Today, I want to share the most special truth about prayer that I have personally learned. I have shared this message with you before but as we memorized in II Peter “I will always remind you of these things, even though you know them and are firmly established in the truth you now have”! I would repeat this every year if I could, because it encourages me personally so much. This simple truth about prayer has liberated me to pray honestly. It has helped me pray confidently. It has kept me from being deceived by enticing but false claims about prayer. It makes prayer such a privilege instead of a burden, because it reflects the character of the awesome God we serve, rather than depending on any ability I might have. Most of all, I have seen amazing answers which could only have come directly from God Himself because I am not that great a prayer – at best I’d give myself a “C+” for praying. But I bring my requests to the One who created and sustains the entire Universe! Believe me, He has more resources than any of us can imagine!

PROPOSITION: True followers of Jesus Christ have the awesome privilege to be able to request things of Almighty God as a child makes requests of his/her beloved father.

1. The privilege of prayer

   **Prayer is a privilege** – it is a great privilege. Like any privilege we can make use of it in significant ways or we can ignore it or corrupt it AND miss the great blessings.

   A. Address God as Father – that’s staggering

      Let’s start in **Luke 11:1 READ**. The scene is a familiar one. The disciples feel inadequate when it comes to prayer. *Isn’t that how we feel at times? (How many feel they pray enough? – Long enough? Persistent enough? We have enough right words like thanksgiving & praise?, have enough others praying for us? These are ALL asking the WRONG question and have the WRONG perspective – prayer is not about *how much* but it is about *relationship*). The disciples had just heard Jesus pray, and they knew it is different than their prayers. They also remembered the confidence in prayer John the Baptist’s disciples had. Rather than hide behind their sinful pride or embarrassment – one of the twelve humbly comes forward and said, “Lord teach us to pray.” Like the disciples, we don’t have it together yet. There is much for us to learn here so we may pray more effectively and confidently.

      **How do we do that?** Jesus starts that answer in V 2 – “When you pray, say: Father…” Wow – did you hear that? At this point a collective gasp would have gone through the group. “Did you hear what Jesus just said, He wants us to call God – Father.” This would have taken their breath away – their faces would have shown the look of surprise, shock, and amazement. Everything else Jesus said after that would have been influenced by this single phrase – “when you pray say FATHER.”
No one at that time called God, Father. God was Almighty and majestic. He was YWHW or Jehovah – a name so majestic they did not say it out loud. God is called “Father” just a few times in the OT – and that is only as Father over the whole nation of Israel. Now Jesus was telling them to PERSONALLY refer to God as Father when they prayed. This is simply staggering. No one did that as this time. No wonder Jesus’ prayers were different! He prayed as a child to the Father.

Back in the 1960’s a Muslim man committed himself to follow Jesus – that immediately put his life in danger – he could not openly share his faith because of the threats & persecution. So he wrote an anonymous booklet to share his testimony of coming to faith in Jesus Christ. Do you know what he entitled that booklet? What title could possibly capture this most incredible transformation in his life which he was willing to die for? He entitled that testimony booklet, “I dared to call Him Father.” “I dared to call the omnipotent, Almighty, Awesome & Creator of the Universe, Father.” Jesus makes that possible. Because Jesus died on the cross as a sacrifice for our sins and bodily rose from the dead, those who repent of their sins and trust Jesus alone as their Savior and Lord become adopted into the family of God and receive the awesome privilege of being able to call God, “Father.” Every believer gets to come to Almighty God as a child comes to a beloved father.

B. Trust God as Father

It is a privilege to address God as Father. But you may say, “You don’t know my father – he doesn’t care, he doesn’t listen, he doesn’t help and he usually doesn’t want me around.” Jesus doesn’t want us to miss this great privilege so he uses a series of common happenings and analogies in v 5-13 to show how the ordinary follower of Jesus can have confidence in their prayers to the Father.

1) God is willing & able (it’s no bother) Luke 11:5-8

For example, every earthly dad gets grumpy at some time and doesn’t want to be interrupted with another problem – but that’s not our heavenly Father. So in v 5-8 Jesus tells the story of a friend, who is normally helpful, but when woken up at midnight is reluctant to help. He eventually does help because of the person’s persistence. If this is how an earthly friend, or dad, answers, imagine God’s response – since God is never tired or grumpy. That phrase at the beginning of v 5 “Then Jesus said to them” confirms Jesus is still answering their question on how to pray. Please understand, you and I can’t “bother” God with your requests; it is not an imposition; there is no bad time to ask. We can freely come to our Heavenly Father at any time and as often as we want. Do you personally feel that freedom? This is our privilege as dedicated followers of the Lord Jesus even though we are imperfect.

2) We can come boldly with our requests Luke 11:9-10
God the Father is different from our earthly fathers. So Jesus also encourages us to come boldly to our heavenly Father with our requests. **READ v 9-10.** Notice the boldness! Notice the honest asking our heart’s desire – no beating around the bush!

3) God answers in grace

Finally, Jesus ties all of His teaching on prayer together reminding us that prayer is **an interaction** between a Father and His child. READ **v 11-13.** Jesus points out that even human dads, who are all imperfect, don’t maliciously give harmful things to the positive, genuine requests of their children. *(Side note: Jesus never sugar-coated our behavior as he calls all of us “evil” in comparison to the perfection of God the Father – that’s because we all sin and fall short of the glory of God and need a Savior).* Now if human dads know how to give good gifts to their children, imagine what God the Father will do. If you are asking for something, God is NOT going to harm you with the answer – He is going to hear your deepest desires & answer them in a way that brings Glory to God, advances Jesus’ work on this earth and genuinely benefits you for the long run. We don’t deserve that; **God answers us in His powerful grace.** His answers are a gift, which is why He regularly encourages us to give thanks! **God answers our prayers as a Father to a child.**

Or picture this: if an unknown kid and your own child come to your door at different times and ask for the same thing, who are you more likely to** ask?** Your own child – because of the relationship! Prayer is a special privilege we’ve been given because of our personal relationship with Jesus – **we pray as a child to the Father.**

C. Reject selfish/elitist prayer approaches

**Luke 11:2-4**

Does a child DEMAND or COMMAND a parent to do something for them? They can, but a wise parent WON’T answer that request for the good of the child. A parent isn’t a servant – neither is God our butler, employee or servant. Didn’t you find Jesus’ illustration of what God gives us in **v 13** interesting? The illustrations have been talking about people who had been asking for earthly things – fish, bread and eggs – yet the highest answer offered is spiritual – a greater effect of the Holy Spirit in our lives. If we want greater freedom, confidence and power in our prayers you need TO REJECT current teachings that turn prayer into a selfish expression of our current wants.

1) Name it and claim it (or “blab it and grab it”)

One of those is the **“name it and claim it,”** maybe we could call it the **“blab it and grab it”.** “I claim a raise at work. In the name of Jesus, I claim a new car and no health problems because my Father is God who owns everything.” This is often associated with the word of faith movement. That is not faith - it's arrogance.

2) God wants you prosperous

Another is called the **prosperity gospel.** Here you are told to pray to take hold of your privilege to be wealthy now – after all doesn’t our Father own everything!
Why won’t He give that wealth with His children so they can be happy? Didn’t God the Father send Jesus to became poor to make us rich. How backwards Biblically: Self-indulgence takes the place of self-control; getting takes the place of giving; being served takes the place of serving. It is all backwards & harmful.

3) You would be healed if you had enough faith
Then there are those that claim you would be physically healed now if you just had enough faith. What father sees his child in pain, doesn’t try to get rid of it. So if you are NOT HEALED now it is because you don’t have enough faith or you aren’t praying right. What an awful burden to put on the sick.

4) You haven’t prayed enough; asked enough people to pray, magic words, etc.
There are many other claims that we need to be totally freed from – You haven’t prayed enough; you haven’t asked enough people to pray, you haven’t said the right words. Too many see prayer as a performance or as a way to manipulate God. Please reject these selfish and elitist prayer approaches. Free yourself to pray as a child to the Father.

Jesus’ actual prayer in v 2-4 clearly contradicts these selfish prayer approaches. There is only one physical thing asked for and that is enough food just for today. (Side note: some of you may have noticed these words are different but similar to the Lord’s Prayer many of us memorized when we were young. That actually comes from the book of Matthew. Jesus used different words for this base prayer when He taught people how to pray – so the words themselves aren’t magic. It’s the approach and the general content that is most important.)

• We’re always coming as a child to the Father, they all start “Father”
• We look up to our Father – “hallowed be your name.” – wow you are so great God, I honor you.
• We want to do things most important to our Dad: “your kingdom come” – You have the big picture so I want to join You in Your work God.
• We are not afraid to ask for our immediate needs: “give us each day our daily bread” – God I need your help today with getting a job, finishing school work, being patient with family or knowing how to overcome problems.
• We want our relationship with God to get stronger: “forgive us our sins” – Lord I’ve messed up, I need your cleansing and your help to live different.
• We treat others as we want our Dad to treat us: “for we also forgive everyone who sins against us.”
• And we want to keep our dad’s rules and boundaries: “and lead us not into temptation” – Lord warn me when I flirt with sin, ignore boundaries, or focus on myself.

This is the context of “ask and it will be given.” The false teachings on prayer today ignore this context. Our prayers are brought to a Heavenly Father who knows far more than we do – He answers for what is best for the long run.
2. How to pray - as a child to the Father

So Jesus teaches us that we have this incredible privilege to pray as a child to a beloved Father. But practically how do we do that? I believe that the answer becomes very clear when we compare a childish request & response with a child-like request & response. Are our prayers and responses Childish or Child-like?

A. Childish Prayers – self focus

What is a childish request? I want that toy – I want that coloring book – I want to stay overnight at my friends. I don’t want to go to bed – I don’t want to eat spinach – I don’t want to clean up – I don’t want you telling me what to do. Summary? I want this and if you don’t do it, then you don’t love me. Childish behavior sees the parent as someone to manipulate to get what they want. And if they don’t get what they want they are going to get mad, stop talking and/or throw a temper-tantrum.

Unfortunately, we approach God in this way much too often. We already have the answer to our request figured out. We see God like Aladdin & his lamp. By rubbing the lamp, a genie came out and said, “what is your wish my master?” Childish prayers are focused on self alone and they lead to discouragement, disillusionment and disappointment.

- I prayed for a husband and I have no husband – ask and it will be given to you – God out the window.
- I prayed to keep my son safe in the war; he died – I hate God.
- I prayed for God to take away a sinful feeling and he didn’t – therefore even though the Bible says it is wrong I’m going to do it.
- I prayed for a “normal” child and my son was born with deformed hands – God is not worthy of my praise.

We can tell a childish prayer by our reaction when we don’t get what we already planned for God to do. We throw a temper tantrum. We get mad at God, we say He isn’t fair. Or we lash out at church leaders & other Christians saying they aren’t doing enough. Or we seek out false teachings that tell us what we want to hear. Childishness is demanding that God does what WE want. As JAMES 4:2-3 reminds us, “You do not have because you do not ask (that is you don’t pray at all). When you ask (that is when you do pray), you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.”

Have you gotten upset at God lately? – it’s a sign of a childish attitude, not a child-like one. Have you rationalized why the plain words of the Bible don’t apply to you or re-interpreted them so you could do what you want? That’s a sign of a childish attitude, not a child-like one. Now God is not going to instantly zap you – He graciously allows us to get these selfish attitudes out in the open. God already knows what we are thinking. But neither will your prayers be answered or long term fulfillment come – God will not be manipulated. Life is very empty when we have a childish attitude.
B. Childlikeness – trust

Heb 5:7-8

So what attitude should we have? We want to be like a child to the Father – childlike, not childish. We want to pray child-like prayers. Childishness manipulates, but childlikeness trusts. A childlike attitude trusts that the Father knows best. The words aren’t important – the attitude and relationship is. A childlike attitude knows the Father has a bigger plan that will always bring great good. A childlike attitude is quick to obey. And a childlike attitude knows the Father deeply cares for them.

Thinking of our illustration of Aladdin and the lamp, it is we who should say “Yes Dad, what is your wish. I want to do it – and do it Your way and in Your timing.”

What’s fascinating is that child-like requests can be in the very same areas as childish requests. Can we pray for healing, a better job, a spouse, friends at school, keeping our kids safe, or more resources? Sure we can! And we can do that freely! The difference is in our attitude and response. Child-like requests share our heart and feelings, but they don’t tell God how to answer them – they trust God’s answer is good even though it is very different from what they expected. Paul prayed for healing of a major problem – “his thorn in the flesh.” The answer was very different than Paul’s preferred future but he trusted God’s bigger plan and it released Paul to greater joy in life, greater effectiveness in ministry, and greater appreciation of the grace of God, even though that infirmity wasn’t taken away.

This is incredibly freeing and super powerful. Childlikeness is unafraid to ask anything of their powerful, loving Father. Young kids just ask whatever is on their heart. They are open, honest, & respectful – but there are no limits to what they ask! But they do it trusting their parents know more than they do. They really trust the parents can do anything AND won’t harm them. So they are quite uninhibited in their requests. When my girls were little and the weather bad, we would often go up to the mall for our special Father/daughter time we did after every meal to give my wife some peace and quiet. They would inevitably ask me for a quarter to go on those little rides. I would always answer “no.” Did that stop them from asking? No! (There were no manipulative fits). One time I said “yes” & gave each of them a quarter. Do you know what the first question each asked when they got off the ride – remember I have NEVER done this before – “Dad can we have another quarter?” That is the request of a child to the Father – it is uninhibited.

Childlikeness doesn’t question the probabilities or try to find the best time to ask to get something. This is the freedom God wants us to pray in! Let’s get rid of our adulthood for analyzing and our teenness of being concerned about what others will think. Isn’t this how Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane when He requested that He not go through with the crucifixion? Intellectually that makes no sense – this had been decided from the foundation of the world, Jesus called his own follower ‘satan’ for suggesting it earlier. The Lord taught this was the prime reason He came to earth and He predicted to his opponents that it would surely happen. But when
humanly overcome with the magnitude of upcoming suffering, Jesus freely asks His Father to come up with another way to take care of sin — one that didn’t require pain! Jesus’ prayer was childlike not childish because He was fully ready to accept the Father’s answer — “not My will, but Your will be done.” And amazingly the book of Hebrews tells us this exchange was an incredible picture of faith and brought greater positives into Jesus’ life. Jesus asked for what we would be hesitant to ask, but He did it as a child to the loving Father.

Now this doesn’t mean we can’t ask “why” after our first request — Paul probably did in his request to be healed because by the third time Paul intensely asked, he shares a perspective God gave him. But we ask the “why” questions respectfully and willing to receive God’s answer. God alone knows what is best for us.

III. Final application(s)

This simple teaching freed me up in prayer incredibly.

- I don’t worry about the words anymore, how I say something or what I may have forgotten. I straightforwardly share my heart and thoughts with God in prayer. A Dad knows even more than the child’s actual request.
- Whenever I feel burdened, anxious or overwhelmed — I simply share that and ask for God’s help. I don’t worry if I have first said enough thanks or praise.
- If someone asks for prayer for healing, I just pray for it! As a child to the Father I am freed to pray for total & complete healing because I know God can do anything. Then I let God decide how He will answer. I don’t try to figure out if it is God’s will and I don’t say “if it is your will” because everything I pray is a real request of a real person who alone gets to choose how they will answer. That is what it means to pray to the Father in Jesus’ name.
- I don’t worry “if I have enough faith” — I have complete confidence my Dad heard me and a mustard seed of faith is really, really small but powerful.
- When there doesn’t seem to be an answer or it is different than I might like, I take extra time to see what God is teaching me because I trust those will be the most special answers of all — like Jesus in Gethsemane.
- I readily cry out for more help when I’m overwhelmed, especially when God’s answers were different than I might have wanted.
- I freely ask for really big things — I don’t have to see how they are possible. Just check out our visionary prayer request sheet in the lobby tract rack.
- Then I challenge myself when I show signs of childishness in my thoughts or responses. I repent. And I spend more time in thanks and praise.

Thirty plus years ago this simply truth revolutionized my prayer life. May this simple truth encourage you in your spiritual life: we pray as a child to the Father — in a childlike way, not a childish one — and God powerfully answers in a way that changes our lives and the world!