

Proper 12: July 24-25, 2022 - Luke 11:1-13 **Lord, Teach Us How to Pray**

Brothers and sisters in Christ, children of our Heavenly Father, whom God invites to pray.

What if I'm not as bold as Abraham? I'm less than dust and ashes. How often do I even think of the well-being of strangers, let alone my own family? What if I'm not as righteous as Elijah, that I could pray and stop rain from falling? What if I'm not as committed and faithful as the early Christians? They were *constantly* gathered around the Word and sacraments, fellowship and prayer. My prayers have never gotten the sun to stand still. They've never brought someone back from the dead. How can my prayers be powerful? I'm not even sure that God hears me half the time.

What a crafty plan the devil has. If he can convince us that God doesn't listen to us, Satan gets us to drop one of the strongest weapons we have. Praise be to God that we have this teaching from Jesus in our Gospel today. The disciples may have had doubts like these. But they had spent enough time following their Lord to see *prayer*. To see bold requests. To see continual intercession with God. To see a man that routinely went out of His way to talk to His Father. And here today, we are reminded that God the Father is *our* good Father too. The best of all fathers wants what is best for us. So, He gives us good gifts - including prayer. He invites us to speak boldly to our Father according to His will. In response, He blesses us with grace upon grace.

What keeps you from praying? Here's one excuse: "It's just not built into my routine." Dig deeper. Think about how powerful this gift is. We have direct access to the almighty God on high. Day and night, in any situation, I know that He hears me and has promised to help me. The Psalms are full of this truth: **Psalm 116:1-2 I love the Lord, for he heard my voice; he heard my cry for mercy. Because he turned his ear to me, I will call on him as long**

as I live. Psalm 66:19-20 God has surely listened and has heard my prayer. Praise be to God, who has not rejected my prayer or withheld his love from me! If God doesn't withhold his love from me, why do I withhold my prayers from him? Why not make it a regular habit?

Perhaps I feel like a pesky neighbor at night. If I were better prepared for life's struggles, I wouldn't have to go bugging God for help. I should've had bread ready for my guest. I should've saved enough money to have an emergency fund. If I had taken better care of my body when I was younger, my health wouldn't be failing me now. Why didn't I listen to my wife's warnings when I was neglecting my family? After all these shortcomings, who am I to ask God for help in the hour of need? How can I come crawling to the holy God for forgiveness when I've been so wicked and rejected His ways? Even though He promises His love to me, what's there to love? I know we sing, "What a friend we have in Jesus!", but who wants a needy friend like me?

The devil isn't the only one who speaks of our weakness. God also knows that we are weak and lowly. But He doesn't use that to whisper lies telling us we don't deserve to pray so don't even bother! No, God speaks a loving invitation to call upon him in our distress. And on top of promising to hear us, He assures us that He won't roll His eyes or look the other way. He isn't the midnight friend reluctant to help in our need. Time and again, God puts us on His shoulders. Read through Psalm 145 and see the Lord's compassion, faithfulness, and goodness to all. When we hear God's promises to answer those who call on Him, the Spirit works in our hearts. Those words give life and ignite a burning faith. That faith will then fervently pray to the Lord.

Take that boldness of Abraham for example. Last week, we heard about the Lord visiting Abraham and promising a child to him

and his wife Sarah, even in their old age. Abraham could have outright dismissed this announcement; it certainly didn't make sense. But by the power of God's Word spoken to him, Abraham had faith. In that faith, Abraham trusted in the goodness of his Lord. So, later when he saw his nephew Lot's family in trouble in Sodom and Gomorrah, he knew he could pray boldly to the Lord. Abraham understood that he himself was dust and that he didn't deserve to address God. But with each approach, he also remembered who his *God* was - a God who loved the righteous and would not sweep them away.

When we speak God's promises back to him, we're not being needy or rude. God loves to hear us, and even more, He loves when we are focused on His words. When we pray like Abraham or like Moses, saying, "God, this is who I know you to be," that means we're speaking from a heart that knows the object of its faith well. That prayer comes from a believer connected to God through His Word, someone who has heard the one thing needful. That prayer is only so bold because it is on fire with the Spirit. When we ask God to help us, we are following His will. Rather than trusting in ourselves, we are casting our cares on Him who promises to uphold us. We don't glorify our own efforts and works, like a puffed-up Pharisee. Instead, we praise the works of the Lord done for our salvation.

Satan could make us feel timid about our prayers. But perhaps you are still confident enough to pray. Like the disciples at this point in their training, you already know that it is good to pray. So again, why isn't prayer a natural habit? When Jesus taught the Lord's Prayer during His Sermon on the Mount recorded in Matthew's Gospel, He spoke about how the hypocrites and pagans pray - out on street corners to be seen, or babbling on and on with many words. With these excessive shows, people think they will be heard better. That's not proper prayer.

Maybe you have the desire to pray but feel like you're praying the wrong way, or you don't know what to say. Or maybe you feel like, even when you do pray, you're wasting your breath. You think your prayers go unanswered, or you don't get the result you want. If God promises that everyone who asks receives, why don't I get whatever I pray for?

All these doubts could make us stop praying. Again, hear God's promises and be encouraged to keep on praying. Jesus says in Matthew, **Do not be like them, [the hypocrites and pagans], for your Father knows what you need *before* you ask him.** And the apostle Paul writes in his letter to the Romans, **the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express, and the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will.**

Our prayers don't need to be said with just the right words. They don't need to be done in a certain place. The Spirit wants us to pray in accordance with God's will. And through God's Word, He teaches us His will. In our epistle lesson today, we heard that God **wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.** And when we think we aren't heard or God isn't answering, God assures us that **He is not slow in keeping His promise. Instead He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.** So He sent His Son Jesus Christ to be the Savior and Mediator for all nations. We're right to doubt our worthiness when we approach God. We often pray according to our sinful will, or we doubt and hold back from praying in the time of need. We can't properly come to God on our own.

But Jesus became true man to be a ransom in our place and to make us righteous. He obeyed God's will fully - including by praying constantly, like in our Gospel account. As an author, Luke

the doctor typically highlights details of accounts. But here Luke begins, “*One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he finished, one of his disciples said to him...*” There’s no details of how much time had passed, where they were, or which disciple asked Jesus. The important thing to note was simply that Jesus prayed. He demonstrated confidence to go to the Father frequently and faithfully.

Jesus isn’t just a model of good prayer, but He is the very reason we can pray. A good friend recently reminded me that prayer isn’t simply conversation or communication *to* Jesus, but it’s a natural response *because of* Jesus and what He has done. By Jesus’ perfect obedience and innocent death, our relationship with God the Father has been restored. By God’s rich grace, we don’t come before His throne trembling in fear of a wrathful judge. We confidently and regularly come to our Father. We can pray to God like children come to their parents, looking up to them and seeking care and comfort. Jesus acknowledges how even the picture of human parents may fall flat here. Even though most parents, while sinful, know to respond to their children with good gifts, Jesus admits that they’re still evil. They have potential to do a good thing, but even these parents fail. But God our heavenly Father is surpassingly greater than any earthly caregiver. So, we have no hesitance to approach our heavenly Father. Because Jesus has made us righteous and given us the gift of the Holy Spirit, we are bold to ask the Father for the things we have inherited through Christ.

And Jesus lays out just what God wants us to have with His model prayer. We might feel like our prayers are constantly nagging God with undeserving requests - we ask and we ask. But all of the petitions of the Lord’s Prayer are God’s own words about the blessings He graciously gives us. **Father:** He wants a restored relationship with His children. **Hallowed be your name:** He longs for us to glorify His name as we learn about Him and all His

goodness. **Your kingdom come:** God seeks to bring more people into the kingdom of believers who will one day sit at His banquet. **Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven:** He gives us His will for guidance in our new lives of His righteousness. **Give us each day our daily bread:** The Father promises to satisfy our desires at the proper time and give us what our bodies need. **Forgive us our sins:** The Lord doesn’t keep a record against us but has far-removed our sins from us, hurling them into the depths of the sea. **And lead us not into temptation:** God doesn’t tempt anyone to sin but guides us on the right path. **But deliver us from evil:** The Lord has always wanted to free us from our enemies and from all danger. We can pray all these petitions with joy and confidence knowing these are gifts God already wants us to have. So we end, ascribing all power and glory to God and say, “Amen! Let it be so!”

Brothers and sisters in Christ, what a gift we have as renewed and redeemed children to come to our Father in prayer. Every time we faithfully come to God in prayer, we remember His words and His works for us. We see what God desires for us, and in faith, we seek the same. Because we have learned of His goodness throughout the Bible, we trust that God will hold to His love and give us what we ask for in prayer, because in faith we want what God promises. When we approach God as believers, we *are* praying boldly like Abraham, like Elijah, like Jesus. We are as righteous as Jesus because His life and death made us so. In Christ’s righteousness, we respond to God’s promises with fervent prayer, knowing the good that He wants for us, and trusting that we will receive it. Amen.