**We need to pray**

Text: Luke 11:1-13

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**Scriptures:** Psalm 116; Luke 11:1-13; 18:9-14

**Songs Chosen:** [SttL] 103, 130, 511, 510, 365

**Series:** Heidelberg Catechism

**Theme:** Prayer is communion with God our Father

**Proposition:** Prayer is necessary for all Christians

**Introduction**

Have you ever tried writing to someone but have received no response back from them? Relationships require ongoing two-way communication to remain living and active. This is true within marriages, families, and church congregations and friendships and in all the spheres of our lives together with others.

Our most important relationship is with God our Father. He is the Living God who communicates. He speaks. He is the One who spoke this Creation into being. We, as human beings, are all made in the image of God, we communicate with words as Adam did after He was created and said of Eve: “*This is now bone of my bones*” (Gen 2:23).

God communicates with words, He speaks and He listens. In times past, He spoke in an audible voice, in dreams and visions, and via His prophets in the Old Testament. Now through Christ, the living Word {Heb 1:2} who “*became flesh, and dwelt among us*” (John 1:14), God speaks to us through His Word, read, heard and preached.

We speak to God through spoken words in song and in prayer. English writer and Puritan preacher John Bunyan described prayer as being: “*a sincere, sensible, affectionate pouring out of the heart or soul to God, through Christ, in the strength and assistance of the Holy Spirit, for such things as God has promised, or according to the Word of God, for the good of the church, with submission in faith to the will of God*”.

There is no such person as a true Christian who does not pray! Jesus says “When you pray” (Matt 6:5,6,7) not “If you pray”. Prayer is at the very heart of the Christian life. If we are to know how to live for Christ, we must know how to pray! Our prayer for help in praying mirrors that of the disciples in our text “*Lord, teach us to pray*”! (Luke 11:1). We are going to look at our communication with God our Father in prayer under three headings:

1. Humble prayer
2. Expectant prayer
3. Thankful prayer
4. **Humble Prayer**

Heidelberg Catechism Lord’s Day 45 Q&A116 answers the question “Why do Christians need to pray?” with these words: “*Because prayer is the most important part of the thankfulness God requires of us*”. It is however, possible to express gratitude without being humble. Humility can be defined as ‘the quality of having a modest or low view of one’s importance’. Hear the Pharisee’s ‘thankful’ prayer to God: "*The Pharisee stood and was praying this to himself: 'God, I thank You that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector*” (Luke 18:11). What’s wrong with this “prayer of thankfulness”? It sounds like the Pharisee was not so much praying as merely enjoying the sound of his own voice which confirmed his own worth in his own eyes.

In prayer, we meet our Master, our Maker. We meet God who is holy, exalted high on His lofty throne "*Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD God, the Almighty, who was and who is and who is to come." (Rev 4:8).* We have no right of access in and of ourselves to God’s throne. God is holy and we are not naturally so. Sin results in estrangement from God. “*But your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden His face from you so that He does not hear*” (Isaiah 59:2). The other man in the temple with the Pharisee in Luke 18 knew this "*But the tax-gatherer, standing some distance away, was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, the sinner!*”.

Our attitude of prayer must be, like his, humble. In the words of Heidelberg Catechism A117 “*we must acknowledge our need and misery, hiding nothing, and humble ourselves in his majestic presence*”. Then, as we pray in the name, in the person of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Most Holy God gives grace to the humble sinner. The way is open for communion through Christ. The Lord Jesus is our high priest, tempted as we are yet without sin. “*Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need*” (Heb 4:16). God will arise and act on behalf of those who come to Him in Jesus name, requests are to be made to Him. He gives grace. We see this in Luke 11:9 "*So I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you*”.

Our greatest need is for the restoration of communion/fellowship in Christ hence, the petition in the Lord’s Prayer: “*Forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone who is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation*” (Luke 11:4). The Heidelberg Catechism also identifies physical needs in A118. As our Lord taught us to pray: “*Give us each day our daily bread*” (Luke 11:3). Grant us what we need to be able to continue to serve you Lord, to glorify you and to be used by you to promote your kingdom.

God does not need to be told our needs, but he desires that we ask Him. God is glorified when we humbly seek what we need from His Fatherly Hand and when we do so expectantly, which brings us to our second point.

1. **Expectant Prayer**

Jesus tells a strange sounding parable in verses 5-8 of Luke 11. The setting is likely a small 1st century village where bread would be baked daily. Once bread had been sold out, there would be no more left until the following day. Someone needing three loaves of bread for a friend who arrived from a journey, presumably later in the day after all the day’s baking had been sold, so he goes to another friend’s home at midnight. Hospitality was a central social obligation and expectation in that culture, much more so than it is today in New Zealand, even amongst Christians. It was assumed that hospitality was to be extended to strangers, but even more to those in closer relationship with one another.

There is an emphasis on friendship in this parable (Jesus uses the word “friend” four times). This parable portrays an absurd situation (and that’s the point). The unspoken question which this masterful story is designed to raise in the mind of the listener is: “*Can you imagine a friend who refuses to assist when requested to provide hospitality to the unexpected visit of a friend who needs some food for his friend?*” The response of the sleeping friend implies not that he has nothing to give, but that he would be inconvenienced! He would have to get up out of his bed at midnight! There was no electric light switch to flick on back then, it would mean lighting a lamp in the dark. The message of the parable is that the one asking will receive from his friendbecause of his persistence, but also because if his friend does not give what is asked he will bring dishonour on himself.

This parable presents the key point by ‘arguing from the lesser to the greater’. If that friend gave him the three loaves he needed; how much more will God respond when we expectantly ask Him in prayer for what we need. This parable parallels the Lord’s Prayer in verses 1-4.

 Prayer is grounded in a relationship with God. The first word of the Lord’s Prayer in Luke 11 is ‘Father’. God’s gracious giving brings honour to His name: “Hallowed be your name”. The village householder got up to meet his needy friend who was in need. Similarly, we meet God in prayer through relationship, however, although we are needy, we do not meetas equals.

God’s name is to be “hallowed”; set apart, holy, sacred. God is the sovereign ruler over His Kingdom "*Worthy are You, our Lord and our God, to receive glory and honour and power; for You created all things, and because of Your will they existed, and were created*" (Rev 4:11). "*For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways And My thoughts than your thoughts*” (Isa 55:9).

In Christian prayer, the servant meets His Master, the child meets His Heavenly Father. Our attitude of prayer must therefore be reverent, though expectant. Like that of Job who prayed "*I know that You can do all things, and that no purpose of Yours can be thwarted. Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge?' "Therefore I have declared that which I did not understand, Things too wonderful for me, which I did not know." 'Hear, now, and I will speak; I will ask You, and You instruct me*.' (Job 42:2-5).

We are to pray expectantly to One who has what we do not. He has all wisdom and knowledge. He has all power and authority. He has all grace and mercy. We have received, are receiving and will receive everything we have from Him. He has all that we need and is willing to give what we need to us. The major component of our prayer must therefore be thankfulness, which brings us to our third point:

1. **Thankful Prayer**

A fish not a snake and an egg not a scorpion although they may broadly look somewhat similar. In verses 11-13 Jesus argues from the lesser to the greater again. If a human father who gives good gifts to his son, how much more will our perfectly good Heavenly Father give to those who ask. Brothers and sisters, God has given us His Holy Spirit. The presence of the Spirit of God testifies to us *“Because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" (Gal 4:6)*

The prayer of the believer is where the love of the Father and the love of His thankful child meet. The prayer of the dependent child of God is a thankful prayer. God is glorified when we reverently thank Him. Our thanks gives glory to God because in that thanks we recognise Him for who He is and acknowledge His gracious gifts to us. The willing servant of the Lord gives thanks, for example: “*To You I shall offer a sacrifice of* ***thanksgiving****, and call upon the name of the LORD*” {Ps 116:17}; *“Rejoice always; pray without ceasing; in everything give* ***thanks****; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus" {1 Thes 5:16-18}.* Through humble, reverent, expectant prayer the Spirit testifies that God, our Heavenly Father loves us.

God wants us to ask him for the things which He wants to give us. His greatest gift to us in Christ is the Holy Spirit who helps us pray. When we pray with right motive, the Spirit guides our prayers and expresses our needs: “*And in the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words; and He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose*” (Romans 8:26-28).

Only the Spirit, who knows the will of God, can lead us to pray according to that will. As we pray in the Spirit, our will becomes aligned to our Lord’s. As those who have received the very good gift of God’s Spirit, we can have absolute confidence that God will perfectly answer our prayer. Giving us all that is best for us, all that we need, because He loves us. This is a great reason for thanksgiving. When we pray the Lord comforts the heart, relieves anxiety and restores joy and peace.

So, Brothers and Sisters in Christ, we need to pray! Pray humbly, expectantly and thankfully. Confident in the Lord Jesus that God the Father will hear, will arise, will give. Secure in communion with our Creator/Maker/Master. Forgiven in Christ as we boldly approach the Throne of Grace in Jesus name. Comforted that God knows all our needs before we even ask. Joyful that God will supply all our needs: spiritual and physical "*So I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks, receives; and he who seeks, finds; and to him who knocks, it will be opened”* (Luke 11:9).

Amen.