THE NEW SHOFAR

In Gethsemane the holiest of all petitioners prayed three times that a certain cup might pass from Him. It did not.
C. S. Lewis

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When you pray…

Sometimes in Bible study, what is not included in the text is as helpful as what is included. In **Luke 11:1**, Luke casually notes that when Jesus taught this model prayer, it happened "*one day*" when Jesus was praying "*in a certain place*." He leaves us wondering WHAT day was it? WHERE did this happen?"

Given Luke's amazing narrative skills across his Gospel, we can assume there was a reason for this. The disciples saw Jesus praying so often that it was, as a matter of fact, difficult to recall the precise day and location of the time he gave them this model prayer to follow. Had Jesus prayed only rarely or on only certain high ceremonial occasions, then maybe it would have been both easy and important to record a few more details. But Jesus prayed so regularly that in the minds of the disciples, it all blurred together. When someone prayed as much as Jesus did, it really did not matter where this precise incident took place—the point is that Jesus prayed all the time to the extent that the disciples finally just had to know how to do that themselves.

Not a prayer but a model for a prayer-filled life

What the disciples seemed to be asking for was not a litany of key phrases or a checklist of prayer items or even a new prayer. What they were inquiring after was how they could, in imitation of their Master, turn the entirety of their lives into an extended act of prayer, the same as they observed was the case for Jesus himself. The Our Father is the way we pray as did our Lord and Saviour.

When we frame the Lord's Prayer as a guide to "praying without ceasing", the specifics that Jesus mentioned make more sense and take on a new meaning. We can then begin to see each petition and phrase Jesus gives is an all-encompassing reality. Luke's structure helps us here.

What do we pray for? The hallowing of God's very Name. That is a life transforming petition. ***What do we pray for***? The coming of the Kingdom, along with our daily bread and ongoing forgiveness—we pray to be forgiven based on the fact that we are *ourselves* engaged in acts of forgiveness *all the time*. To limit our acts of forgiveness for any reason, is to ask God to forgive us to the same extent that we fail to forgive others. ***What do we pray for?*** That we are not led into temptation. Not that we avoid temptation, that is impossible, but that we are not overwhelmed by the seductiveness of temptations, that the wiles of the devil are spurned by the divine graces we have from living in his presence.

Incessant prayer more important than content

We tend to think that the *content* of prayer is the key. In truth, Jesus always seemed more interested in the incessant nature of prayer and its never-ending desire to stay connected to the Father, who alone gives us all good things. But

then, seemingly out of the blue, Jesus says God will give "the *Holy Spirit*" to those who ask for it. But where in the last twelve verses was there any mention of the Holy Spirit? Jesus' model prayer does not mention the Spirit. The people in the analogies are not talking about the Holy Spirit. So why does Jesus conclude with mentioning something that had not cropped up before?

Maybe the answer is that whether we know it or not, in all our praying, in all our asking and begging and pleading with God; what we are finally asking for–and what we for sure will in the end receive–is nothing less than the indwelling Spirit of the Living God. We pray in the power of this Spirit, who is our sacred companion tying us into the indwelling Jesus. When we pray in the power of the Spirit, we find that the Spirit living in us and assuring us that no matter what happens, we serve a loving God who holds us tenderly every moment of our lives.

This sits at the heart of Luke 11. This teaching began with the disciples asking Jesus to teach them how to pray. He answered them in a surprising way, telling them that in their praying it was the Holy Spirit they had been seeking all along. When Jesus tells us *to ask, to seek, to knock* and *then* says that *we will be answered*, that what we seek will be found, that the door will open, he's talking about the Spirit of God there. Anyone who prays regularly knows that despite the blank-check appearance of verses 9 and 10, God answers in ways we may not always understand or appreciate. Sometimes the door appears to remain shut and what we seek elusive. Our struggles to articulate our deep-seated needs are well understood by our loving Father. If God always gives the Holy Spirit to those who pray, then even when a prayer goes "unanswered," God has provided a deeper answer after all. This is not an easy truth to digest. If we are praying for a loved one to be cured and they succumb to the illness and die, it can be hard to accept we have been heard. Jesus, however, promises the praying person they have received the Holy Spirit to help them in their grief, a grief their prayers had hoped would helped them avoid. The love of God is not less because something did not happen. The proof of His abiding love comes through the gentle ministry of the Spirit, assuring us that the gospel is still true, hope of the resurrection is still real, and Jesus remains in our hearts by His Spirit.

We can end with a prayer conundrum: Consider the example of Jesus. One dark night long ago in a placed called Gethsemane, he made a request, and, in the end, his Father had to say *no*. A certain, bitter cup of suffering *would not* pass from Jesus. The next time we know Jesus prayed, he was crying out in dereliction, "My God, my God, *why*? Why have you forsaken me?" Jesus moved from an unanswered prayer to a lament and yet his prayer life remained intact. His Father had said *no,* had had to abandon him for a time. But before he bowed his head and died, Jesus said to this same Father, "Into your hands do I commit my spirit."