

PRAY Sermon Series: A-ASK

Luke 11:5-13

Good Morning Connection Family and Happy Memorial Day weekend! Whether today is your first day with us in this series or you've been with us for the whole month of May, you are welcomed to this Extraordinary Invitation of prayer.

Speaking of prayer, I have to give a quick plug for our [Prayer Garden here at CCC! Did you know that we have one here?](#) Out back, our trustees and some green-thumbed people have worked really hard to make a peaceful and beautiful space for prayer. If you're looking for a quiet place to pray, you should totally check it out!

We've been looking at the acronym [P.R.A.Y.](#) And today, we're looking at [A for ask.](#)

So let's start like we have been this series, with the Lord's Prayer. You can say whatever version you know and the words will be on the screen as well. And, once again, we're going to try to pause after each line together-

["Our Father, who art in Heaven, hallowed be Thy Name.](#)

[Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done, on Earth as it is in Heaven.](#)

[Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.](#)

[And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.](#)

[For Thine is the Kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever.](#)

[Amen."](#)

So today, as we look at A for ask, you can probably think of a million things you've asked God for in your prayer time. Often, I think this is the main part we think about and spend time in when we go to God in prayer. It probably started when we were young, taught that we could talk to God and ask him anything. And sometimes, prayer becomes all asking, and no praising, repenting, or listening. That's why it is so important to look at the way we pray and how we do it.

Today we're going to look more closely at how we ask God for things. We're also going to talk about one of the biggest questions I'm sure you've heard asked time and time again- **what do we do when we pray and ask, and it seems like we either don't get the answer we want or even worse-we get nothing in return.**

Pew Research Center Online says that 55% of Americans say that they pray every day. Even some self-reported non-religious people pray, about 20-30%. But what are we asking God for? Many of us, if we're honest, have probably prayed for things we may not want to admit to.

I found a list online of things people commonly pray for, and as you'd expect, the list ranges from the good, to the bad, to the just plain selfish and ugly. Let's see if any of these hit home for you:

Let's start with the good: many people report that they ask God for help for family members or friends, for advice in their own problems, for forgiveness, for people who mistreat them, and for help for people who are victims of natural disasters. Show of hands- can any of us say the same?

Now how about any of these: Several people report that they have prayed and asked God to win the lottery, for success in something they've put no

effort into (tests in high school, anyone?), for their sports team to win, or for help in finding a good parking spot. Anyone want to admit to any of these requests?

Now for the hard ones we'd rather not admit to. We've probably all prayed for things we should not have. Several people in this survey admitted to praying and asking God to not let them get caught speeding, or for someone else in their life to fail, for God to take revenge on someone that has done them wrong, or for asking God that no one will find out something bad that they've done. We don't have to raise our hands, but we've probably prayed similar prayers, if we're honest with ourselves.

As a pastor and someone who has been in ministry awhile, I have prayed both personally and with others for a whole host of different things. I've prayed with people to find their keys, their lost dog, to have a baby, to overcome an addiction, for guidance in tough situations, for health, for loss and grief, for God's will at the end of life, and the list goes on.

Don't get me wrong, God WANTS to hear our requests! He knows us and loves us. Matthew 6:8 reminds us-

“...for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.”

But how often do we ACTUALLY remember when we're asking these things, who we're asking them to? Do we remember who we are communicating with?

Prayer gives us the opportunity to ask our heavenly father, the creator of the universe, ANYTHING, the possibility of partnering with Him to literally change the world-that's powerful!

So what are we praying for?

What if we remembered to have that perspective? The perspective of the power of our prayers and to whom we are lifting them to? That every request that leaves our lips is at the feet of the Almighty King-would that change the way we pray?

As we dive into this today, we're going to be looking at how Jesus talked about asking for things in prayer in Luke 11.

Luke 11:5-8 says-

“Then Jesus said to them, “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.’ 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.”

I love that line- “shameless audacity”. Other translations say “shameless persistence” or “brashness” or “importunity”- like relentless begging.

Jesus is telling us to literally pray in such a way that we are unapologetically, with zero fear, boldly asking for what we need.

Keyword here-need.

That’s an important distinction to make because sometimes we pray for what we WANT. And sometimes, we think WE know what we need, but we

really have no idea. We pray and we're disappointed when God's answer is different than what we thought it should be.

We've got to trust and remember that God knows our needs better than we do.

And so He continues with this metaphor in the following verses 9 and 10-

“So I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.”

This is probably one of the more popular verses we read and hear about when we look at prayer and how to pray.

And this goes along with what Paul says in 1 Thessalonians 5:17- “Pray continually” or other versions say, “Pray without ceasing.”

We've heard these verses before but maybe we've misinterpreted what they actually mean.

We can hear teachings on these verses and this idea that God wants us to be persistently praying and seeking Him and we can think it means something about prayer that it doesn't.

We can easily become mistaken and be led to think that if we just keep praying harder, longer, with more elegant words, then our prayers will be answered, just the way we want them to be.

That's not what these verses are saying at all. If you've ever prayed for something for so long and it never turned out the way you thought it would, then you know this personally.

I remember being a child, growing up in a pastor's family and seeing my mother pray for a dear friend at our church who was in her early 30's, struggling with cancer as she raised her 4 year old daughter. I watched my mother pray for weeks and months for this friend, as she took her meal after meal, and had visit after visit. I witnessed countless tears poured out and seemingly never ending prayers lifted up to heal her and allow her to get well and raise her daughter. Yet I remember when my mom told me that she didn't make it, and that despite all of our prayers, her friend Michelle had died and gone to heaven to be with Jesus.

See, there is no perfect equation for prayer that gets our words to God's ears faster. There's no special way to fast track our prayer to the beginning of the "prayer queue." There's no magic word that grabs His attention to get us an immediate "yes".

Something that I learned from that experience, even as a little girl, is really, really important. I watched my parents' prayers NOT get answered. But I watched them still CONTINUE to pray.

Because continuous, persistent prayer doesn't mean spending every second of every day doing nothing but hands folded, head bowed praying. But it means to have a continuous, underlying attitude, a God-conscious reliance on the Holy Spirit, throughout our daily lives. It should be the undercurrent of our lives, apart of everything we say and do.

We should be constantly asking, seeking, and knocking in our daily lives as we live out our faith and seek to follow His will for us in our lives.

Not OUR will. What did we pray? "Thy will be done."

That's the part that we get hung up on A LOT when it comes to praying and having unanswered prayers or prayers answered differently than what we expect.

How many of us have been asked by our non-Christian friends questions like- "How could a good God let bad things happen?" "Or why would it ever be God's will for this bad thing to occur?"

We can pray and ask for what we think is God's will and sometimes it aligns. But we can NEVER truly or fully know why God's will is what it is.

Isaiah reminds us about God's ways when he says-

"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the Lord. "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts." (55:8-9)

Or how about how Ecclesiastes 11:5 puts it, echoing the same, saying-

"As you do not know the path of the wind, or how the body is formed in a mother's womb, so you cannot understand the work of God, the Maker of all things."

St. Augustine, early Christian theologian, said it so simply-

"If you understand it, it is not God."

Wow.

We've got to stop striving to understand His will. He is God and we are not. And if we are striving to understand WHY things happen the way they happen when we pray, then we are striving for the wrong answers.

So why pray? Many people can get cynical at this point, thinking that if God's will is His will, and whatever is going to happen is going to happen, they why continue to pray?

I think it's helpful to remember that **when we pray, it's not about changing God's mind. It's about changing our hearts.** And like David said last week, putting us in a posture of repentance and alignment with God.

Danish Christian philosopher Soren Kierkegaard argued that because God is all-knowing, prayer doesn't inform Him of anything new or bend His will to our desires. Instead, it informs us about ourselves, helping to shape our hearts and align our will with God's. When he talked about this, he said-

"The function of prayer is not to influence God, but rather to change the nature of the one who prays."

When we ask God for things, we shouldn't be trying to bend His will to ours, but actually the opposite. We should be asking for our will to be bent to align with His.

And that, is powerful.

What would it look like if all of us prayed for His will to TRULY be done "here in the Middletown and surrounding MOT area as it is in Heaven." What might happen? How might we be transformed by allowing His will to work in and through us?

We must never underestimate the power of His will or what will happen when we truly seek it.

I feel like I could keep talking about the power of God's will and how impactful it is when we put His will first in our lives!

One relevant application of this we saw in Aaron and Stephanie's story this morning- the impact this has on our anxieties and fears.

Don't stress and worry seem to be such a big part of the climate in our world today? Anxiety is one of the biggest and most common struggles I hear from people of all ages. Don't get me wrong, anxiety is a real, diagnosable problem, but doesn't it seem like so many people are worried and stressed out? What if focusing on God's will helped to alleviate our worry, fear, and doubt?

George Muller, an English Christian evangelist in the 1800's believed and lived his life in such a way that it did. He said-

"I find the doing of the will of God... does a man so much good, that it leaves no time for anxiety..."

And he had the anxieties of the 1800's! He believed and taught that the radical surrender of focusing on doing God's work crowds out room for worry. By staying rooted in scripture and constant prayer, he traveled to 42 different countries preaching the gospel, founded an orphanage in England that cared and educated over 10,000 children in his lifetime, created the Scriptural Knowledge Institution which distributed millions of Bibles worldwide, and recorded over 50,000 specific answers to prayers in his journal.

WOW.

What would it look like to shift your worries, fears, and anxieties over to focus on God and His will? What would be possible in and through your life if instead of letting fear and anxiety rule, you let God? Like Aaron said in the video, what are you letting control you?

I want to end today with a story of a time I prayed with someone for the will of God in their life.

I had a moment this past fall when I was visiting someone in the hospital. He had been sick for over a year and was not doing very well at all. I went to visit with him and his wife and we talked and read scripture together and then I asked him what he wanted me to specifically pray for. At this point, he was barely able to talk, but I leaned in and he whispered, "God's will." I chuckled and I looked at him and then I looked at her and I said, "Now I will pray for that, but you know what happens if I do." Being a strong man of Christ, he did know, and he nodded his head. I stood in that hospital room and there as I held their hands, I prayed for God's will in his life, whatever that looked like. It was few days later that he passed, peacefully into the arms of Jesus.

In this prayer, we knew what we wanted God's will to be-healing. And that's exactly what it was. But it wasn't the temporary healing found in this world. When he passed, he was eternally healed, the best, most permanent kind of healing we can ever experience.

So, **how are you asking God for things in your life? Are you seeking your will or His?**

As we close in prayer, think about the things in your life that you're seeking, and ask Him to bring them into alignment with His will for you.

Do you want His will, or yours?

And get ready. You will be surprised at the power that has in your prayer walk with Jesus and in your life.

Let's pray.

Benediction:

If you're leaving here today, and you're unsure of how to pray moving forward, I want to leave you with this encouragement from Romans-

“In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God's people in accordance with the will of God.” (Romans 8:26-27)

Even when we don't have the words, we can still ask, seek, and knock for God's will in our lives.

How are you going to live that out this week?