THE COMMUNICATION IN A RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD

Luke 11:1–13

Key Verse: 11:2

“He said to them, ‘When you pray, say:

“Father,

hallowed be your name,

your kingdom come.”’”

 In our series “A Real Relationship With God” we’ve been thinking about various aspects of the relationship. A real relationship with God always begins with God’s grace of forgiveness (Isa1). It’s rooted not in our efforts, but in the Spirit of God (Ro8). But it does involve making a commitment to remain in Jesus (Jn15). It also involves trust, a trust that grows as we keep God’s commands and learn his character (Pr3). And a relationship with God calls for our obedience: we need to treasure Jesus’ words and obey them (Jn14). Now in today’s passage we want to think about the communication in a relationship with God.

 Any relationship requires communication. Without it, a relationship can’t really get started, and when it diminishes, any relationship will shrivel up and fade away. Real communication can’t be manipulation, just getting the other person to do what we want. Communication is a two-way street, where both parties are genuinely interested in each other and care for each other’s needs. This is the kind of relationship God wants to have with each of us. We see this in the famous prayer Jesus taught, called “The Lord’s Prayer.” In this prayer we express our interest in God and his concerns, as well as our faith that he’s interested in us and our daily needs. It’s a foundational prayer that defines a Christian’s priorities and should shape the character of our inner daily life. As we think about this prayer, may God inspire us to communicate with him, make his concerns our focus, and learn to depend on him in every area of our lives.

 In Luke’s Gospel one of the major themes is prayer (e.g. 1:10,13; 2:37; 6:28; 18:1,10,11; 19:46; 21:36; 22:32,40,41,44–46). Luke specifically mentions that Jesus was praying from the beginning of his ministry to the end (3:21; 23: 34a). Jesus often withdraws to lonely places and prays (5:16). He prays all night when he has to make an big decision (6:12), and when he has to teach his disciples something really important (9:18,28,29). Look at verse 1a. This time there isn’t anything pressing; prayer was just Jesus’ regular communication with the Father. Look at verse 1b. What’s striking this time is that one of his disciples actually *asks* about prayer. We call it a “teachable moment.” We might try to teach some good things, but if people aren’t interested, it’s a waste of time. But if people *ask* about a subject, that’s when they’re more likely to learn. We also notice that this disciple said, “…just as John taught his disciples.” Jesus’ disciples knew of John the Baptist’s austere lifestyle, and how he trained his disciples to fast and pray. But Jesus didn’t do that; he just prayed quietly by himself. By being around him, finally one of the disciples developed the desire to pray.

 Let’s read verses 2–4. Jesus taught a model prayer. He wasn’t saying that it’s wrong to ad-lib a prayer, that all prayer has to be scripted. But he *was* saying that prayer should be not long-winded and complicated but simple, and have specific, essential requests. We notice how Jesus taught in the first part that we should first focus on who God is and on what his concerns are, and then talk about ourselves and our needs. To pray each part of this prayer requires faith. The prayer is short, but each part is rich in meaning, and put together it’s comprehensive. As we reflect on it, we can learn much about what it means to communicate with God.

**First,** “Father.” In talking to God, Jesus didn’t teach us to use many exalted descriptors, such as “Almighty, Majestic, Holy, All-knowing One.” He told us to just call God “Father.” Until Jesus taught this, people didn’t call God “Father”—that would’ve been considered heretical. This one word, “Father,” is powerful. What’s the nature of a father? Basically, he provides for, protects and disciplines his children because he loves them. When they have a good father, children feel secure. Jesus says God is our Father. He isn’t a remote concept, or our demanding boss or slave driver; he’s our true Father. Unfortunately many fathers are inapproachable. They don’t know how to listen to their own children or have a relationship with them. Sadly, many children don’t feel comfortable talking to their own father. But God isn’t like that. As our Father, he cares for us and is happy to listen to us talk to him about anything. But to really call God “Father,” we need faith. As we learned, it’s the Holy Spirit who gives us the conviction that God is our Father (Ro8:15). Actually, it’s mind-blowing that the Creator God loves us like a father and sees us as his own dear children (1Jn3:1a). We always need to remember that in Christ, God is our loving Father.

**Second**, “hallowed be your name.” We’ve all heard this before, but what does it really mean to pray it? “Hallowed” means “holy.” Through our prayers we don’t make God any more holy than he already is. Rather, when we pray this, we’re asking that all people, us included, may approach God acceptably with reverence and awe (Heb12:28). So many people are treating God recklessly and randomly. So we should pray for ourselves and everyone else to know that God is holy. Though he’s our loving Father, we shouldn’t take him for granted; we should pray to approach him always with the utmost respect and honor he deserves.

To pray for his name to be hallowed also means to pray that we wouldn’t ever cause his name to be dishonored. That happens when we’re hypocritical. Paul told the hypocritical Jews, “God’s name is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you” (Ro2:24; cf. Eze36:23). Today, when Christians are hypocritical, non-Christians are watching and don’t take faith in God seriously. But if we live a holy life, people around us begin to see that God is real. So to pray, “hallowed be your name” is to ask God to help us live in a way that brings glory to his name. Honestly, we all live self-centered lives. In our sinful nature we seek our own glory and honor, and it taints all we do. But when we’re in Christ, our inner person changes: above all, we really want God to be honored and glorified.

It’s interesting that this is the first thing Jesus taught us to pray: “hallowed be your name.” But is this usually the first thing we actually pray? Common sense tells us that prayer means coming to God to ask for things. But Jesus taught that prayer starts with us being concerned with who God is and how people understand and relate to him. To pray, “hallowed be your name,” we actually need to love God. Praying this prayer first helps us grow in this love.

**Third**, “your kingdom come.” This request is closely related to the first one, “hallowed be your name,” and it’s kind of the climax. When people turn to God and begin to accept him as God and revere him, it’s how his kingdom comes. Actually, the kingdom of God is the main point of the Christian message. The Old Testament looked forward to it. God taught his people after every 50 years to celebrate “the Year of Jubilee.” It was the year when all debts were cancelled, when slaves and prisoners were set free, and when God’s mercies would be shown to all (Lev25:8–13). It was just a shadow of God’s coming kingdom.

The New Testament tells us that Jesus went around proclaiming “the good news of the kingdom” (Lk8:1). Why is God’s kingdom coming such “good news”? It’s because through faith in Jesus, people can be rescued from the kingdom of darkness (Col1:13). Spiritually speaking, that’s where so many people are still living today. In the kingdom of darkness, sin reigns; death reigns; Satan reigns. It’s a kingdom of hatred, of revenge, of oppression, cruelty, injustice, curse and despair. But in the kingdom of God, grace reigns; life reigns; God reigns. It’s a kingdom of love, of forgiveness, of uplifting, kindness, justice, blessing and hope. God opened the doors to his kingdom to all people through Jesus’ death and resurrection. When anyone repents of sin and believes in Jesus, they become members of God’s kingdom, no matter who they are. This kingdom is especially offered to those who are poor, who have little to hope for in this world (Lk6:20).

To pray “your kingdom come,” we actually need to put our hope in his kingdom. If our hearts are full of the things of this world, we can’t really pray this. Many people’s passion in life is to build their own little kingdom, in this way or that, centered around “me.” Some even try to do it in ministry. But the prayer “your kingdom come” teaches us to fully embrace God’s master passion, to build *his* kingdom. Living and working for God’s kingdom is hard, but never a loss. To pray “your kingdom come” means to pray that more and more people would accept Jesus’ message. It’s to pray that God’s kingdom would spread to people anywhere in the world who’re living in darkness, without God and without hope.

 Ultimately, to pray “your kingdom come” is for the future. As we live in this cursed world, we suffer. We have to endure the same sufferings Jesus did (Ro8:17–23). But it’s our faith that one day Jesus will come again as Judge and restore all things; he’ll give us a new resurrection body and bring us to live with him forever in God’s kingdom (1Th4:16,17). Until then, we always need to share the good news of his kingdom with people (Lk10:9; Ac28:31). Whenever we pray, we should remember to call God “Father” and to ask that his name be glorified and for his kingdom to come. It’s a very God-centered prayer. In the second half of the Lord’s Prayer we need to learn to communicate with God about our needs.

**Fourth**, “daily bread.” Read verse 3. We actually find this same prayer in the Old Testament: “Keep falsehood and lies far from me; give me neither poverty nor riches, but give me only my daily bread. Otherwise, I may have too much and disown you and say, ‘Who is the LORD?’ Or I may become poor and steal, and so dishonor the name of my God” (Pr30:8,9). Jesus said simply, “Give us each day our daily bread.” It means to ask God for our daily material needs. We shouldn’t worry about tomorrow or the distant future, but depend on God for what we need each day. And it means to acknowledge that all the material blessings we have, including our job and income, actually come from God, not from us.

We may think that God is too spiritual, too holy and too preoccupied with much bigger things to be bothered with our daily material needs. But as our Father he wants to be involved in all the practical matters of our lives. At first we may feel funny asking God to help us with our finances. It’s kind of humbling. Many people would rather just work hard and take care of their own financial needs instead of asking God or anyone else for help. But Jesus taught us here always to ask God’s help for our daily needs. When we pray like this, financial worries won’t consume us or take over our priorities (Lk12:22ff.). When we pray like this, we don’t compartmentalize our faith, but include God in our real lives.

**Fifth**, “forgive us our sins.” Let’s read verse 4a. Just as we need to be praying each day about our material needs, this request teaches us to pray each day about our spiritual needs as well. Many people believe that they’ve already been forgiven and wonder why we need to keep asking for forgiveness. But it’s because even though we believe in Jesus, we still have a sinful nature, and we still do sin. Sometimes we commit sins intentionally; other times, we’re not even aware of the sins we’re committing. Again, it’s humbling. In our communication with God we’re not ever going to hear an apology from him that he’s sinned against us; we’re the ones who keep on sinning against God and against others. So when we come to God in prayer, we always need to remember to ask for his forgiveness. It doesn’t mean to constantly be living in guilt, dread and regret over our sins. But it does involve confessing our sins and asking for the blood of Jesus to cleanse us (1Jn1:8–10). The point of always asking God to forgive our sins is always to be aware of his forgiving grace and always to depend on it. If we stop praying for God’s forgiveness, we become self-righteous, and then we become ungracious towards others.

**Sixth**, “for we also forgive everyone who sins against us.” Read verse 4b. Jesus connects God’s forgiveness of us with our forgiveness of others. Elsewhere he taught, “And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive them, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins” (Mk11:25). We can’t have a string of broken relationships with people in our real lives, then come to God and pray a lot, thinking we’re doing fine. The Bible says if we’re not considerate of other people and don’t treat them with respect, our prayers are hindered (cf. 1Pe3:7). So when we confess our own sins to God in prayer and ask for his forgiveness, our hearts are renewed in his grace, and we can then in turn “forgive everyone who sins against us.” Honestly, it’s hard. As we live in this world, people can be really cruel. They can say and do very hurtful things to us, both actively and passively. We need to bring this to God in prayer and ask him for his grace to help us to forgive from the heart (Mt18:35).

**Seventh**, “And lead us not into temptation.” Read verse 4c. Here’s another humbling personal prayer request. Many people may think they’re strong enough on their own to resist temptation. But Jesus himself came to the Father when he was tempted, and he warned us to get up and pray so that we won’t fall into temptation (Lk22:46). There are all kinds of temptations in life. The temptations of sex, money, power and worldly glory are especially powerful. Many people are eaten up by these temptations. But there’s also the temptation of trying to save ourselves. When he succumbed to temptation Peter tried to follow Jesus at a safe distance, but it didn’t work (Lk22:54–62). We need to talk to God about all the temptations we’re facing in our lives, and ask his help to lead us out of them.

 Today we mainly thought about the communication in a relationship with God. It’s a two-way street of being concerned with God and what’s on his heart, as well as telling him about all our real, personal needs. We need to ask for the Holy Spirit to help us have such a God-centered and humble prayer life (13).