you to help me with something.
- (2) I want to talk to you about something.
- (3) I want to tell you about my day.

What would be your response? What do you think God's response, when we, His children, ask Him the same?

That is the kind of thought that should embolden our faith.

So What?

Start where you are!

Do you pray? If not, start! How? Here. Our father..."

Have you grown lax in your prayer life? Jump start your prayer life. Get a place. Get a plan. Get a partner.

How do you learn to ride a bike? Do you watch a video? Read a book? Some things can only be learned by doing. We learn to pray by praying.