

## **Prayer in Luke: The Importance Assigned by Luke to Prayer**

by Joe Spivy

It is a commonly acknowledged that Luke places a great deal of emphasis upon the place of prayer in his account of the life of Christ (The Gospel of Luke) and his record of the beginning of the church (The Acts of the Apostles) (Luke T. Johnson, The Gospel of Luke, Sacra Pagina, Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 1991, 69-71).

Below are several Lukan passages that mention people praying.

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| Luke 1:10     | Worshippers praying  |
| Luke 1:13     | "your prayers have been heard" (Angel to Zechariah)          |
| Luke 2:28-32  | Simeon prays upon seeing the baby Jesus                      |
| Luke 2:37     | "fasting and praying" (Description of Anna)                  |
| Luke 2:38     | (Anna, upon seeing Jesus) "gave thanks to God"               |
| Luke 3:21     | "as he was praying" (Jesus at his baptism)                   |
| Luke 5:16     | "But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed"       |
| Luke 5:33     | Why don't Jesus' disciples fast and pray like John's         |
| Luke 6:12     | Jesus prayed on mountainside; all evening praying to God     |
| Luke 6:28     | pray for those who mistreat you (instructions from Jesus)    |
| Luke 9:16     | prayed as he broke bread for miraculous feeding              |
| Luke 9:18     | Jesus prayed in private                                      |
| Luke 9:28-29  | Jesus prays at transfiguration                               |
| Luke 11:1-2   | Disciples, observing Jesus, ask for instructions in prayer   |
| Luke 11:5-11  | Parable of friend in need and explanation (Ask, Seek, Knock) |
| Luke 17:15-16 | 15 Samaritan, healed by Jesus, praises God                   |
| Luke 18:1     | Parable of Persistent Widow (Always pray, never give up)     |
| Luke 18:10-11 | Parable of tax collector and Pharisee (two men/two prayers)  |
| Luke 19:46    | Temple, house of prayer, made into den of robbers            |

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| Luke 21:36    | Prayer for strength in coming time of trouble                        |
| Luke 22:17-19 | Thanks for cup and bread at Last Supper                              |
| Luke 22:32    | Jesus' prayer for Simon (Peter)                                      |
| Luke 22:40-41 | Jesus' instructs apostles to pray to not fall into temptation        |
| Luke 22:44-46 | Jesus' prayer at Gethsemane (2 <sup>nd</sup> admonition to apostles) |
| Luke 23:33-34 | Jesus' prayer for forgiveness for his executioners                   |
| Luke 23:46    | Jesus' prayer at death on cross                                      |
| Luke 24:30-31 | Jesus prayers over bread on Road to Emmaus                           |

The books of Luke and Acts work in concert to frame an explanation of Luke's understanding of Christianity. Those some from a more liberal theological standpoint consider Christians to have still been Jews during the time of Luke. Thus Acts, according to this view, is Luke's understanding of the Church in the Jewish context rather than Christianity which they see as a later development.

However, to do this one must downplay the importance of the events recorded in Acts 10 and following and virtually ignore Luke's statement in Acts 11:26, "The disciples were called Christians first in Antioch (where many non-Jews were being converted).

Written to Theophilus (Luke 1:3; Acts 1:1), the lover of God (whether an actual person or a general description of the intended audience is indeterminable), these books provide a picture of the foundation of the Christian faith (Luke- the life of Jesus, see also Acts 4:12) and of the community that formed as a result of that faith (Acts 4:4; 16:5; 19:20).

Luke constantly refers to prayer in the life of the devout with special emphasis given to Jesus who more than a devout one, but the Lord. Prayer, in Lukan theology, is indicative of a life that is devoted to God and dependent upon his power. Early in his narrative the reader is introduced to a simple group of devoted followers who have gathered to worship (1:10). Zechariah, a priest, is told by an angel that the prayers of he and his wife (see 1:6 for a description of their personal devotion) have been heard and God will give them a son (John the Baptist).

Luke later introduces Simeon and Anna. He is a devout man and she a prophetess who fasts and prays and is a constant presence in the temple court. Each, upon seeing Jesus, offers up prayers of praise and thanks to God.

It is Jesus himself, in his final hours, who best personifies what it means to display complete faith and dependence upon God the Father. In the Garden his earnest prayer is for deliverance from what is to follow- "yet not my will, but yours be done" (22:42). On the cross his prayer is for those who are mistreating him (22:33-34, echoing his words in 11:4) and, in the end, he entrusts his spirit to God (22:46).

The teachings of Jesus place an emphasis upon prayer in the life of the follower. His disciples are to pray for those who mistreat them (6:28) an attitude that is consistent with the merciful nature of God. When asked to provide instructions in prayer, Jesus' prayer is one of complete dependence upon God for material (11:3) and spiritual (11:4a) blessings and for strength in the face of temptation (11:4b). The temptation theme is echoed later in the book as Jesus apparently seeks to prepare his followers for the destruction of Jerusalem (21:36) and their collective (22:40-46) and personal (22:32) crisis at the time of his crucifixion.

Luke's emphasis on prayer is also seen in two parables unique to his gospel account. In chapter 18 Luke shares the parable of the persistent widow who demonstrates the need for constant prayer. As this precedes the majority of teaching on prayer in times of temptation, it may be seen as preparatory for the coming times of increased difficulty. The times of oppression are to be overcome by increasing dependence upon God.

The second parable may serve two purposes. It is a cautionary tome, pointing to the efficacy of sincere prayer that depends upon God and the impotence of prayer that would claim spiritual independence from the power of God. It may also introduce and help explain the difference between those that[who] will soon oppose Jesus in Jerusalem (19:39, 45-48; Matt 27:62) and those who are his followers (19:36-38).

However, perhaps Luke's greatest emphasis is the relationship between prayer in one's life and the power of God. Repeatedly prayer is mentioned and then momentous events (often displaying the power of God, normally seen through the work of the Holy Spirit) follow. The repetition of this pattern, prayer followed by a significant incident, is difficult to ignore or escape in Lukan literature.[Excellent!]

Among the synoptics, it is Luke alone who often brings to light the part of prayer at significant junctures in Jesus' ministry. Luke interjects prayer as a crucial element linking what has taken place in the life of Jesus with the guidance and approval of the Father in heaven.

Compare the accounts of the three events in the life of Jesus found below. With each book is the scriptural reference and a note of the presence of prayer in the record.

| <u>Event</u>    | <u>Luke</u>   | <u>Matthew</u> | <u>Mark</u>  |
|-----------------|---------------|----------------|--------------|
| Baptism         | 3:21 (Yes)    | 3:13-17 (No)   | 1:9-11 (No)  |
| Naming of 12    | 6:12-16 (Yes) | 10:1-4 (No)    | 3:13-19 (No) |
| Transfiguration | 9:28-29 (Yes) | 17:1 (No)      | 9:2 (No)     |

On two of these occasions, baptism and transfiguration, God's approval of Jesus is displayed audibly and accompanied by a visible sign (baptism- dove; transfiguration- Moses and Elijah with light).

Again, it is a parable (and the explanation that follows) that is found solely in Luke that may provide a clue to understanding Luke's purpose. Following Luke's record of the model prayer, he shares the parable of a friend in need and then expounds upon its

meaning. He concludes that God will answer their prayers and give the Holy Spirit to those who asks.

Throughout the second half of the Lukan corpus the pattern of prayer followed by power is repeated.

| <u>Passage</u> | <u>Prayer</u>              | <u>Passage</u> | <u>Power</u>                                 |
|----------------|----------------------------|----------------|--|
| 1:8,14         | apostles pray in Jerusalem | 2:1-4          | Holy Spirit fills apostles<br>(Pentecost)    |
| 4:24-30        | prayer of church           | 4:31           | Holy Spirit fills all                        |
| 10:2           | Cornelius prayed daily     | 10:3           | Receives vision                              |
| 10:9           | Peter prays                | 10:11-16       | Receives vision                              |
| 10:30          | Cornelius recounts prayers | 10:44          | Holy Spirit comes on all who<br>hear message |

To summarize, Luke's view of prayer seems to include two crucial elements.

1. The sincerely devout will recognize their dependence upon God and pray regularly (as was the habit of Jesus, 5:16; 6:12; 9:18; 11:1; 22:44-46).
2. Such prayers are honored by God in the life of Jesus (3:21; 6:12; 9:16; 9:28); Pray is displayed in the life of the early church (Acts 2:1-4; 4:31; 10:44).