

Do you sometimes find it hard to keep up your private prayer life? Maybe you just forget. Or maybe you would like to pray but you just have a hard time coming up with the words to say. In the Gospel for today Jesus encourages us to pray. And so the theme for the sermon today is

Pray Often!

- I. Because Jesus gives us an outline for what to say.
- II. Because our Father will surely respond with good things.

First, pray often because Jesus gives us an outline for what to say. Our Gospel for today begins, **“One day Jesus was praying in a certain place” (Luke 11:1a)**. Jesus prayed often. He prayed at important events in his life, like his baptism (Luke 3:21), and before he chose the 12 disciples (6:12). And he certainly prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane the night before he suffered and died (22:41). Let’s follow Jesus’ example and pray before important events in our lives. But not only did Jesus pray before big events, but he also made prayer a regular part of his private life. Luke 5:16 says, “Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.” In Luke 9:18 it says, “Once when Jesus was praying in private...” And in our Gospel for today it says, “One time Jesus was praying in a certain place” (11:1). Let’s follow Jesus’ example and make prayer a regular part of our private life.

But you might think, “I would like to pray more often, but sometimes I don’t know what to say.” One of Jesus’ disciples was also wondering about what to say. It says, **“One of his disciples said to him, ‘Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples’ (11:1b)**. The disciple was wondering what words he should say, and Jesus responded by giving him the Lord’s Prayer. **He said to them, “When you pray, say: ‘Father, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread. Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us. And lead us not into temptation.’” (Luke 11:2-4)** We can use this prayer almost exactly as it is here and we do that in our worship services. We can also use these words in our private lives as an outline or list of things to pray for. When you go to the grocery store, it’s helpful to have a list. You can use the Lord’s Prayer as a list or an outline of things to pray for.

The first point on Jesus’ outline of things to pray for is **“Father, Hallowed be your name.”** God’s name includes his reputation. When Christians engage in sinful living that harms God’s reputation. And so one thing we can pray for under this point in the outline is “God, please don’t let fall into sinful living, because that would harm your reputation.” The next point in the outline is, **“Your kingdom come.”** A major theme of Jesus’ ministry was proclaiming the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God comes when a person hears that Jesus died for their sins and they believe it. Then God sets us his reign in their hearts through faith. So under this point in the outline we could pray. “God, please let more people believe in Jesus and be saved.” The next point in the outline is **“Give us each day our daily bread.”** At this point in the outline we could ask God to give us our food for the day. We could also think of the many people around the world who have very little food to eat and ask God to give them give them food to eat as well. The next point in the outline is **“Forgive us our sins” (Luke 11:4)**. We confess our sins to God and ask him to forgive us because of Jesus. **“For we also forgive everyone who sins against us” (11:4)**. This reminds us that Jesus tells us strongly to forgive those who sin against us, since God has cancelled our debt of sin. The final point in the outline that Jesus gives here is that we should ask God to keep us from falling into sin: **“And lead us not into temptation” (Luke 11:4b)**. This reminds us of when Jesus was in the Garden of Gethsemane and he told his disciples, **“Watch and pray so that you do not fall into temptation.” (Luke 22:39, 46)** At this point in the outline, we can pray, “God, I experience much temptation. Please don’t ever let me foolish put myself into a situation where I am tempted. Please guard me from temptation in the course of everyday life. And when I do face temptation please help to overcome and win the victory and not fall into sin.” So the next time you think, “I’m not sure what to say in prayer,” one thing you could do is use the Lord’s Prayer as an outline or a list of things to pray for. So pray often! Pray often because

Jesus gives us an outline of things to pray for. And, secondly, pray often because our Father will surely respond to our prayers with good things.

One possible obstacle to us praying often is that we might not know what to say. Jesus answers that in the first part of our passage. He gives us an outline of what to say. Another possible obstacle to us praying often is that we might be tempted to think, "Is God really going to answer my prayer." And Jesus spends the rest of today's Gospel lessons saying, "Yes! God is definitely going to answer your prayer by giving you good things!" First Jesus tells us a parable. He says, **"Suppose you have a friend, and you go to him at midnight and say, 'Friend, lend me three loaves of bread; a friend of mine on a journey has come to me, and I have no food to offer him'" (Luke 11:5-6).** I mentioned in the sermon last week that hospitality (inviting people into your home and giving them food) was very important in the ancient world. It was very important to give a traveler food to eat. So even though it was midnight, the host is bold enough to wake up his neighbor and ask, "Can I borrow three loaves of bread, a friend of mine has come on a journey." **"And suppose the one inside answers, 'Don't bother me. The door is already locked, and my children and I are in bed. I can't get up and give you anything.' I tell you even though he will not get up and give you the bread because of friendship, yet because of your shameless audacity he will surely get up and give you as much as you need." (Luke 11:7-8)** Jesus' point is: If the sleepy neighbor is going to give you bread at midnight because you were bold enough to ask for it, then God is definitely give you good things when you ask Him, because he's not a sleepy neighbor, he's your Father.

Did you notice how Jesus told us to address God when he taught us the Lord's prayer? He told us to address God as **"Father"**! Martin Luther explained that beautifully in the Small Catechism. He said, "With these words, God tenderly invites us to believe that he is our true Father and that we are his true children, so that we may pray to him as boldly and confidently as dear children ask their dear Father." At our dinner table at home I sit in between my sons Luke and James. And if I have five strawberries on my plate, James will say, "Can I have one of your strawberries?" I was looking forward to eating those strawberries, but I give it to him anyway, because I'm his father.

When I give him the strawberry I sometimes have said to myself this saying of Jesus, **"Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish would give him a snake instead?"** The point is no father would do that. **"Or if he asks for an egg would give him a scorpion?"** Again, the point is no father would do that. **"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)** I'm a sinful earthly father and I give James the strawberry. How much more will the perfectly good heavenly Father respond to our needs when we ask him! So pray often! As Jesus says, **"Ask and it will be given to you, seek and you will find, knock and the door will be opened to you."** He might not give us exactly what we want, but he will give us what is best for us. And notice that Jesus turns our attention to our spiritual needs. He says, "How much more will your Father in heaven, give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him." We have physical needs and God will provide for them. But our spiritual needs are more important. We need the forgiveness of sins and God gave us that by sending his Son Jesus to die on the cross. We need to believe in Jesus and God gave us that by sending the Holy Spirit. And through the faith which the Holy Spirit gives to us we offer up prayers to the Father. So pray often! Pray often because Jesus gives us an outline for what to say. And pray often because our Father will surely respond with good things. Amen.