

**Home Church Study Guide—April 18, 2010**  
**A Praying Heart (Luke 11)**

What is there to say about the Lord's prayer that has not already been said? Luke's version is shorter than Matthew's, but the basic structure is the same. It is a very simple prayer. It begins with an acknowledgement of the holy nature of God's name. Secondly, Jesus calls for the arrival of God's kingdom. God's kingdom is where His will is done. It certainly is appropriate for us to continue to pray that His kingdom come in ever increasing measures—not only in all the world but specifically in our own hearts! Next Jesus acknowledges His dependence on God for the basic necessities of life. "Give us this day our daily bread" recognizes it is God who sustains life. Clearly we need to recover this thought. We often live as "practical atheists." Though we would never deny the providence of God, we do not think of him as the constant provider for all our needs. Not only do we have a continual need for physical provisions from God, we also have a constant need of forgiveness. In Luke's account, it sounds as if Jesus is suggesting that we merit this forgiveness because we forgive those who sin against us. It is more likely that Jesus is acknowledging the practical lesson learned from God's amazing forgiveness. Because we are forgiven, we forgive. We plead to God for forgiveness and in turn forgive those indebted to us. Jesus' final petition is asking God to not bring us into temptation or trial. This is again an acknowledgement of the frailty of the flesh. It is a request for God to be gentle with us in life. When the entire prayer is considered, it clearly expresses an attitude of absolute dependence on God. It is also amazingly brief. The length of our prayers is sometimes an indication of how much we have of which to inform God. Rather than prayers of humble submission and acknowledged need, we tend to pray long prayers of petition. What can we learn from Jesus' short prayer? We need to begin every day with an acknowledgement of our total dependence on God. Jesus' model prayer is a wonderful way to do this—praise God's holy name, ask for His will to be done in your life as it unfolds that day, acknowledge your dependence on Him by asking Him to provide your basic needs, express your desire to be forgiving as you live in his forgiveness, and then ask a prayer of gentle handling, because we are indeed weak. I dare say that if everyone would commit to praying this simple prayer in a meaningful way every day, it would have a tremendous impact on the life of the church.

"Ask, and it will be given; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened!" God is more reliable than any man or any friend. Jesus is calling us to a radical faith in a God who invites us to walk with Him. And this is a God who will give us exactly what we need! As Jesus continues to tell of the extravagant love of God, He uses an absurd story. If we, who are "evil" will give our children what they need, how much more will God do this? Prayer never goes unanswered. However, God will not give us what is not best for us or for His over-arching purposes in our lives. But if we are hungry and ask for food, God is not capricious. Can you imagine a father giving his hungry son a poisonous scorpion? How absurd! God is infinitely more loving than any father— be assured He will give us just what we need!

There is one final teaching in this story on prayer, and it may be the most important. If earthly fathers provide what their children need in order to be properly nourished, how much more will the Father in heaven give us exactly what we need most—the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit has been a major player in the gospel of Luke. Not only that, but the Holy Spirit will also be a major character in the dynamic story of the church as Luke tells it in Acts. Unfortunately, because we have tended to have a weak understanding of and even a fearful attitude toward the Holy Spirit, we have not acknowledged the central role He must play in our participation in the redemptive story of God. The greatest gift of the kingdom of God, of a life surrendered to God's purposes and will, is the gift of the Holy Spirit. Of course, we cannot receive it without the cleansing received from the blood of Jesus. I am not suggesting the Holy Spirit is more important than the Father or the Son. However, in the everyday life of the believer in Jesus Christ, Jesus is here saying that God gives us that which we need most— His Holy Spirit. It is He who guides us to the holy life for which we were originally created.

The point of Luke's gospel is that we can now live the life for which we were created! God sent His Son as the perfect embodiment of the obedient life. He receives the Holy Spirit at baptism, who since then, has clearly led Jesus every step of His life. Jesus remains submitted to the will of the Holy Spirit by staying in constant contact with His Father through prayer. It is a prayer of total submission to the Father. And now, Jesus, commenting on prayer and its purpose, affirms that the greatest gift of the Father is given in the humble request of the obedient heart— the Holy Spirit! The Holy Spirit waits to enter the surrendered heart. He will then guide us to the life of praising God for which we were created.

**"So What" for Home Church discussion:**

1. How necessary is prayer in your daily lives? What can we do to encourage one another to have a deeper dependency on God that will lead to meaningful and purposeful prayer?
2. Do we believe God will give that for which we ask? Why or why not?
3. If God's ultimate gift to his children in His Holy Spirit— how does that gift influence our daily lives?