

October 23, 2022

BASICS IN DISCIPLESHIP

Luke 10:25-11:13

(6 of 11 in a series through Luke 7-15)

You may have had an experience in school where you were in the classroom, heard the topic that was going to be addressed, and sat back in your chair, confident you'd mastered this one, only to realize once the lecture began that you didn't quite have the grasp on it you thought at first. That's how Luke 10:25-11:13 can make you feel. As Luke arranges his gospel around themes, you'll see that this section is about the basics of discipleship. Our text is about the need for Jesus' disciples to love God and neighbor, take in his word, and pray. That's quite simple and elementary, isn't it? I doubt anyone who has known the Lord for any length of time will find themselves responding to this text saying, "I had no idea I was supposed to love God and neighbor, take in God's word, and pray."

On the other hand, once we actually get into the details of what Jesus says about these topics, I think you'll see that it's incredibly challenging and that we may not see the high calling of love, that we often can distract ourselves from God's word with many "good" things, and that we might not yet see what a blessing prayer is. And because there's much to cover in order for us to see that, I want to dive right in. So, let's first look at the high calling of loving God and neighbor.

The high calling of loving God and neighbor

Our text begins with a lawyer coming to Jesus "to put him to the test" (10:25). In other words, the lawyer's question isn't genuine but simply trying to trip up Jesus. Nonetheless, he asks Jesus, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" And Jesus answers, "What is written in the Law? How do you read it?" (10:26). In other words, Jesus is acknowledging that this man no doubt has knowledge of the Bible to ask such a question, so he wants to get his read on it. What is the answer that this man himself has come up with? And the man answers, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself" (10:27).

Now, that was actually a very good answer—which we'll see Jesus acknowledge as well. What the man does is combine Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18, which call us to love God and love our neighbor, and gives that as his answer. And just to show you how good of an answer that is, Jesus himself is asked by another lawyer at another time, "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?" and Jesus answers by combining these two texts and telling the man to love God and love his neighbor. So, this guy nails it with his answer.

Well, sure enough, Jesus then commends him, saying, "You have answered correctly, do this, and you will live" (10:28). But, actually, there's the problem. The man knows he isn't doing this. And though it might be hard for someone else to challenge that he loves God because he might claim another can't see his love for God, he knows he falls short of loving his neighbor. Perhaps

even running through his mind are people whom he only shows disdain for. Therefore, he asks Jesus another question, “attempting to justify himself.” He asks, “And who is my neighbor?” (10:29).

Now, we might think that if Jesus answers this question, he’s taking the bait of focusing on love for neighbor and ignoring the man’s lack of love for God. After all, had he genuinely loved God, he would have wanted to honor Jesus. But the reality is that love for God will show itself in love for neighbor, and saying we love God when we don’t love our neighbor shows we’re self-deceived. Therefore, Jesus happily answers the question but not in a way the lawyer anticipates.

Jesus replies by telling a story about a man going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he came upon some robbers who stripped him, beat him, and left him half dead. Then, a priest came by, but instead of helping the man, he passed by on the other side of the road. Then, a Levite came by and did the same.

Now, at this point in the story the lawyer probably thought he saw what was coming. Jesus’ first two characters in the story were thought to be the most godly in society—a priest and Levite. Most likely Jesus’ last character would be just a normal Israelite who did the right thing. And perhaps there’d be a lesson on hypocrisy or not judging a book by its cover or the like, and the lawyer would probably be tempted to identify himself with that good, average Israelite. But instead, Jesus’ next character in the story is a Samaritan—a people for whom Jews had great disdain. And so if there was any chance of the lawyer identifying himself with the hero in this story, there simply wasn’t a chance of that now. But the Samaritan was indeed the hero of the story. Not only did he care for the man’s immediate needs but took him to an inn, paid for his stay, and assured the owner that whatever more care the man needed he’d provide for him.

Then Jesus asks an interesting question. He says to the lawyer, “Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?” (10:36). Now, do you notice the change Jesus has made? The lawyer asked, “Who is my neighbor?” wondering whom he is required to show love to. And, honestly, he’s just wanting to know from whom he can withhold his love. But Jesus turns the focus ever so slightly, focusing on how we can be a neighbor to others as he asks, “Who proved to be a neighbor?”¹ In other words, Jesus is wanting this lawyer not to picture himself in the story as the priest, Levite, or Samaritan. He wants the lawyer to picture himself as the man left for dead. Once in that role, how would he want others to see him? When you’re in a place of need, you sure want others to be neighborly to you—regardless of whether they’re of the same nationality, or tribe, or group, or what have you.

When you ask, “Who is my neighbor?” as the lawyer does, you’re asking from a position of “assumed superiority,”² wondering whom you have to love. But when you reverse the question

¹ David Garland writes very helpfully about this move by Jesus in his commentary, and I’m reflecting his insights here. *Luke*, ZECNT (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 445-46.

² *Ibid.*, 445.

and ask, “Whom do I want to be neighborly to me when I am in need?” your answer changes, doesn’t it? That’s what Jesus wants us to see. Here’s his point: *we should look to love others as we’d desire to be loved by them in our time of need*. That’s how a follower of Christ must live according to Jesus’ words. And so it’s good for us to ask if we’re obeying the command of Christ here? Is this how we approach loving our neighbor? If we’re a follower of Christ, it needs to be. That’s where Jesus begins, but second, he shows us our need to take in God’s word.

Our great need to take in God’s word

In the next scene, Jesus enters the village where Mary and Martha live, and Martha invites Jesus into her home. Now, in this cultural context, welcoming one into the home came with the great expectation of providing for that individual with hospitality. Therefore, Martha begins serving her guest. But with each passing second, she’s getting frustrated because her sister, Mary, is simply sitting at Jesus feet, listening to his teaching. Martha’s thinking Mary should be helping her. Not only that, but it seems that she’s getting frustrated with Jesus. After all, he should stop teaching Mary and tell her to get to work helping her sister. So, finally, when Martha can’t take it anymore, she says to Jesus, “Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me” (10:40). But instead of telling Mary to help her sister, he answers Martha, saying, “Martha, Martha, you are so anxious and troubled about many things, but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her (10:41-42).

Now, this can be a little confusing, because as the casual reader of this text, we can probably sympathize with Martha. We’ve no doubt found ourselves in her shoes in some setting and can relate to her frustration. So, what was Martha missing and why was Mary’s simple sitting at Jesus’ feet in this moment commended?

Well, obviously Martha’s initial idea of serving Jesus certainly isn’t a wicked idea. But it seems that she became so anxious about serving Jesus that she became distracted from actually enjoying him. We might think of it this way. Imagine you have someone over that you really want to honor, and so you invite him into your home and seat him in the living room. Then you ask if he’d like coffee, and so you abandon the living room to spend time in the kitchen brewing coffee. Then you bring him the coffee only to say, “Oh, I bet you’d like some dessert with that,” and so you head back to the kitchen to bake up a dessert. And then, well, you get the picture. In your effort to honor and serve your guest, you’d have lost track of actually spending time with and enjoying him. It seems that Martha was doing something similar.

Meanwhile, to Mary, having Jesus in their home was the most important thing to her. She wanted to soak up everything he had to say. That’s why Jesus can say that Martha was anxious and troubled about many things while Mary was doing the one thing necessary.

Now, my guess is that at least some of us find this convicting. We know what it’s like not to crack open our Bibles because we’ve got things to do—maybe even things that we tell ourselves are done in service to Jesus. How many of us have tuned out of listening to God’s word on a

Sunday morning because we're thinking about how to be hospitable to our guests we're having over for lunch? And we could go on with this all day, and I'm not saying that working hard or being hospitable are bad. They're great. But we must realize that what's most important is that we know God, and the chief way he's revealed himself to us is in his word. It's good for us to obey Jesus, but we must first know what he commands. If we try to sidestep this in our anxious hearts to get on and serve Jesus, then we need to reminder that people don't need us as much as they need God's word, and if we don't know it then we are of little help to them. This is why it's a good practice to gather on Sundays, take time where our feet are still, our mouths are closed, and our hearts and ears are open, and take in God's word. It is more necessary than most things we've got on our busy Sunday afternoon schedule. And, finally, we see the wonderful privilege of prayer.

The wonderful privilege of prayer

In our final section, the disciples witness Jesus praying. And when he finishes, one of them says to him, "Lord, teach us to pray" (11:1). Jesus answers, "When you pray, say: 'Father, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread, and forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone who is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation'" (11:2-4).

Now, our first response to Jesus' words may be to ask why this is different than what we see in Matthew, the model prayer many of us have memorized. Well, the difference is likely because either Luke abbreviated what Jesus said, which is fine because Luke is no mere historian but wanting to stress certain themes and realities in his gospel, which we've seen thus far. Or, it could also be that Jesus had a conversation like this with one of his disciples on multiple occasions and didn't say precisely the same thing each time. And that too shouldn't bother us because this model prayer is just that—a model. He's not telling us to recite these precise words when we pray but to let his example serve as a guide as we pray. How then does this model prayer guide us? Well, let's walk through it and note some things.

First, Jesus tells us that we can address God as "Father." We're not praying to one who is distant or unknown but to our Father, who loves us. And he tells us to pray for God's name to be hallowed or honored. If you remember from the Ezekiel text read earlier in the service, you'll remember that God said that Israel had profaned his name among the nations. They'd done this by their chasing after false gods. If you were a member of another nation and saw Israelites coming to worship your gods, you'd only conclude, "They must not think the God of Israel is that impressive." Thus, God's name was profaned before them. Therefore, when we pray for God's name to be honored, we're praying that God honor his name before others—especially by enabling us to live holy lives that draw attention to the worth and greatness of our God.

Next, we pray for God's provision of daily bread—that is, our daily needs. Praying this way acknowledges both our need and our recognition that every good thing we have is a gift from the Lord. And finally we're told to ask God to forgive us our sins as we forgive others and lead us not into temptation. And this is a reminder to us that perfect obedience will not be ours this side

of the resurrection, and we need the Lord's forgiveness, even as we forgive others who sinned against us. It's also a reminder that we need God's grace not to walk away from him and chase after sin, even asking him to help us avoid those things that would pull us away from following him. That is, we pray as we sung earlier, "Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it; prone to leave the God I love. Here's my heart, Lord, take and seal it. Seal it for Thy courts above." Let this be a guide to help your daily prayers.

But Jesus doesn't stop with these instructions on how to pray. He also provides us great encouragement as we pray. He does this by asking two questions that he expects us to answer negatively. The first is a long question, so let's read it all. Jesus asks, "Which of you has a friend will go to him at midnight and say to him, 'Friend, lend me three loaves, for a friend of mine has arrived on a journey, and I have nothing to set before him'; and he will answer from within, 'Do not bother me; the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed. I cannot get up and give you anything'" (11:5-7)? Do you see the question? Who has a friend who will answer you that way in that setting?

But following the question is not our only difficulty in understanding this text. Most likely answering the question, "Of course we don't have a friend like that" doesn't make sense to us. Rather, we might, "Of course our friends wouldn't want to get out of bed at midnight. Why in the world would I go to him at midnight expecting him to?" So let me provide some context.

Hospitality was a very big deal at this time and in this culture. To take in a guest and not be hospitable would be an embarrassment—for you and the whole village. This makes sense of why a man gets a guest who shows up unexpectedly after a long journey and rushes over to his friend's house to get some bread to serve him because he's out. We'd think that you'd say to your unexpected guest, "Sorry I don't have anything to serve you, but I didn't know you were coming, and it's already midnight." Surely he'd understand.

But that's not how this culture worked. Not serving bread, even to your unexpected guest, would be humiliating. That's why the man runs over to his friend's house to get some bread at such a late hour. Not only that, but your friend would completely understand and feel the same panic you do to make sure that neither of you would bear the shame of not providing for a guest. Therefore, when Jesus asks how many of us has a friend who would offer an excuse like, "My kids are sleeping and the door is already latched," they would think, "None of us has a friend that bad." It would be like one of us saying, "Who has a friend on whose door you could knock at midnight saying, 'My wife needs rushed to the emergency room, and my car won't start. Can I borrow yours?' and he would answer, "C'mon, man, I'm already in bed and don't want to wake the kids"?" The answer is (hopefully) none of us has a "friend" like that.

Well, let me pause in this story for one second and tell you what happened in the office on Tuesday because it may be that *almost* none of us has a "friend" like that. I wanted to make sure I was thinking through this portion of my text rightly and decided to ask Aaron (who, by the way, agreed). So, I walked over to his office, and looked through the glass window in his door and saw him just sitting there. Then, staring at him, I knocked. And he looked right at me and shook his

head, “No.” I knocked again, and again he shook his head again. Finally, it took me knocking a third time before he finally let me in. Therefore, I’m afraid that had I been in the crowd when Jesus asked, “Which of you has a friend who would respond so callously to you in your time of need?” I would have had to raise my hand. But perhaps this is a case where the exception proves the rule. So, let’s get back to the story.

Jesus notes that even if the guy didn’t want to get out of bed and help because he’s a friend, “yet because of his impudence he will rise and give” you what you need (11:8).³ That is, because of his desire not to be shamed—if for no other reason—he’ll answer your request. The idea then seems to be that we’re to understand that if even a friend whose inclination is to be selfish would still do the right thing when you knock on his door and ask for his help, how much more will our Father do what is good and right for us. Therefore, Jesus tells us, “As and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened” (11:9-10).

So, that’s his first question (i.e. which of you has a friend who would respond in this callous way?). And, besides me, hopefully none of us does. Jesus’ second question is similar: “What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will instead of a fish give him a serpent; or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion?” (11:11-12). And again, the answer is negative. Of course we don’t expect a father to do that. Well, Jesus tells us, “If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!” (v. 13).

Again, this is a lesser to greater argument. Jesus has no problems acknowledging that we’re all sinful. But he builds on that. If we’re evil and yet still can’t imagine behaving so terribly toward our children, then how much more confident should we give that our good and loving heavenly Father won’t give us what we need—especially the Holy Spirit to empower and equip us to obey him?

Look at Jesus’ kindness. His disciples ask him how to pray, and he not only instructs them how but reminds them of how blessed we are in prayer. We’re not praying to a god whom we’re trying to work to get to pay attention to us. When we pray, we’re praying to our loving heavenly

³ There are two other ways some people interpret this story. Traditionally it was understood that the word translated “impudence” in the ESV should be translated “persistence.” And the idea is that it was because of the persistent knocking by the friend that the man would get out of bed and so Jesus is teaching us to be persistent in prayer. But the Greek word never means “persistence” but “shamelessness” (i.e. desire to be without shame—so, Carson, *A Call to Spiritual Reformation* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992], 116). Others recognize the word doesn’t mean “persistence” but still attached this adjective to the knocking friend, suggesting that it’s the friend’s shamelessness in knocking at such an hour and refusing to take no for an answer, thus, basically also encouraging persistence in prayer. But this interpretation misses that Jesus is focusing on the one receiving the request in both illustrations he’s using (i.e. the friend in bed in vv. 5-8 and the father in vv. 11-12). That’s how he starts the question: “Which of you who has a friend will go to him at midnight ...” He’s focusing on the man in bed. The “shamelessness” of v. 8, then, is the shamelessness of the man in bed, that is, the idea of not wanting to be shamed. It is his desire not to bear shame which rouses him to get out of bed and share his bread, lest his shame be known in the village.

Father who is eager to answer when we ask, seek, and knock and gives good gifts to his children, especially more of the Spirit to empower us for obedience. Sure, he doesn't give us all we ask for, but even that's because he's good and wise and knows what's best. He withholds no good thing from us. Should we ever doubt his love, we merely need to remember that he sent his Son for us to live, die, and be raised so that we might know him.

These are basic elements of discipleship, but if you're like me, you've probably found yourself at one point or another a bit convicted that we aren't quite matching up with what Jesus pictures for us here in loving God and neighbor, taking in his word, and enjoying the privilege of prayer. So, let us repent where we need to and then turn to the one who not only forgives but gives us his Spirit to empower us to obey, as we come to the table today. Amen.