

Prayer and Dependence on God

DARRELL DELANEY

He was always slipping away; early in the morning, late at night, or in the middle of crowds. The disciples would look around and realize once again that Jesus had gone off to pray. It became such a pattern, that one day they just asked him: Lord, teach us to pray. In this episode of *Groundwork*, we will explore how prayer and dependence on God form a heartbeat in the Gospel of Luke. We will look at how Jesus not only taught about prayer, but lived it: before making decisions, at times of sorrow, and in everyday life. As we dig into Luke's gospel, we will discover what it means to be people of prayer, and how following Jesus draws us into deeper intimacy with the Father; next on *Groundwork*.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Welcome to *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Scott Hoezee.

DARRELL DELANEY

And I am Darrell Delaney; and Scott, this is episode three of our six-part series on the Gospel of Luke. In the first one, we talked about the emphasis of the Holy Spirit throughout the entire Gospel of Luke; and in the second episode, we talked about what God's view of economic justice is, which took us through the Old Testament and into the Gospel of Luke in the New Testament; and today, we are going to talk about the importance of prayer and dependence on God, and that Jesus is not just telling us to recite words, but this is how he lives; and of course, he is our model and example.

SCOTT HOEZEE

[0:01:20.20] And as we can say about every episode in this series on Luke, there is nothing in Luke that isn't also in Mark and Matthew and John, right? And prayer. Jesus prays in all four gospels. It is not like he only prays in Luke, but not... Of course, Jesus prays in all four gospels; but Luke...and we are going to see this in this program, Darrell...Luke really pushes Jesus the pray-er very, very overtly; including at times, you know, like Matthew and Mark telling the same stories. They don't emphasize that: Oh, while that happened, Jesus was praying. Luke *always*...and we are going to see that...Luke *always* says: Hey, when this happened, before that happened, before he decided that, he was praying...he was praying...he was praying. So, this is a major emphasis in Luke, and it begins right at the beginning at the baptism. Luke 3:21, 22:

When all the people were being baptized, Jesus was baptized too. And as he was praying...(I don't think the other gospels say that at the baptism). And as he was praying, heaven was opened ²²and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes, I think Luke is making sure that we don't miss that. It is not just a throwaway comment for him. He is inspired by the Holy Spirit to emphasize what he is emphasizing. So, when he emphasizes the fact that, as Jesus is praying, these things happen, this is the inauguration and the pivotal moment in Jesus' ministry; and he is having a moment of prayer while this happens. So, it is basically Jesus' communion with the Father, and it prepares his way for the ministry that he is going to go into.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; so, interesting, interesting that Luke punches that up. As he was baptized, he was praying and that is when the descent of the Spirit came. This is where it begins, but it doesn't stop. Let's look at Luke 5:16. This is a little verse, but it sets the tone: But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.

DARRELL DELANEY

Not just occasionally; not just once or twice; but often. Jesus regularly stepped away from crowds and miracles and the disciples and all the noise so that he could be with his Father; and that speaks of his spirit of wanting to be renewed by his Father constantly; and because his ministry flows from the intimacy of his Father, it makes sense that he would make time for this, so he doesn't operate out of burnout or out of pressure, but out of the dependence of God. That is what he is doing, he is modeling what that means, and that is a good example for us.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; you know, John's gospel is the one... We looked at the high priestly prayer of Jesus in John's gospel in a recent *Groundwork* series; and Jesus, over and over and over and over...he is like a broken record says: Everything I say, everything I do is because the Father told me to say it; the Father told me to do it. I have nothing of my own accord. Father, Father, Father. That is John; but here, Luke is showing that exact same truth that he had to keep talking to the Father. It was an intimate relationship. He had to keep talking to the Father; he had to stay in touch with the Father because the Father was basically calling all the shots.

DARRELL DELANEY

And it is really important for us to see Jesus' prayer life very explicitly, like this. Like for example, in Luke Chapter 6, it says: ¹²One of those days, Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray, and spent the night praying to God. ¹³When morning came, he called his disciples to him and chose twelve of them, whom he also designated apostles.

So, before making one of the most significant decisions, one of the most important decisions of his ministry—choosing the twelve disciples—he spends all night praying about that. So, he is looking for the Father to give him wisdom, to let him know who he should select. The intentional dependence that he had on his Father is both humbling and challenging. It makes me wonder: Do I often pray before making important decisions? Do I often seek God's wisdom the way Jesus did? I think that is a very important question to think about.

SCOTT HOEZEE

I will say...I don't know about you, Darrell, but some of my prayers are longer than others. Sometimes my prayers are very short, like we call them arrow prayers. You know, you are driving and you remember: Lord, please be with my kids, you know; they have an exam in Algebra today.

Other prayers are longer. None of my prayers have lasted all night, you know. Maybe sometimes there are times when you are holding vigil with a sick parent or somebody. Maybe you are de facto kind of praying all night because you are not sleeping, but all night! He prayed all night, because as you just said, he had to choose the Twelve; and that was pretty important. So, that again shows his dependence on God and that he is not going to make a decision, even as the Son of God, without praying.

We see something similar in Luke 9:18:

Once when Jesus was praying in private and his disciples were with him, he asked them, "Who do the crowds say I am?"

Now, in all of the synoptic gospels, this is the hinge point, where Jesus says: Who do people say that I am. Luke makes sure... Now, we get that in Matthew and Mark, but I don't think Matthew and Mark say it was after he had been praying, and he said: Hey, by the way, who do people say that I am? Of course, this leads to Peter's great confession: You are the Christ, the Son of God, and so forth and so on. But again, that pivotal moment preceded by prayer. Again, Luke just keeps hitting this over and over.

DARRELL DELANEY

And he hits it again in the Transfiguration in Luke 9. It says that: ²⁸About eight days after Jesus said this, he took Peter, John, and James with him and went up on the mountain to pray. ²⁹As he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became as bright as a flash of lightning.

As he was praying. See, Luke draws attention to the point where, even the transfiguration doesn't happen without prayer preceding it. So, it is really powerful to see that.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; and then, of course, there is Luke 11, two chapters later. 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."

So, what prompts the disciples to ask for...we are going to get the Lord's Prayer...we are going to get to that a little bit later in this program...we will hit that again; but it wasn't theoretical. It wasn't like: Hey, you know what? We should learn how to pray. They kept watching Jesus. So, he had been praying and they were watching him. It was like: How does he do that? How does he pray? We have to find out. It was the modeling of Jesus; it was his being a role model of constant prayer that made the disciples say: We want in on that.

How do we do that?

We are going to get to that, but again, what led us to find out the Lord's Prayer was because Jesus has been praying all the time; and so, the disciples logically said: How do we do that?

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; so, they are looking at how real and how compelling and how intimate and how powerful his prayer life looks with the Father, and they are like: Well, we learned how to pray when we were younger, but when we watch Jesus, we don't know how to pray. We need to learn how to pray the way he is praying, because they are seeing Jesus' powerful model of that.

Then finally, Luke talks about one of the most heart-wrenching moments in prayer, which is Luke 22 at the Mount of Olives. This is Gethsemane. It says:

²⁹Jesus went out as usual to the Mount of Olives, and his disciples followed him. ⁴⁰On reaching the place, he said to them, "Pray that you will not fall into temptation." ⁴¹He withdrew about a stone's throw beyond them, knelt down and prayed, ⁴²"Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done." ⁴³An angel appeared to him and strengthened him. ⁴⁴And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground.

So, even we see here in Jesus' agony, Jesus' moment of sorrow, he is praying. So, not just when things are great; not just when things are amazing; but even in his sorrow and challenge, he is praying and showing the model of prayer.

SCOTT HOEZEE

He is in relationship with God no matter what the season is. But in just a moment, we will go back to that moment when the disciples say: How do we pray? The Lord's Prayer...we are coming up to that; so, stay tuned.

Segment 2

DARRELL DELANEY

You are listening to *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Darrell Delaney.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I am Scott Hoezee; and Darrell, in the first part of this episode of *Groundwork*, we show that Luke consistently paints a portrait of Jesus that shows him grounded in prayer; he is praying all the time in intimacy from his relationship with the Father; but again, as we just said, it is not just that Jesus prays, but the disciples *see* him praying, and then they say: We want that for ourselves; how do we do that? And so, we are going back now to Luke 11.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, Jesus is going to teach them now in this verse. It says: 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.”²He said to them, “When you pray say: ‘Father, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come. ³Give us each day our daily bread. ⁴Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us. And lead us not into temptation.’”

So, Luke’s version is a little different than the one we know in Matthew, isn’t it? It isn’t the one that most people say in church.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; in Matthew, Matthew puts this in the context of the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 6, and in Matthew, Jesus just teaches this. I don’t think in Matthew they didn’t ask him: How do I pray? But in Luke they do, and it is not in Luke’s version of the Sermon on the Mount, the Sermon on the Plain. It is a little later, but it is... Yes, as you said, it is no less profound. We are invited to approach the God of the universe and call that God Father. We are invited to pray for that kingdom to come, which means, really, Darrell, what we see in the Lord’s Prayer... Now, we have needs. We just saw in the last segment, when Jesus was in Gethsemane, he had needs and he cried. Of course, we cry out, but one of the things that prayer does for us, and one of the things, I think, Darrell, we see modeled in the Lord’s Prayer is that when we pray, we are also trying to align our wants and needs with God’s wants and needs for our lives, right? When we pray, we want to bring ourselves closer into alignment with God.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; your kingdom come, God; your will be done on earth; first, before I ask for anything, make sure that you understand that I acknowledge you as my Father and I give you thanks for who you are and what you have done, and then we get to whatever I am asking for. So, it aligns my purposes under his, and it is a surrender...it is a submission...and to acknowledging credit where credit is due first, and then get into requests.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And we also have that pivotal line: Forgive us our sins; and that is startlingly tied with our forgiving of other people: Forgive us our sins *as* we forgive others—that is in Matthew’s version. In other words, if we don’t forgive other people’s sins, we don’t deserve our sins to be forgiven. In Luke, it is stated a little bit differently: Forgive our sins *because* we are already forgiving the sins of others, but there is that tight alignment—that yoking together of our sins being forgiven and our being forgiving people in kind. It is like, we get it: God is a forgiving God, we are to be a forgiving people who follow him. If we want God to forgive our sins, how can we refuse to forgive the sins of others who have hurt us? So, that is a key part of it, as well as, you know, don’t lead us into temptation.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, prayer is never disconnected from community. So, we have the vertical relationship with God and the horizontal relationship with one another. I cannot ignore my relationship with my neighbor and just say: Oh, yeah; I love God; and then that is it. That is not it, because there is no way that God will be able to address my prayer requests if I am not addressing my relationship with my neighbor. So, we see that God is the one who is going to protect us, even in spiritual temptation; and dependence on God is a daily act that makes sure that we trust God with our weaknesses, and we can come to him and ask him for protection, because that is the kind of God he is.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; and Luke follows it up in Chapter 11, interestingly, with a parable. So, he gives them what we now call the Lord’s Prayer, and then we get the friend at midnight, also a unique parable to the Gospel of Luke. You do not find it in Mark or Matthew. Luke 11:5: “Suppose you have a friend and you go to him at midnight and say, ‘Friend, lend me three loaves of bread; ⁶a friend of mine on a journey has come to me, and I

have no food to offer him.’ ⁷And suppose the one inside answers, ‘Don’t bother me. The door is already locked, and my children and I are in bed. I cannot get up and give you anything.’ ⁸I tell you, even though he will not get up and give you the bread because of friendship, yet because of your shameless audacity he will surely get up and give you as much as you need.”

Kind of a curious parable there, Darrell.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; shameless audacity. So, that is actually...Jesus is trying to teach them how to be persistent and be bold in prayer. So, you come to God and you have that shameless audacity...the good news about God is how much more is he the God who never sleeps or slumbers, and he can hear you calling out on him...calling for him in the wee hours of the night, because he is never sleeping; and he is looking for you to ask with confidence, come to the throne of grace with boldness, because that is the shameless audacity that God wants to help, and he wants to see; because he is far more generous than that sleepy neighbor who we just read about.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And so, Jesus follows it up with Luke 11:9: “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. ¹⁰For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.

Now again, we know prayer is not quite that blank a check. I mean, Jesus did not exactly get what he wanted when he prayed in Gethsemane. He did have to drink that cup. So, we don’t want to turn that into a blank check, but it is about saying, again, we align ourselves with God, you know. He goes on to say:

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!”

He gives the Holy Spirit. Not necessarily everything we ask for, but he will give us the Holy Spirit, which as we saw in the first episode of this series on Luke, is a key theme there as well.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, I mean, of course the greatest gift God could ever give is himself, right? I mean, if he gives the Holy Spirit to those who ask him, that is because you are asking and you keep on asking. I think in the verses you just read, the Greek verb is a present continuous verb. It is ask and keep on asking...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DARRELL DELANEY

Seek and keep on seeking; knock and keep on knocking; and so, the persistence and the tenacity of not giving up in prayer and continuing to seek God, even when you do not see immediate results, is kind of what he is illustrating in Luke 18, with the persistent widow, where it says then Jesus told this parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up. Then he goes into this story about this widow. She keeps bothering this guy who is a judge, and he doesn’t care about God, but he wants to answer her request because he is tired of her constantly coming back; and God shows that he is a good Father who wants to answer prayers. So, the persistence is awarded, and rewarded, for that reason.

SCOTT HOEZEE

I think Luke 18 is the only time where Jesus tells a parable where Luke tells us what it is about, you know; Jesus tells a parable to show they should always pray and not give up. It is like, oh, well; that kind of gives away the show; but that is the point. And again, yes; God is not exactly like the unjust judge, though, but the point being sort of that how much more, right? Just like the nudgy neighbor earlier in Luke 11: I don’t want to give up; I don’t want to give you justice; I don’t want to give you bread. Oh, fine, you know; you kept... But even if an unjust judge or a nudgy neighbor can be goaded into giving something good, how much more will God do that if we just keep on praying?

DARRELL DELANEY

So, Luke wants us to know that prayer is not a last resort, it is our lifeline; and in the next segment, as we close, we want to talk about how this applies to our life today, and why prayer is the key to a resilient and faithful walk with God. So, stay tuned.

Segment 3

SCOTT HOEZEE

I am Scott Hoezee, with Darrell Delaney, and you are listening to *Groundwork*; and Darrell, now that we have seen how Jesus modeled prayer and taught prayer in Luke's gospel, let's bring it home. What does it mean for us today?

DARRELL DELANEY

I think we can talk about the importance that Luke is trying to show that prayer is not just some spiritual ritual, but it is a rhythm of life; and he is showing Jesus illustrate this because it is the heartbeat that Jesus has. He shows us how to surrender to God; he *needs* to pray. He doesn't just want to pray. It is not just some religious act. It is his connection to the Father; and so, he is showing that we need that same connection.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; so, in this segment, we are going to kind of loop back to several things we have noted in this program, and then maybe throw a little bit more practical application on it. I like what you just said there. We like to think that God doesn't need anything, and if Jesus was the Son of God, he didn't need anything; but as the *incarnate* Son of God, who was both fully human and fully divine, he did need to pray. He needed to stay in touch with his Father. We already looked at this in Luke 5:16:

Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.

Again, not once in a while; all the time. Whenever he disappeared, the disciples went looking for him...and the disciples were always surprised: What are you doing here? What are you praying for? We've got work to do. We've got people to see; people to meet; the crowds are all looking for you. It is like they did not see that Jesus could not meet those people; he could not do those miracles; he could not tell those parables if he did not keep praying. The disciples just kind of thought: Stuff to do; people to meet; and you are praying? And Jesus is like: Stuff to do; people to meet; that is *why* I am praying. They did not always see it.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, the Lord is showing us that we get our marching orders from the Father. He is carving out time, no matter how busy the itinerary is for that day, he is pausing; he has a rhythm and he makes sure that he is intentional about that. What would it look like for us, I wonder, if we carved out intentional time with God away from all the noise and the things. No one is more busy than Jesus is. I am sure that he has an itinerary that is longer than ours, but he still intentionally finds time; and the good news about us is that we don't need to go to some mountaintop of some monastery...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes.

DARRELL DELANEY

All we have to do is have a willingness to pause every now and then. That is what the word *selah* means; it means pause. I mean, even if it is just five minutes...even if it is sitting at a stoplight...even if it is going up the elevator, we can have time on our lunch break and just make sure that we are intentional about connecting with God.

SCOTT HOEZEE

I usually assume that when somebody doesn't get going when the light turns green it is because they are on their cellphone, and I toot my horn. I hope they are not praying when I do that, but maybe they are, I don't know; but that is a good example.

There is that song: As I breathe, I pray...

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

As I breathe, I pray.

We also noted that Jesus did not make any major decisions without...including choosing the twelve disciples...without asking God first. In fact, we saw earlier in this episode, he prayed the whole night before he made *that* decision. But also interesting, obviously we all pray when we have need, and Jesus did, too, out of his agony in Gethsemane...we looked at that earlier.

But Jesus didn't pray just when he needed something or when he was in trouble. Let's listen to Luke 10:21: At that time Jesus, full of joy through the Holy Spirit, said, "I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, Jesus is rejoicing in prayer. So, prayer is meant to encapsulate every emotion of the human experience. It is not just when things are only bad. Things can be good and we can pray. We can thank God for what he has already done or what he is currently doing; and that is what Jesus is doing, because real prayer comes from a real relationship with God. If you are up, pray; if you are down, pray; if you are somewhere in between, guess what? Pray. Because the communication...the connection to God is invaluable at every point of our Christian experience and in our lives.

SCOTT HOEZEE

On the day we are recording this, Darrell, it is a spring day in Michigan, and I took my dog for a walk by a park by the river, and it was a beautiful spring day. The trees are budding...the birds...the orioles were all over the place...and at one point while I was walking my dog, I just said: God, this is a good day. Thank you! That is just sort of the dialogue that we want to have. Not just in our vulnerable moments, but in our good moments.

Let's do five things, Darrell, as we close out this program. Five things that we can do to have a Jesus-like style of praying that Luke shows us.

DARRELL DELANEY

Luke is showing us that...based on his passages in scripture...he is showing us that we can start small, but as long as we are consistent, even if we start with five minutes, we can reshape our heart and our mind. When we take time to center and spend time with the Lord, even five minutes can be very important in that walk with Jesus. So, starting small is very, very good. You do not have to do two or three hours, you can do five minutes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

I remember somebody one time observed with the Puritans in this country that they didn't pray super long, but they never started a day without praying. They would pray for ten minutes, and then they would live out the prayer the whole rest of their day. Start small, but be consistent.

Number two: As we already said, pray before decisions, right? Don't just react; pause; listen; ask God: Show me the way; I can go left or right here; I can take this job or not take this job; I can apply to this school or not this school. Show me, O God; show me the way. So, entrust all the crossroads of our life to God.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; that is important as well; and then, you know, including praise and gratitude is another. Prayer is not just about asking for things; it is about adoring God; it is about thanking God; praising God for who he is and what he has already done. We have been teaching our kids that if God does nothing else for you, he sent his Son to die for you so that you could have a relationship with God. That is the best thing ever! Everything else is a bonus. So, we can thank God for what he has already done, and we can thank him for what he has given us, because he is a generous God.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly. So, 1) Start small and be consistent. 2) Pray before big decisions. 3) Include praise and gratitude. 4) Be honest; be honest with God. God wants us to pour out our hearts. Jesus was honest with God; when he was scared, when he was in agony in Gethsemane, he was honest. We have noted many times before that one-third of the book of Psalms are laments, and sometimes we think, well, no, no. We cannot complain to God. It is God's perfect will for my life; so, even if it is really bad, I cannot complain. No; be honest. Pour out your heart. God can handle our emotions; he can handle our doubts; he can handle our fears. He wants to hear that and walk with us through them as we continue to align our lives with God.

DARRELL DELANEY

And then finally, the last one is to stay alert in prayer. We use prayer as our defense against spiritual temptations, weariness, confusion. It helps us depend on God, and we remember this as we close, that prayer is not just a duty, it is an invitation to walk with God, to know his heart, and to live in step with his Spirit. This same Spirit that filled Jesus, fills us. The same Father who hears Jesus, he hears us; and the same strength sustaining Jesus in his darkest hour is available to us today. So, let's just not be people who pray out of obligation, but out of intimacy, joy, and dependence. Thanks be to God.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Thank you for listening and digging deeply into scripture with *Groundwork*. We hope you will join us again next time as we examine the theme of jubilee and joy in the Gospel of Luke. Connect with us now at groundworkonline.com to share what *Groundwork* means to you. Tell us what you would like to hear discussed next on *Groundwork*.

DARRELL DELANEY

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