

Sermon
Release...
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Bacon Memorial Presbyterian Church
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Francois Bovon once observed that “*The Lord’s Prayer belongs to us and yet escapes us.*” This short but profound reflection captures something deeply true: we recite these words often, but they challenge us each time we speak them. In Luke 11, as Jesus walks toward Jerusalem—with the weight of the cross drawing nearer—he pauses to teach this prayer. Why now? Why here? Perhaps because releasing, forgiving, and surrendering through prayer is not just preparatory—it’s essential.

This prayer, familiar across every Christian tradition, confronts us with questions not just of language, but of life. What does it mean to genuinely ask for forgiveness? To release others from their debts as we seek to be released from our own? To pray not out of routine, but with a posture of openness and humility?

In teaching us to pray this way, Jesus invites us into a rhythm of grace—a pattern of release that breaks the grip of resentment, clears space for healing, and draws us closer to the heart of God. We may know the words, but living them is where the true work begins.

Jesus is so clear in his ministry and teachings showing us profound and meaningful ways to reach God and find inner peace. Again, why here? Why in this moment would Jesus pause and reflect on not just the practice of prayer but its meaning for the disciples and for us.

Inspired by [workingpreacher.org](https://www.workingpreacher.org) commentary on Luke 11:1-13 by Rev Jennifer Wyand.

If there is one thing that is clear in this life it is the act of forgiveness is necessary to live a full and peaceful life. What is also clear is that the act of forgiveness is one of the most difficult if not impossible things to give especially when the other party who may have harmed us does not offer apology or remorse.

Yet as we reflect again upon Jesus' actions, it is so evident that he is telling the disciples and us that forgiveness is needed each and every day...but let's pause and reflect on the wording that we are most accustomed to...it does not start, forgive those who have wronged against me...it is forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.

Forgiveness begins with me. It starts with a humble acknowledgement that my actions or inactions have somehow led to an undesirable outcome. So how many of you are good at forgiving yourself? How many of you are good at asking for forgiveness – in true humbleness and humility – from someone you have wronged? It is not an easy thing yet when done right is profound in its ability to change us.

No one knows this better than alcoholics... recovering alcoholics that is. The twelve steps are laden with opportunity for true humility and growth.

12 Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous (and Alanon)

1. We admitted we were powerless over alcohol — that our lives had become unmanageable.

2. Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him.
4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.
5. Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.
6. Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.
7. Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.
8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.
9. Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.
10. Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.
11. Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understood Him, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.
12. Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these Steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

When you think about it, isn't that the Lord's prayer in action? Prayer has already played a large role in Luke's Gospel by this point in the story. We have already been given several scenes in which Jesus himself is praying. For instance, in both the account of Jesus' baptism (Luke 3) and the account of Jesus' transfiguration (Luke 9), Luke inserts the detail that Jesus was praying before the event occurred, which the other gospel accounts don't mention. In fact, by Luke 11, Jesus has already been featured praying in five separate accounts (Luke 3:21; 5:16; 6:12; 9:18; 9:28). So, it's not surprising that the disciples would notice this rhythm and ask Jesus to teach them how to pray.

Jesus does not present this prayer as a magical formula or as the only acceptable prayer. This is our invitation to true relationship with the divine – with God. It offers humility, truth and trust. To pray persistently, fervently and constantly with the understanding that God is always there, always listening, always accepting us, wherever we may be.

The practice of prayer is but one piece of this lesson from Jesus. He stresses the importance of coming to God in prayer and meditation. Doing so with an open mind understanding that not all prayer is answered in the way we hope. So, I wonder, is it possible to have spiritual fulfillment through the practice of prayer if the answer doesn't come?? So Luke stresses the importance of prayer and why it is indeed so powerful - We pray because we trust the One who hears us. It is in the very practice of seeking that we find hope and strength because the One in whom we wait is the Creator and Sustainer of life and loves us beyond measure.

So for me, I'm going to stick with step 11 from the 12 steps:

Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understood Him, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.

This is a release of sorts – to surrender our will and seek the will of God through prayer and meditation. To let go of our will in every situation and trust that the God who loves us, goes before and beside us. Jesus went so often to prayer before every situation to show us where comfort and strength reside.

To close, I'd like to share an version of the Lord's Prayer from New Zealand:

THE LORD'S PRAYER

Eternal Spirit, Earth-maker, Pain-bearer, Life-giver,
Source of all that is and that shall be,
Father and Mother of us all,
Loving God, in whom is heaven:

The hallowing of your name echo through the universe!
The way of your justice be followed by the peoples of the world!
Your heavenly will be done by all created beings!
Your commonwealth of peace and freedom sustain our hope and come on earth.

With the bread we need for today, feed us.
In the hurts we absorb from one another, forgive us.
In times of temptation and test, strengthen us.
From trials too great to endure, spare us.
From the grip of all that is evil, free us.

For you reign in the glory of the power that is love, now and for ever.
Amen.

~ New Zealand Prayer Book