

GOD IS NOT A SLEEPY FRIEND
Luke 11:1-13

The disciples watched and waited as Jesus prayed. When he finished, one of them said, “Lord, John the Baptist taught his disciples how to pray. Will you teach us to pray?” This is the occasion of the text. Everything Jesus says in verses 2-13 is a response to this request in verse 1. Before we study the Lord’s instructions, let us consider the disciple’s request.

This request was made after the disciples observed Jesus in prayer. The repeated references to the prayer life of Jesus in Luke’s Gospel alone make it clear that Jesus was a man of prayer. The Lord’s example moved and motivated the disciples. It should have the same effect on us. One of the primary reasons you and I should pray is because Jesus prayed. Jesus is the blending of deity and humanity, the meeting place of time and eternity, the intersection between earth and heaven. Yet Jesus prayed. If Jesus felt it necessary to pray, how much more do we need to pray?

Likewise, this request was made to Jesus. If you want to develop a skill, wisdom will lead you to consult a qualified expert. Jesus is the expert on prayer. Being fully human, Jesus knows how to offer prayer. Being fully divine, Jesus knows how to answer prayer. The best place to learn to pray is the feet of Jesus.

Also notice the uniqueness of the request itself. **Luke 11:1** is the only place where the disciples asked Jesus to teach them anything. They did not ask him to learn to preach or perform miracles. In **Luke 9-10**, Jesus sent the disciples out to preach and do miracles. But they still needed to learn how to pray. Prayer is one of the hardest things to learn in your walk with Christ. It is one of the most difficult things to learn, because it is one of the most important things to learn.

Notice the manner in which this request is made: “Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples.” There is no record of John teaching his disciples how to pray. But this statement is sufficient to conclude he did. Rabbis customarily taught their disciples to pray. He would teach his way of praying. The disciples probably expected Jesus to teach them the “Jesus formula” of prayer. It was the right request from the wrong perspective. In response, Jesus does not teach a technique. He teaches them a truth: **GOD ANSWERS PRAYER**. This is arguably the most important lesson you can learn about prayer. God answers prayer. God is not a sleepy friend. God meets his children’s needs through believing prayer. How then should we pray?

I. PRAY WITH REVERENCE FOR GOD.

Luke 11:2-4 records what we commonly call **THE LORD’S PRAYER**. It is the Lord’s Prayer in that he taught it, not that he prayed it. Jesus could not have prayed this prayer, because he never committed any sin that would require forgiveness. This passage closely parallels the Lord’s Prayer as recorded in **THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT** in **Matthew 6:9-13**. But this version is given in direct response to the disciple’s request

that Jesus teach them to pray. In this context, it teaches us that the God who answers prayer is God. So we must pray with reverence for God. The Model Prayer teaches us to pray God-sized, God-centered, and God-exalting prayers.

A. PRAY DIRECTLY TO GOD.

Verse 2 says, “When you pray, say: “Father...” Some translations carry the words of **Matthew 6:9** here and read, “Our Father in heaven.” But literally, verse 2 teaches us to address God simply as “Father.” “Our Father in heaven” emphasizes both the immanence and transcendence of God. “Father” emphasizes the immanence or nearness of God. **ST. TERESA OF AVILA** confessed that she found it hard to get past this first word of the Lord’s Prayer. She viewed it as a lovely land she never wanted to leave. We, too, ought to be awed by the wonderful privilege of prayer. You and I get to talk directly to God about our needs – not a priest, not a patron saint, not a guardian angel. And we do not have to pray like a desperate beggar asking a rich stranger for a big favor. We do not have to pray like a guilty criminal asking a stern judge for a lenient sentence. We do not have to pray like a servant without rank asking a master without mercy for a favor without assurance. We can come to God as little children going to a caring father.

Israel had many names for God. But they rarely addressed God as “Father.” In contrast, Jesus did not teach his disciples the Old Testament names for God. He taught us to address God directly as Father. Jesus can authorize us to pray this way because his blood and righteousness make intimate communion with God possible. **Hebrews 4:14-16** says: “Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”

B. PRAY ABOUT THINGS THAT WILL BRING GLORY TO GOD.

In THE MODEL PRAYER, Jesus rebukes prayer that rushes into God’s presence with a grocery list of personal requests. The glory of God must come before our wants and needs. God’s name and God’s kingdom should be our top priority. Prayer is about God accomplishing his will on earth, not your will in heaven. **James 4:3** warns: “You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions.” Selfish prayer dishonors God. To pray effectively you must pray about things that bring glory to God. We ought to pray God’s name to be hallowed and God’s kingdom to come. Prayer is not about prayer. It’s about God. Prayer is about God’s glory, not mine.

In a sermon on the model prayer, HADDON ROBINSON recalls playing with his children. He would put coins in his fist. And they would sit on his lap and work to get his fingers open. Once a finger was open, it couldn’t be closed again. So they would work until they got the pennies from his hand. Then they would jump down and run away, filled with joy over the pennies they won.

Sometimes we only come to God for the pennies in his hand. But more important than the pennies in God's hands is the hand of God himself. That's what prayer is all about.

C. PRAY AS IF EVERYTHING DEPENDS ON GOD.

In the opening petitions of the model prayer, Jesus rebukes prayer that rushes into God's presence with a grocery list of requests. But that does not mean your personal requests do not matter to God. The latter petitions of the model prayer make it clear that you can bring your requests to God in prayer. You can pray about your personal needs: "Give us each day our daily bread." You can pray about your past sins: "and forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone who is indebted to us." You can pray about your future trials: "And lead us not into temptation." Furthermore, these petitions teach us how to pray about personal matters. We are to pray as if everything depends on God. For instance, we are to pray as if we believe we will not eat our next meal without God. This is not a license for you to be slothful in your work, unrepentant in your sins, or carefree in your lifestyle. **VANCE HAVNER** said it well: "God feeds the birds. But he does not put food in their nests." You are responsible for what God has made you responsible. Work as if everything depends on you. But pray as if everything depends on God.

II. PRAY WITH DEPENDENCE UPON GOD.

Verses 5-8 read: "And he said to them, 'Which of you who 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'" I tell you, though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, yet because of his impudence he will rise and give him whatever he needs." This parable of the midnight caller raises two questions about your prayer life.

A. DO YOU PRAY?

This is not the primary question this parable raises. But it is significant. When this man received an unexpected visit from his friend and had nothing to feed him, he knocked on his neighbor's door for bread. The fact that this man instinctively went to his neighbor's house with his problem confronts us with some important questions:

- When you have a problem that you cannot solve, do you pray about it?
- When there is a need you cannot meet, do you pray about it?
- When it is midnight in your life, do you pray about it?

The earliest African converts to Christianity were devoted to prayer. They would set specific spots in the field where they would pray. Soon the paths to these open prayer closets became distinctively marked. When any one neglected prayer, it would be apparent to others. The other would kindly remind him, "Brother, the grass grows on your path out yonder." Your prayer life is one of the primary expressions of your dependence upon God. Do not let the grass of prayerlessness grow where there ought to be the worn marks of your dependence upon God.

B. HOW DO YOU PRAY?

The word impudence in verse 8 unlocks the meaning of this parable. The KJV translates it "importunity." The NKJV and NASB translate it "persistence." The NIV translates it "boldness." Literally, the Greek word simply means "shamelessness." It was past midnight. The friend behind the locked door was in bed with his sleeping family. Common sense, good manners, and personal respect should have made this midnight caller leave when his sleepy friend told him no. But shamelessness made him keep knocking. He needed bread. It was late. The market was closed. His sleepy friend was the only one who could supply what he needed. So there was no shame in his game. It did not matter if he woke up everyone in town. He was determined to keep knocking until his sleepy friend opened the door and gave him the bread he needed.

This is how Jesus wants you to pray – shamelessly. Sinful pride murders believing prayer. You will not take prayer seriously if your heart and mind are looking for face-saving alternatives for getting your needs met. You cannot seek God's face and save your face at the same time. This man went to his neighbor's house for bread. He did not leave until he had the bread he needed. His sleepy friend told him no in no uncertain terms. But this man kept knocking until his sleepy friend gave him what he needed. The point is made by way of contrast. God is the anti-hero in the parable. God is not a sleepy friend. If a sleepy friend will meet the need to get back to sleep, how much more will our God – who neither slumbers nor sleeps – meet your needs. **MATTHEW HENRY** said it well: "We prevail with men by importunity because they are displeased with it, but with God because he is pleased with it."

A woman went to a neighbor's produce stand to buy grapes. She stood in line, as the farmer waited on other customers. The line was long and each person received special attention. When the woman got to the head of the line, she ordered her grapes. But the farmer did not immediately fill the order. He took her produce basket and walked away. Having to wait again, the woman began to fume, thinking about how the farmer had taken care of the strangers in front of her. Her smoldering anger was doused, however, by the farmer's explanation as he returned with the basket full of beautiful, perfectly ripened grapes. "I know I kept you waiting," the farmer said, "but I needed the time to get you the very best."

How long have you been in line waiting on God to get to your request? Whatever you do, don't get out of line! Don't allow your heart to become angry, bitter, or worried as you wait on God. Keep praying and waiting on God. God knows and God cares. And God will give you what is best. Don't stop praying!

III. PRAY WITH CONFIDENCE IN GOD.

Verses 9-13 teaches us to pray with confidence that God is able and willing to answer prayer.

A. PRAY WITH CONFIDENCE THAT GOD IS ABLE.

In verse 9, Jesus says, “I tell you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.” The verbs – ask, seek, knock – are imperatives. Jesus is not recommending prayer. Jesus commands us to pray. These imperatives are in the present tense, which denotes continual action. We are to keep asking, keep seeking, keep knocking. Pray until you get an answer. Pray until something happens. Pray until it is given, found, or opened. Jesus does not specify what we should ask for, what we should seek, or what door we should knock on. He leaves the prayer requests open and optional to teach that you can pray about anything and everything. **WARREN WIERSBE** comments: “Effective prayer is the provision for every need and the solution for every problem.”

WHAT A FRIEND WE HAVE IN JESUS
ALL OUR SINS AND GRIEFS TO BEAR
WHAT A PRIVILEGE IT IS TO CARRY
EVERYTHING TO GOD IN PRAYER

Asking, seeking, and knocking will be rewarded with gifts, discovery, and welcome. In fact, Jesus guarantees that your prayers will be answered in Verse 10: “For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened.” Does this mean every prayer will be answered? Yes and no. No, every prayer will not be answered the way you want it to be. But this is not bad news. If you are like me, you have asked God for things that seemed to be so important and urgent at the time. But as you look back, you recognize how foolish, shortsighted, and unnecessary your requests were. Some of us should praise God for the prayers he did not answer the way we wanted him to. Yet, God answers prayer - even when he doesn’t answer it the way you want him to. **WILLIAM BARCLAY** wrote: “There is no such thing as unanswered prayer. The answer given may not be the answer we desired or expected; but even when it is a refusal, it is the answer of the love and wisdom of God.”

B. PRAY WITH CONFIDENCE THAT GOD IS WILLING.

Jesus makes his final point with two rhetorical questions about how fathers deal with their children. Verses 11-12 says: “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?” These questions assume a negative answer. No caring father would respond to his son’s hunger cries in such a cruel, negligent, and harmful way. To do so would be both child abuse and child endangerment. He would give him fish and bread, not a serpent or a scorpion. In fact, he would give him five loaves and two fish if he could.

Jesus closes this lesson on prayer by arguing from the lesser to the greater. Verse 13 says, “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!” When Jesus calls his disciples evil, he asserts the pervasive nature of remaining sin. At our best, we are still corrupted by sin and polluted with selfishness. But despite the evil within us, we know how to take care of our children. In contrast, there is absolutely no evil whatsoever in God the Father. And if we who are evil know how to give good gifts to our children, how much more will God take care of the blood-adopted children.

Matthew 7:11 says that God gives good gifts. But **Luke 11:13** specifies one of his best gifts: “how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him?” Jesus made this statement before his atoning death on the cross, before his glorious resurrection from the dead, and before his permanent gift of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. We who live and believe in Christ on this side of these redemptive milestones have already received the gift of the Holy Spirit. And we do not need to pray to receive the Holy Spirit. **Romans 8:9b** says, “Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him.” If you do not have the Holy Spirit, you are not saved. But if you are saved, the Holy Spirit is already there. If you have been born-again, you have all of the Holy Spirit you are going to get. But the Holy Spirit is still trying to get all of you. He wants to fill us with his peace, wisdom, and strength, so that we may resist temptation, live obediently, and even endure hardship. And we can ask for the Spirit’s help that we might be and do all that the Father designed us to be in Christ.