

As Alana just mentioned, my sermon this morning is going to centre upon one of the spiritual practices that is central to relationship with Jesus, namely, prayer. There are many things we might like to know about Jesus, but are not told. We don't know what Jesus looked like, how many brothers or sisters He had, or what His favourite food was, but one thing we do know is that Jesus was a person of prayer.

Jesus prayed alone, and in the company of others. Jesus prayed on mountain tops, in boats, at the Temple, and as He walked along the road—Jesus prayed everywhere He went. I think Jesus would have described prayer much like Clement of Alexandria did—prayer is keeping company with God. The moment we open our mouth to pray, we engage in a relational activity.

This morning we're going to look at Jesus' teaching on prayer, found in Luke 11; if you would, please take your Bible and turn with me to Luke 11:1-13. In this text Jesus describes the shape of prayer, and, the nature of the One to whom we pray. As I read our text, listen for the two primary images that Jesus uses in describing God.

“One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he finished, one of his disciples said to him, “Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples.” 2 He said to them, “When you pray, say: “Father, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come. 3 Give us each day our daily bread. 4 Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us. And lead us not into temptation.”

5 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; 6 a friend of mine on a journey has come to me, and I have no food to offer him.’ 7 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.’ 8 I tell you, even though he will not get up and give you the bread because of friendship, yet to preserve his good name he will surely get up and give you as much as you need.

9 “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. 10 For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened. 11 “Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? 12 Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? 13 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!”

In this text, we are given a window into prayer and into God's nature—the One to whom we pray is both Father and Friend. We're going to explore these two images as we go, so let's begin where Jesus does:

1. God as Father: “When you pray, say: Father”. When we pray, we are not addressing a foreign dignitary, a busy CEO, or a demanding tyrant—we are speaking with One who made us and loves us. The fact that prayer begins with “Father” tells us that prayer is not a task we engage in—we're cultivating relationship, we're keeping company with God.

Ephesians 1:4 tells us that before the creation of the world, the Father loved you—He chose in advance to adopt you into His family. Romans 8 tells us that we pray to a Father who is for us, not against us—He demonstrated this great love by sending Jesus to die in our place. When it comes to prayer, we don't tell God what we need

because He doesn't know, we tell Him as an expression of our trust and dependence. He is a good Father who knows what we need before we ask. George Macdonald writes, "This is and has been the Father's work from the beginning—to bring us into the home of his heart. This is our destiny."

Jesus' prayer continues—**Hallowed Be Your Name:** In its purest sense, to *hallow* means to make something holy, but clearly God is already holy. What then is Jesus inviting us to pray? R.T France writes, "it's a prayer for us, for the world, to recognize the honour that is due God and the will to give it."¹

Copernicus and Galileo stunned humanity by declaring that the earth was not the centre of the universe—we are no less shocked to discover the same truth about our own lives. Helmut Thielicke was right in saying that when we pray for God's name to be hallowed, we're ultimately praying against ourselves.² The great sin at the Tower of Babel was humanity's attempt to make a name for themselves, instead of *hallowing* the name of God.

Last week we looked at Jesus' statement that in order to find true life, we need to spend out lives on Him. When we pray for God's name to be hallowed, we are undoing a "me-centred-spirituality;" we give up staring in the mirror, and set our gaze upon Him.

Jesus continues His prayer, saying, "**Father, may Your Kingdom Come.**" Hebrews 2:8 reminds us that, "*At present we do not see*

everything subject to God's" rule. When we turn on the evening news we see a world in which violence and oppression abounds; we see the carnage of narcissism and greed all around us. We see a world in which disease ravages whole people groups—*at present we do not see everything subject to God's rule.*

In praying for God's kingdom to come, we are praying for God's Kingship to be universally recognized and embraced—we are praying, *God, come and rule without rival!* But closer to home, this prayer declares our own personal allegiance—*God, You are my King; there is no other—my life is yours to command.*

When we pray for broken bodies to be healed, we are praying for God's kingdom to come. When we pray for reconciliation in marriage, friendship, and family, we are praying for God's kingdom to come. When we pray for an end to violence, oppression, and greed, we are praying for God's rule to be established upon the earth.

Ultimately, when we pray for God's kingdom to come, we're asking for the world to be put to rights—we're asking God to restore everything that has been broken.

When we pray, **Give us each day our daily bread**, we confess our dependence on God. Take note first, that we pray for daily bread, not for yearly bread—this daily dependence keeps us grounded in humility, and, connected the Source who supplies what we need. Second, take note that we are praying for bread. Here in the first

¹ R.T. France, *New International Commentary on the New Testament: Matthew*, 246.

² Helmut Thielicke, *Our Father In Heaven*, 45.

world, praying for bread can easily morph into praying for iPhones, a good parking spot, a bigger salary, better house, or a better spouse. Bread, on the other hand, is something we need to live. *Father you are the One who provides; You know what we need to live.*

Praying for our daily “bread” encompasses more than just food—it’s a prayer for our needs to be met. We pray for food, for shelter, for work, and for our relationships—for who among us can live without giving and receiving love? We pray for daily bread when we pray for protection, for the reconciliation of broken relationship, or healing for our bodies.

illus: A few years ago, I woke up one Saturday morning and I knew something was wrong. The H1N1 virus had been making it’s way through Vancouver and I became violently ill—I staggered to the bathroom, my stomach heaving, and moments later I collapsed to the floor, unconscious. When I awoke, I was so weak, Naomi had to lift me up and carry me to bed—I lay, hardly able to lift my head. I was supposed to preach the next morning and my wife called Pastor Keith to let him know he was “on”.

My kids were very concerned when they heard I was sick—they wanted to see me, but my wife didn’t want to expose them. My son was so insistent that he see me that Naomi allowed him to stand in the doorway to our bedroom. Before he left I asked him to pray for me—He prayed for daily bread. *Jesus, my dad is feeling really sick, can you please heal him? Amen.* Within 15 minutes, my strength came back and the nausea went away—the next day I was standing here preaching.

Notice too that we do not pray for my bread, or my forgiveness; we pray for our bread, our forgiveness—this one word—*our*—changes the way we pray. Together we share a common Father; together we form the family of God. We pray for our needs but always with an eye and an ear open to our brothers and sisters around us—what do they need?

When we pray for **forgiveness**, we are praying for something essential to our survival. Eugene Peterson writes, “We perish bodily if we have no bread; we perish relationally if we have no forgiveness.”³

Our greatest debt is the debt we owe to God. Our greatest need is the need for forgiveness. When we speak of debt, we speak of something we owe, something we are obligated to pay. When we pray, *Father forgive our debts*, we recognize that we have not given God what He is due. As creatures made in His image, we owe to God the debt of love, worship, and obedience.

Every time we try to make a name for ourselves—instead of hallowing His Name; every time we live for self—instead of living for Him; we accumulate a debt before God. When we pray, *Father forgive our debts*, we confess that our lives have missed the mark of His intended purpose. Forgiveness comes at great cost; Jesus died on the cross, bearing our sin, that we might be reconciled to God.

Jesus’ prayer reminds us that forgiveness is needed on both the vertical and horizontal plane—*forgive us, as we forgive others*. We

³ Eugene Peterson, *Jesus and Prayer Lectures*, mp3 #G.

perish bodily if we have no bread, we perish relationally when we do not receive, and offer, forgiveness.

Finally, Jesus tells us, when we pray, say, “Father, **lead us not into temptation**”. There is an unseen battle going on around us. Jesus reminds us in John 10 that Satan is both God’s enemy and ours—his purpose is to steal, kill, and destroy us. There is also an unseen battle going on within us.

The word translated “temptation,” can have two different meanings; it can mean either “test” or “temptation”. Darrell Johnson writes, “A test is something meant to prove a person’s character and, in the process, improve it. A temptation is meant to...bring a person down in some way.”⁴

James 1:13-14 reminds us that, “*God is never tempted to do wrong, and he never tempts anyone else. Temptation comes from our own desires, which entice us and drag us away.*” Jesus is teaching us to pray for protection in the midst of testing, lest the test be twisted into temptation.

This prayer for deliverance involves the entire Trinity. As we pray, the Son represents us, the Holy Spirit empowers us to stand, and the Father shelters us—He is a strong tower in every storm. My dear people, the Christian life is a supernatural life—a life that cannot be lived on human strength and ability. We need the power of God to stand during the time of testing.

2. If the first image Jesus uses is that of God as Father, the second

image speaks of **God as Friend**.

There is a longing in every heart for friendship—someone to enjoy spending time with; one who will listen and speak; one who is trustworthy and loyal. Proverbs 17:17 says, “*A friend loves at all times;*” a friend is someone who sticks with us, even when we’re at our worst. **I wonder, how often do we think about God in terms of friendship?** I want to return to this idea of God as Friend, but first, there are a few cultural matters to explain in order to understand Jesus’ parable in vs. 5-8.

His parable presupposes the kind of home that would have been common in 1st century Palestine—Jesus speaks of a one room house. At night the sleeping mats were unrolled, and the entire family would lay down beside each other: father, mother, and children. If someone were to stand outside the door and call in, the entire family would be woken; if the father got up, he would have to step over his family members on route to the door.

But more importantly, Jesus’ parable draws upon an expectation that is lost in translation from their culture to ours. In Jesus’ day, the duty to provide for a guest was tied to one’s own honour. If a guest showed up, whether they were expected or not, known or not, liked or not, had absolutely no bearing on whether they were offered hospitality. If an **enemy** showed up at someone’s door in need of hospitality—it was one’s duty to serve them a meal, and if necessary, provide them with a place to sleep—this was a matter of honour.

⁴ Darrell Johnson, *Fifty-Seven Words That Change The World*, 92.

illus: One scholar writes, “The host *must* serve his guest and the guest *must* eat.”⁵ One of my former professors, Gordon Smith, tells the story of encountering this kind of hospitality every time he travels to the Middle East. On numerous occasions he has travelled to there to lecture, and when he does, he stays with a husband and wife who were former students—this couple were born in the Middle East and have returned to live and work in pastoral ministry.

Usually the husband picks up Gordon from the airport, and as soon he greets Gordon, he will typically ask, “Have you had something to eat?” The host is always looking to serve his/her guest. If Gordon hasn’t eaten, they will stop to grab a bite, if he has already eaten they leave the airport and head back to the couple’s home. Upon entering the house, after receiving a warm greeting from the wife, she will inevitably ask, “Have you had something to eat?”

At this point, every time, Gordon finds himself caught between a rock and a hard place. If he says “no, we didn’t stop to eat,” she will chastise her husband for not being an attentive host, but if he tells her that they did stop to eat, she will chastise them because she already has a meal waiting for them.

Gordon says that it doesn’t matter what time he arrives, day or night, after an initial greeting, they will eat together. Whether he is hungry or not doesn’t have any bearing on the matter—as soon as he enters their home, they sit down to share a meal. In many respects, hunger is a secondary issue. A shared meal does more than simply fill

stomachs, meals connect people—throughout history, in nearly every culture, eating together is a powerful expression of welcome and friendship. Unless we know this truth, we miss the point of Jesus’ parable.

But there is another element in Jesus’ parable that tends to trip us up, namely, a sense of communal responsibility. Did you notice who’s at the door calling in to the family? It’s not a stranger requesting hospitality, it’s the neighbour. Imagine that your neighbour wakes up your family at midnight, saying, “*I’ve just had an unexpected guest arrive from out of town and I have nothing to serve them; can you get up and find some bread and soup so that I can serve them a meal?*” Such a thing wouldn’t happen in our culture and if it did, we would be likely to respond, “*If you don’t have enough food to serve your guest, that’s your problem!*”

One scholar writes, “The crucial element in the initial portion of the parable is that the guest is the guest of the *community*, not just of the individual. . . In going to his neighbour, the host is asking the sleeper to fulfill his duty to the guest of the village. As long as the request is modest enough, refusal is unthinkable.”⁶ Again, it’s a matter of honour.

Jesus’ parable exposes an individualism that runs contrary to 1st century culture, and, to the gospel itself. In our culture we orient around the word “me”—my needs, my desires, my time, my rights; but in orienting around Jesus, we are led from “me” to “we”. Because

⁵ Kenneth E. Bailey, *Poet and Peasant and Through Peasant Eyes: A Literary-Cultural Approach to the Parables in Luke*, 122.

⁶ Bailey, 122-123.

of Jesus, we—who were once the enemies of God—have now been invited to His table. Jesus is the Host, and we are invited guests. We sit at His table, not primarily as individuals, but as members of His extended family.

I wonder, *what would it look like to shift from “me” to “we”*? How would this transform the way I look at my time, my rights, or my possessions? Where might God be asking you—where might God be asking our community—to move from “me” to “we”?

At this time I want to return to the question at hand: *what does this parable teach us about God and prayer?*

First, we learn something about God’s own nature—when we pray, we engage in conversation with a Friend. When we wake our neighbour at midnight, asking for food to serve our guest, everything is stacked against us. It’s late, his family is asleep, and the door is bolted shut. The point that Jesus is making is that though everything is stacked against you, yet because of his integrity—in order to preserve his own honour, and the honour of the village—your neighbour will get up and give you more than you asked for.

And if your neighbour will do you this kindness, how much more will God? We pray to a God who is both Father and Friend—He will answer you, not merely to preserve His honour, but because He loves you with an everlasting love.⁷ Exodus 34:6-7 says, *“The Lord [is]... compassionate and gracious...slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin.”*

Second, this parable reminds us that the trustworthiness of God’s nature, allows us to pray with joy and hope. If we can be confident that a neighbour will meet our needs—even when he might not want to—how much more can we rest assured that God our Friend will hear our request and answer according His provision and purpose.

After this parable, Jesus concludes His teaching on prayer with a call to perseverance and one final reminder of God’s true nature. In vs. 9 we read, *“Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. 10 For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.”*

I said last week that the muscle of perseverance might be the most under-exercised muscle in Western culture, but here Jesus invites us to persevere in our praying. The intent of His words are, *“Keep asking, keep seeking, keep knocking.”*

It’s not a matter of persevering in prayer so that God knows we’re serious, nor do we persevere in prayer in order to wear God down and get what we want. Instead, by persevering in prayer, we come to know both God and ourselves. That is, we begin by offering our request, but as we continue to pray, we find we are offering ourselves—*not my will but yours be done*. While God may grant our request as we have asked, what we can be sure of is that God will give more than we ask, for He will give us the gift of Himself.

“[If] your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then...know how to

⁷ Bailey, 133.

give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"

When we pray, we speak with both Father and Friend. What is it that you are speaking with Him about these days? What needs are you bringing before God? What hurts or longings rest heavy upon you? Prayer is not primarily a task we engage in—we're cultivating relationship, we're keeping company with God. Let me encourage you to make this practice of prayer central to your life with Jesus.

Pray

Capital Projects

I've purposely concluded our service earlier than usual, because I want to take some the next 10-15 minutes to speak with you about a conversation that we've been having as a Board and Staff.

I said last Sunday that in recent weeks I've felt a new sense of urgency in my praying. The phrase that keeps coming to mind is, "*Now is the time.*" *Now is the time* to run after Jesus with courage and perseverance. *Now is the time* for God to shake us from familiar habits and routines—to awaken us to His Word and His Presence in new ways.

Ecclesiastes 3 says, "There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens... a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance... a time to search and a time to give up... **a time to tear down and a time to build**".

I believe that now is the time to build. In addition to our ongoing work to introduce people to Jesus, and mentor them in the life of discipleship, our Board and Staff sense that there are two capital projects that will allow us to expand ministry in our church and to the North Shore.

I've asked one of our Cap University students—Christian—to put together a video that outlines the projects that our Board of Elders has recently approved. Let me invite you to turn your attention to the video screen.

Video

At this time I'd like to invite our ushers to come and hand out a brochure that outlines these two capital projects in some more detail. You can also find this brochure and a FAQ page when you go to our web page: nsac.bc.ca, click on the tab "**Donate Online**," and then click on the heading "**Expanding Our Reach**". At the bottom of the page you will find the brochure, a donation card, along with a **Frequently Asked Questions** page.

After seeing the video, naturally you will have some questions about cost, timing, and the sequencing of these projects. What I'm going to do is spend a few minutes filling in the picture, and then I want to conclude by talking about the vision behind the projects. Let me begin with the cost.

Cost: The estimated cost of the two projects is between \$380k and \$400k. In advance of this morning, I've already sat down with our Board, Staff, and a select few congregants, asking them to consider a financial commitment to these projects over and above their regular

giving. To date we have received both cash and pledges in the amount of \$127,000—this leaves us with \$273,000 left to raise.

Where are we at in the process? We have retained the service of an architect, who has created the conceptual drawings that you have seen this morning. And with the help of a retired contractor in our church, we are in the process of interviewing several general contractors to manage the project.

Our architect has met with the City of North Vancouver and they've told us that while we do need building permits, we don't need to apply for a development permit. What that means is that our projects don't need to be submitted for City Council approval or neighbourhood approval—this simplifies both the process and the timeline significantly.

Sequencing: You may be wondering, will both projects proceed at the same time, or, will one begin before the other? This past Fall we hired a building envelope engineer to inspect our exterior walls and roof, and they discovered some damage that needs repair this Spring. We have money in hand for this repair and our architect has advised us that it would be most cost effective to coordinate the exterior repair along with the construction of the upper room. We hope to renovate the kitchen when it is not being heavily used by the ministries of our church.

Timing—what is your timeline for beginning construction? Our Board would like to begin construction once the majority of the money has been pledged (or donated). That being said, our desire would be to begin the exterior repair and construction of the upper

room in late Spring, with the possibility of renovating the kitchen after SummerJam and Flo Soccer Camp—late July, and into August.

If I may, I want to take a few moments to answer the most important question—the “**vision**” question. Why these projects? Why now?

Growing a building isn't our vision, growing people is, but we recognize that this building is a vehicle for our vision, and, that these two projects will help to expand our ministry reach.

Our building is in constant use; every night of the week children, students, and adults gather. But for some time now, there are more requests for ministry space than we are able to facilitate. As you saw in the video, an upper room, constructed above the foyer, will create a mid-sized space for up to 60 people. This room would immediately impact our Children's, Preteen, Youth, and Women's ministries. This room will also create space for our sister church—the Iranian Alliance Church—as they continue to reach out to Iranians on the North Shore.

A kitchen is one of the most important and strategic rooms in a house. As I said earlier in my sermon, a shared meal does more than simply fill stomachs, meals connect people—throughout history, in nearly every culture, eating together is a powerful expression of welcome and friendship.

Our ability to provide food for community gatherings is severely limited by our present kitchen. We want to welcome guests who attend weddings, funerals, and community events to enjoy a meal, and experience a sense of belonging but we lack the required “Food Safe” designation to serve outside guests. We also lack the necessary

equipment to make our kitchen functional in preparing, serving, and cleaning up meals for large groups of people.

A renovated kitchen will provide congregants and guests new opportunities to gather. It would allow us to prepare occasional meals for ministries like Coffee Time, and to explore the possibility of a “community kitchen” ministry.

Over the last few weeks, we’ve spoken about other opportunities that God has put before us—even as we talk about these capital projects, we also sense God’s call to press forward with a community house that will provide safe, affordable, housing for some of our most vulnerable congregants. Further, we have a volunteer team in place that is leading us towards sponsoring a refugee family. I believe that God is calling us to expand our reach in a number of different directions, and I believe that the time is now.

We have one of the most strategic locations of any church building on the North Shore—just off the highway, and one block east of the Lonsdale corridor. As I said in the video, we believe that God chose our present location so that we could live out His mission in the centre of the marketplace.

Would you do something for me this week? Take the brochure you received home—read it through, and then leave it some place visible where it will remind you to pray about what part you might play in contributing to these projects. Your Board, the Staff, and a few others have already pledged to give over and above their regular financial giving—at the end of February, you will have an opportunity to hand in a pledge card of your own.

I suspect you may have questions that I haven’t answered today, and so, I and a few others will be hosting Q&A meetings after the morning services on Sunday, February 21st and 28th—everyone is welcome to attend. You can also feel free to call or email Mardi or myself in the coming weeks.

For nearly 8 years now, I’ve been your Lead Pastor, and it’s been privilege to serve along side a host of fun, committed, gifted, loving people. I love this church, and I believe God has so much good in store for us. Let’s continue to look to Him and listen to Him in the months ahead.

Benediction