

Spirit-led Prayer

Jarrett Stephens

Pray Like Jesus | September 6, 2026 | Luke 4:1; Luke 4:14-18; Galatians 5; Luke 10:17-20; Luke 10:21; Luke 11:9-13; Psalms 50:8-23; Isaiah 55:8-9

Prepared from the spoken message and lightly edited for readability. Scripture quotations and spoken phrasing are preserved as delivered.

Good morning. I want to invite you to take God's Word and turn to Luke chapter 10.

Does anybody remember this little button right here? The retail chain Staples made it famous. During Super Bowl 39, they ran an ad, and the world went bonkers over it. In fact, they started selling these after the ad, and they sold more than a million in less than a year.

The commercial started with a little boy sitting in math class. He wasn't paying attention, and his teacher called on him to answer the question. He was caught, but he had an Easy Button that he could hit, and he had the answer.

It then goes to the next scene. There's a bucking bronco and a cowboy who has to saddle-break this strong bronco. He just knows his work is cut out for him. It looks like a mean bronco, so he has this Easy Button that he taps, and the horse is saddle-broken.

It then goes to a dad who's trying to change a diaper, and he's got his twins there. I kind of feel for that dad trying to change the diaper. The twins are moving around, and you can tell he's just at his wits' end. He hits the Easy Button.

Then it ends with a surgeon who is doing a surgery that he's never performed before. The nurse is like, "You've never done this surgery before."

He's like, "Oh, that's not a problem," because he's got the Easy Button, and he hits it.

Then it ends by saying, "Don't you wish all of life had an Easy Button?"

I thought about this Easy Button as it relates to what we're talking about in prayer, because I think that's how we think about prayer sometimes. It can be so difficult for us, so challenging. Isn't it true?

If you've tried the 10-minute challenge in the last couple of weeks, as we've been working out this prayer series, praying through the Lord's Prayer for just 10 minutes, you know how much your mind can wander. You know the distractions that can come up. Some of you are even kind of discouraged and defeated because you haven't been able to go seven minutes or 10 minutes in prayer. You just wish you had an Easy Button that you could hit. "That was easy." All of a sudden, you'd become a person of prayer.

We're talking today about Spirit-led prayer. Some would think, when we study the life of Jesus, that if anybody had an Easy Button, so to speak, when it came to praying, it was him. You wouldn't be completely wrong.

Jesus was a man of prayer. Twenty-five times in the Gospels, we have him praying, but only seven or eight times do we actually have the words that Jesus prayed. That's what this series is unpacking.

We're going to look at Luke chapter 10, verse 21. This prayer we're looking at today is just like most of the prayers of Jesus for which we have the words he spoke. When we're looking at his prayer life, they're really short bursts, almost like staccato statements. Most of the prayers are no more than a sentence or two. The longest we have is what we'll look at next week in John chapter 17, but most of Jesus' prayers are very short.

Luke chapter 10, verse 21, says:

In that same hour he rejoiced in the Holy Spirit and said, "I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will."

— Luke 10:21

If we're going to pray like Jesus, we've said we've got to look not just at what Jesus prayed, but at how he prayed. Again, you're not totally wrong in thinking, "Man, I can't pray like Jesus because I'm not Jesus. He had the ultimate Easy Button. He was God in the flesh."

You're not wrong. In Luke chapter 1, remember, we're told that he was conceived by the Holy Spirit - 100 percent God, 100 percent man. In Luke chapter 3, which we looked at in the first week, Jesus is baptized, and as he is praying, the Spirit of God descends on him.

You continue reading in Luke's Gospel, and Luke is very much into the details of the relationship - I should say the interaction or the interrelationship - between the Godhead, specifically God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. We're told in Luke chapter 4, verse 1:

And Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness.

— Luke 4:1

We've already seen that he's conceived by the Spirit, the Spirit of God descends on him, and now Luke tells us he's full of the Spirit and led by the Spirit into the wilderness.

We're talking about Spirit-led praying today, and I'll just say that Spirit-led living and Spirit-led praying don't mean easy, okay? Jesus was full of the Spirit and led into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.

After that temptation, he comes out victorious. Luke chapter 4, verse 14:

And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee, and a report about him went out through all the surrounding country.

— Luke 4:14

He ultimately goes to his hometown of Nazareth, and he goes into the synagogue there. If you take trips to the Holy Land with us, whenever we open that back up, sometimes we'll go to Nazareth. Sometimes we can get into the synagogue that many believe was the first-century synagogue where Jesus took the scroll of Isaiah. This was his coming-out-as-the-Messiah party, so to speak. He reads from the scroll of Isaiah, and listen to

what he reads. Luke records it in Luke chapter 4, verse 18:

*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives
and recovering of sight to the blind,
to set at liberty those who are oppressed.*

— Luke 4:18

Then you get to this verse we're looking at today, with Jesus rejoicing in the Spirit and praying.

I package all of this up front to emphasize that, no, Jesus didn't have an Easy Button, but it certainly was easier for him than it is for us. We are of the flesh, right? We have a sin nature that, according to Galatians chapter 5, desires what is contrary to the Spirit and wages war against the Spirit.

We have a sin nature that doesn't want anything to do with pursuing God or seeking God. We have an enemy who wants to derail us and cause us to do anything and everything other than seeking after the presence of God. This is what makes prayer so challenging and so difficult.

But listen, it doesn't have to be this way. God didn't give us an Easy Button when it comes to our prayer life. He did something better: He gave us his Spirit.

According to Scripture and basic Christian doctrine, when we ask Jesus to be the Lord of our life, when we turn the leadership and lordship of our life over to him, God puts his Spirit in us. As we walk in step with the Spirit through a life of prayer, he works in us and shapes us to trust in him.

Sometimes I give you the sermon in a sentence, or a major point, a major thesis, if you will, of the message. Here it is. It'll be on the screen. If you take notes, I encourage you to write it down:

Spirit-led prayer shapes us to trust the Lord.

That's the big-picture idea of the message today and what I believe is being communicated here in the text.

The Greater the Revelation, the Greater the Accountability

Let's set some context for you. What Jesus prays follows an event and a conversation.

If you look at the beginning of Luke chapter 10, he sends out 72 of his followers. These are no-names. We assume they were much like the disciples - untrained, unschooled men. It just says he sent 72 out, and he tells them they're going to go to different towns and villages. This is where Jesus is sending them. They are going to preach the good news of the kingdom, and he gives them authority to heal diseases.

After he puts them on mission, he prepares them that not everywhere they go is going to accept them. In fact, if you look in the early verses of Luke chapter 10, he says, "I am sending you out like sheep in the midst of wolves."

All right, that's not good. The sheep's not going to win that one, okay?

He prepares them for their mission trip and says, "You're going to be rejected." You pick up in verse 10. Look at what he says:

Whenever you enter a town and they do not receive you, go into its streets and say, "Even the dust of your town that clings to our feet we wipe off against you. Nevertheless know this, that the kingdom of God has come near." I tell you, it will be more bearable on that day for Sodom than for that town.

— Luke 10:10-12

Now, that's saying something, okay? For those of you who grew up in church, you know the name Sodom, all right? Genesis chapter 19. God's harshest judgment, we see, literally rains down on Sodom because of their wickedness and rebellion. God judges them and rains fire and sulfur down, completely destroying the city.

In fact, a first-century ear listening to Jesus even say the word "Sodom" would have thought of severe judgment. What Jesus says is that these towns that reject you and reject my message are going to get it worse than Sodom.

Now he continues. Look at verses 13 through 16, all part of the same conversation:

Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago, sitting in sackcloth and ashes. But it will be more bearable in the judgment for Tyre and Sidon than for you.

And you, Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven? You shall be brought down to Hades.

The one who hears you hears me, and the one who rejects you rejects me, and the one who rejects me rejects him who sent me.

— Luke 10:13-16

Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum were all small towns and villages in the Galilee area. What's amazing is that these are the towns and villages where Jesus ministered.

Think about this: These towns and villages were Jewish villages. These were the chosen people of God. These were the ones who were prepared for the Messiah. Jesus shows up, God in the flesh. He is the Messiah, and he teaches of the coming kingdom in these towns and villages. They see him with their physical eyes. They hear him teach audibly with their ears. They see his miracle-working ministry, and yet they reject him.

Jesus says, "It's going to be better for Tyre and Sidon on the last day." Those are coastal cities where pagans lived, Gentile areas. He said, "If they had seen what you saw, they would have repented a long time ago."

He makes the statement here, "Woe." It's a term of rebuke because these people had seen Jesus. These 72 followers are going to go out, and for those who reject the work of the Lord, Jesus says judgment is coming.

Here's the big lesson he's teaching that leads up to the prayer in verse 21. I want you to take this away with you, and it has a little bit to do with what he prays in verse 21: The greater the revelation, the greater the

accountability.

You do understand that, right? Jesus would say it like this: "To whom much is given, much is required." The more you have, the more you've got to answer for.

From a spiritual standpoint, let's pull it into the here and now. Do you realize the weight simply because you live here in the West, in Houston, Texas? You come to church. You're listening to the Word of God spoken in a language you can understand. You've got a copy of God's Word, for the most part, in your lap or on your phone. Some of you grew up in church and have been coming to church services for years and years. You can check off the list that you've been to VBS and that you've been to camp.

Do you realize the revelation you have as compared to some people in the world? There's an accountability with that. The greater the revelation, the greater the judgment. The more you know, the more access you have, the more you had better do something with it. The stakes are raised.

What Jesus is going to do in just a moment is pray and thank the Father for hiding the things of the kingdom from the wise and understanding. The wise and understanding are not the brightest and the brilliant. When he speaks of the wise and understanding, he would be speaking to me and you - the ones with the greatest revelation who aren't able to see it. That's a dangerous thing.

Look at what happens next. We don't know how much time passes between the sending out of the 72 and when they come back. Was it two days? Was it two months? We don't know. But in this story, it follows in verse 17:

The seventy-two returned with joy, saying, "Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name!"

— Luke 10:17

I love that. It makes the Bible human, you know, because that's exactly what I would have been highlighting and bragging about. "Man, we went out, and the demons were doing what we were telling them to do!" They're rejoicing.

But look at what Jesus says:

I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven.

— Luke 10:18

Some teach that Jesus is referring to eternity past, before creation, when Satan fell in his pride and was cast down to the ground. Others believe he's speaking of exactly what he just witnessed. The 72 have gone out. They've proclaimed the kingdom. Demons have been cast out. People have been healed of their diseases. The King's kingdom is here, and Jesus sees it. He sees that the enemy, the ruler of this world, is losing his grip and will ultimately be defeated forever at the cross.

Then he says:

Behold, I have given you authority to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall hurt you.

— Luke 10:19

This is just Jesus' way of saying that his followers are going to have victory over the forces of darkness. Then he says:

Nevertheless, do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.

— Luke 10:20

See, he doesn't crush their rejoicing. He just redirects it. They were rejoicing in what they had done: "The demons are subject to us!"

Jesus is saying, "Hey, watch where you get your joy from, okay? Because next time I send you out, what if the demons don't come out when you tell them to? If joy is dependent on you, this isn't going to go very far."

Joy needs to be based on the Lord. He says, "Rejoice in what God has done. Rejoice in the fact that your names are written in heaven." Jesus redirects where they're getting their joy from - not in what they have done, but in what God has done.

Then he breathes out this prayer:

I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will.

— Luke 10:21

Remember our sermon in a sentence: Spirit-led prayer shapes us to trust the Lord.

Spirit-Led People Are Thankful People

Let's work this out. First of all, I want you to notice that this is a prayer of thanksgiving. Notice those first three words: "Father, I thank you."

It's amazing to me that, of the seven or eight prayers we get, depending on how you count, one of them is a prayer of thanksgiving.

We're talking about Spirit-led prayer and being a Spirit-led person. Spirit-led people are grateful people. They're thankful people.

Yesterday we had our First Saturday Prayer, and there were a number of us in the chapel praying. We prayed through Colossians chapter 3. Twice in Colossians chapter 3, we're told to be thankful, and we spent some time just praying that we would be a thankful people.

Spirit-filled people are thankful people.

Listen to the psalmist in Psalm 50, starting in verse 8, speaking of thanksgiving:

*Not for your sacrifices do I rebuke you;
your burnt offerings are continually before me.
I will not accept a bull from your house
or goats from your folds.
For every beast of the forest is mine,
the cattle on a thousand hills.
I know all the birds of the hills,
and all that moves in the field is mine.*

*If I were hungry, I would not tell you,
for the world and its fullness are mine.
Do I eat the flesh of bulls
or drink the blood of goats?*

Offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving.

The one who offers thanksgiving as his sacrifice glorifies me.

— Psalm 50:8-14, 23

God's saying, "You're making all these sacrifices. You're coming to me and giving me all these acts of worship, if you will, laying your sacrifices down. Let me tell you what I want: Offer to me a sacrifice of thanksgiving."

You want to glorify the Lord? Offer sacrifices of thanksgiving.

Remember Andrew Murray? The first week, we talked about *With Christ in the School of Prayer*, a Christian classic on growing and having a vibrant prayer life. He says this: "Thanksgiving will draw our hearts out to God and keep us engaged with him."

In other words, what he's saying is that if you want intimacy with the Father that is free-flowing, be a person who is thankful. Have a heart of gratitude.

Let me tell you what will cut off the flow of the Spirit in your life, where you can't be Spirit-led: cynicism and self.

Murray is just echoing what Paul said in 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18:

Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

— 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

"Rejoice always." He's looking at the life of Christ. This was Jesus, rejoicing in the Spirit.

"Pray without ceasing." That was Jesus. He just breathed out the prayer - a life of prayer.

What kind of prayer was it? A prayer of thanksgiving. "Give thanks in all circumstances, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you."

I just think it's awesome that when we read about Jesus, he's rejoicing in the Spirit and breathing out a prayer of thanksgiving.

I think oftentimes we think of Jesus and Christianity as the place where joy goes to die. God's some cosmic killjoy, never having any fun. If you're having fun, he's ready to stamp that out. Everything is sacred. Everything is serious. "No joy for you," all right? "No soup for you. No joy for you." We think that's how God is.

In 1973, there was an artist by the name of Willis Wheatley. He took his pen and sketched out a picture of Jesus, a concept of what Jesus may have looked like. When he released it, it took the world by storm.

The reason it took the world by storm is because no one had ever, up to this point, drawn an image of Jesus that looked like this. The title of the sketch is **Christ the Liberator**, but it became known as **The Laughing Christ**.

Again, think about it: Every artist's rendering we've ever seen of Jesus is like halo, serious, 1970s rock Jesus, you know? And here he is laughing, full of joy, full of thanksgiving.

Thanking the Father for Who He Is

Now notice in this prayer what Jesus is thankful for, because we're learning to pray like Jesus. We've got to look at what he prayed for and how he prayed - rejoicing in the Spirit, thankful. But what does he thank God for?

First, he thanks the Father for who he is. He thanks God for his character. Look at the first part of verse 21:

In that same hour he rejoiced in the Holy Spirit and said, "I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth."

— Luke 10:21

This is relationship right here, the same as the Lord's Prayer: "Father." Intimacy.

Remember, we said that, for Jesus, prayer wasn't a box to check. It was a life to share.

This is who God is. "I'm thanking you, God. You are my Father." There's that picture of intimacy. But then he describes him as "Lord of heaven and earth."

It's not just relationship. Again, it's just like in the Lord's Prayer. In Luke chapter 11, it's going to be the disciples' prayer. This is where Luke records the Lord's Prayer as the disciples' prayer. It begins the same way: "Father."

"Who art in heaven, hallowed be your name." Then where does it go? It goes from relationship to rule: "Your kingdom come, your will be done."

That's exactly how Jesus is praying. He says, "You are the Lord of heaven and earth."

Just think about what Jesus is praying in this. He's thanking God for his character. It's awesome to have a sovereign who is over the affairs of this world and over the affairs of our lives, but it's only awesome if we have a relationship with that sovereign. If there's a problem, we can talk with him. We can bring our desires to him. We can bring our requests to him.

Jesus, in teaching us to pray, says, "You've got both. You've got a loving Father who is sovereign over the

universe."

Tim Keller put it like this: "The only person who dares wake up a king at 3:00 a.m. for a glass of water is a child." I would say his child, all right?

We have that kind of access. We have a King we can go to at any time. This is the relationship we have.

Thanking the Father for How He Works

Jesus thanks the Father for who he is, and then he thanks him for how he works. He thanks him for his character - Lord of heaven and earth, sovereign - and he thanks him for his ways.

Look at the second part of verse 21:

You have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will.

— Luke 10:21

What are these hidden things? I would classify them as principles from the upside-down kingdom, if you will.

Here's what I mean by that: He's rejoicing in the fact that 72 unknowns went out there and advanced the kingdom. He's rejoicing in the upside-down kingdom and how God works. It's different from the world, right? God uses the foolishness of this world to shame the wise. He uses the weak to shame the strong.

Think about the upside-down kingdom. This is what Jesus is saying: "God, I thank you that you don't operate the way the world operates."

Who did he come to free? He came to give freedom to the poor.

Think about the Sermon on the Mount. Blessed are the poor. Blessed are those who mourn, those who are heartbroken. Blessed are the hungry, those who have to depend on God and are utterly dependent. God raises them up.

This is the upside-down economics of the kingdom, right? If you want to be first, what do you have to do? Go last. If you want to be exalted, what do you have to do? You have to humble yourself. If you want to save your life, you have to lose it. Love your enemies. Bless those who curse you.

What Jesus is praying for in this prayer is that he's thanking the Lord for how he operates and that he operates totally differently from how this world operates. He values what the world doesn't value, and Jesus is thanking his Father for this.

We read this passage a lot, Isaiah 55:8-9. The Lord speaks through the prophet Isaiah:

*For my thoughts are not your thoughts,
neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord.
For as the heavens are higher than the earth,
so are my ways higher than your ways*

and my thoughts than your thoughts.

— Isaiah 55:8-9

Spirit-led prayer shapes us to trust the Lord.

I remind you in this moment that prayer isn't just us talking to God. It's a relationship we share. The power of prayer is what God does in us, through us, and to us as we seek him in prayer.

Spirit-led prayer, what Jesus is doing here, slows us down long enough that, when we get in the prayer room, we acknowledge that he's our Father. We acknowledge that he's sovereign over the affairs of this world and over our lives. We acknowledge, "God, your ways are not my ways. You're bigger than me."

It's in that act of prayer that God, by the Holy Spirit, shapes us to trust him.

This is where we get to know God. You'll never trust in someone you don't know.

I've used this illustration before, but when my girls were little, we didn't turn them over to be babysat by just the person who had the best resume. We cared way more about this question: Do we know the person who's babysitting them?

Psalms chapter 9, verse 10:

And those who know your name put their trust in you.

— Psalm 9:10

"Those who know your name put their trust in you."

How do we know the name of God? He's not talking about knowing it intellectually here. This is an experiential knowledge. We get to the prayer closet, and it's in prayer that the Holy Spirit shapes us to trust in him.

Lord, Let Your Holy Spirit Shape Me

It's a reality, isn't it? Let's be honest. There are some in this room who, when we're talking about rejoicing in the Spirit, aren't at a place in life right now where you're rejoicing at all. You don't sense any joy in your heart.

We're talking about thanking the Lord for who he is, for his character, and for how he works. If you're honest, there's no gratitude in your heart because you're looking at the character of God and thinking, "He's not being faithful to me right now."

You're not thankful at all. You're looking at the situation you're going through, whatever you're up against. You're not thanking the Lord for his ways because you don't agree with them: the job loss, the diagnosis, the death of a loved one, a wayward son or daughter, a wayward grandson or granddaughter.

What do you do when there's not joy like Jesus? When there's not a heart of gratitude like Jesus? What do you do?

Turn to Luke 11, one chapter over. Luke 11 is all about prayer. The disciples' prayer is up top. He then gives a

parable on prayer: Don't give up in praying. Keep asking, keep seeking, keep knocking.

It culminates in verses 9 through 13:

And I tell you, ask, 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.

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?

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!

— Luke 11:9-13

Those verbs are in continuous action: Keep seeking. Keep knocking. Keep going.

If you're here this morning and there is no joy, and you're having a hard time thanking God for who he is and how he works, you know what you do? You get to the prayer closet and say, "God, I need more of your Holy Spirit."

Make this your prayer: "Lord, let your Holy Spirit shape me more and more."

That's the challenge. That's the application.

I want you to keep doing the 10-minute challenge. Keep working it out, praying through the Lord's Prayer one minute at a time, sitting in God's presence, and thinking about your relationship with him.

Here's the only thing I want you to add to it this week: After you have sat with the Lord, I want you to breathe out this prayer and sit in his presence for another minute or two: "Lord, let your Holy Spirit shape me more and more."

God's Spirit shapes you in silence and solitude, with the Scripture open before you. You bring to the Lord your needs: "God, I don't understand what you're doing, but I want to thank you for who you are and for how you work. Give me more of your Holy Spirit. Shape me."

It's in that prayer that God will begin to form you and shape you to trust in him more and to see things from his perspective. It might not happen that day. It might not happen the next day. But you keep getting in there, and just watch what God does.

Amen?

Amen. Amen.

All right, let's pray together. Heads are bowed, eyes are closed. Let's pray.