

This morning I am in the fourth week of a sermon series on the Lord's Prayer entitled "Lord, teach us to pray." This title comes from Luke 11:1:

Luke 11:1 - *One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he finished, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples."*

Evidently there was something about how Jesus prayed that piqued the disciples' curiosity and led them to ask Jesus to teach them how to pray. In response, Jesus taught them what has come to be known as the Lord's prayer. This morning, I want to read Matthew 6:5-13 again, pausing to remind us of what we've talked about the past few weeks, and then focusing on the phrase "Give us today our daily bread." The goal again is to understand what prayer is all about and become better at praying, that we might know God better.

Matthew 6:5-13 - *"And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. ⁶ But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.*

Prayer is not a show for others but communication with God.

⁷ *And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. ⁸ Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.*

Prayer is not a magic formula or technique. You can talk to God like you are talking to a friend

⁹ *"This, then, is how you should pray:
" 'Our Father in heaven,*

Jesus from the very beginning holds up the need for both reverence and intimacy in our relationship with God. God is the King in heaven, but He is also our Father. He is our Father, but He is also the king.

hallowed be your name,

When God invites us to praise Him, it is an invitation to enjoy Him. We talked about how beginning our praying with praising God for who He is, what He has done, and what He has promised truly puts everything else in the proper perspective.

¹⁰ *your kingdom come,
your will be done
on earth as it is in heaven.*

And last week we looked at Jesus' admonition to pray "your kingdom come, your will be done" and the call to submit our will and our control to His will and control, for that is where life to the fullest is found.

¹¹ Give us today **our daily bread**.

¹² Forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.

¹³ And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from the evil one.'

Give us today our daily bread. This morning we are up to asking God for things, what is known as petitionary prayer. **I would say that this is the main reason people pray after all** – we are sick and in need of healing, or unemployed and in need of a job, or going through relational crisis and asking for intervention. Many of you are probably left wondering why we ask an all-knowing God for things, and if there is a right way to ask that will lead Him to answering our prayers. So I think it is critical to pay attention to what Jesus has to say in this prayer and elsewhere about asking God for things, that we might do it well or do it effectively. I want to share three things we learn from this verse about asking God:

- 1) **We are beloved children asking our good and loving Father in heaven**

Remember that we start with intimacy and reverence. He is our Father in heaven. Jesus tells us that not to address God as a boss or king, but as our Father, our perfect and good Father who loves us perfectly.

1 John 3:1 - See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him.

According to Jesus in these short verses, we can ask for anything of our Father, from His kingdom to come to our daily bread. Large things and small things, spiritual things and material things. Our daily bread is not just about literal bread, but is an expression of asking God for our daily and hourly needs, because they matter to God our Father. This is because when we put our faith in Jesus, God the Father adopts us as His children, and now He loves us with the same love He has for His Son Jesus:

Romans 8:15–16 - *The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, “Abba, Father.”*¹⁶ *The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children.*

God is our good and loving Father. He loves us, and like any loving Father, He loves to give good gifts to His children.

James 1:16–17 - *Don’t be deceived, my dear brothers and sisters.*¹⁷ *Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.*

Every good and perfect gift, from our health to our dog to the flowers to the most delicious food. What would it look like to wake up to that reality, that anything good in our lives is an undeserved gift of His grace?

1 Corinthians 4:7 - *For who makes you different from anyone else? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as though you did not?*

Now, some of you may wonder whether or not prayer is even necessary, because doesn’t God know all things? Even though God knows everything, God desires an intimate relationship with us. Asking Him for things, sharing our heart’s needs with Him, deepens the relationship. As PT Forsyth wrote, “Love loves to be told what it already knows... It wants to be asked for what it longs to give.” As we speak what is on our hearts, we are sharing information that God is deeply interested in, because He loves us. And our prayers do affect God’s heart.

James 4:2 - *You do not have because you do not ask God.*

We are beloved children asking our good and loving Father in heaven for what we need, whether it is big or small. And because God is our Father who loves us and is good, we can approach Him boldly, with confidence. We don't need to be timid.

Hebrews 4:14–16 - Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. ¹⁵ For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin. ¹⁶ Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

The encouragement to pray “give us today our daily bread” is a call to depend daily upon our good and loving Father. It is a call to a life of trust and security in a God who loves you like a perfect Father and has unlimited resources to you're your needs. One of the great Christian biographies is of George Muller, a 19th century British pastor and founder and head of an orphanage in Bristol, England that housed over 10,000 children during his lifetime and established 117 schools to provide Christian education. His claim to fame was that he never once made a request for financial support, always praying to God to touch the hearts of donors to make provisions for the orphans. And God never let him down, and he never went into debt. Here is one example:

“The children are dressed and ready for school. But there is no food for them to eat,” the housemother of the orphanage informed George Mueller. George asked her to take the 300 children into the dining room and have them sit at the tables. He thanked God for the food and waited. George knew God would provide food for the children as he always did. Within minutes, a baker knocked on the door. “Mr. Mueller,” he said, “last night I could not sleep. Somehow I knew that you would need bread this morning. I got up and baked three batches for you. I will bring it in.” Soon, there was another knock at the door. It was the milkman. His cart had broken down in front of the orphanage. The milk would spoil by the time the wheel was fixed. He asked George if he could use some free milk. George smiled as the milkman brought in ten large cans of milk. It was just enough for the 300 thirsty children.”

So the first thing we need to know about asking God for things is that we are coming to our Father in heaven who is good and who loves us, so ask boldly.

- 2) We are beloved children asking our all-knowing and wise Father in heaven

He is our Father, and so He is good and He loves us. But He is our Father in HEAVEN, and so He is also all-knowing and wise.

Isaiah 55:8–9 - “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,” declares the LORD. ⁹ “As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.

He is the all-knowing and wise Father. And we, lest we forget, are children. Remember that children often ask for things that are not good for them. Children are short-sighted and self-centered. Parents see a bigger picture and have a longer view.

1 Corinthians 13:11–12 - When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put the ways of childhood behind me. ¹² For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.

This is one reason why, even though God loves us, He does not give us everything we have asked for. In our shortsightedness we ask for things that are not in our best interest or for the best interest of others or the world. Or maybe we ask for things that we are not yet ready for. Or sometimes our prayers are answered but we lack the eyes to see it, as God is giving us the deeper thing that we are really asking for, or in a longer time frame.

This is important to recognize, because we all struggle with unanswered prayer. As C.S. Lewis put it, “Every war, every famine or plague, almost every death-bed, is the monument to a petition that was not granted.” And it can be even more challenging to understand after you read words like this:

Mark 11:23–24 - “Truly I tell you, if anyone says to this mountain, ‘Go, throw yourself into the sea,’ and does not doubt in their heart but believes that what they say will happen, it will be done for them. ²⁴ Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.

It leaves you wondering why your prayers, which often seem so reasonable and in line with God’s heart, go seemingly unanswered. But as PT Forsyth said, “We shall come one day to a heaven where we shall gratefully know that God’s great refusals were sometimes the true answers to our truest prayers.”

God is good and loving, but also all-knowing and wise. And so, you hear the balance in this passage:

Matthew 7:7–11 – “Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. ⁸ For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened. ⁹ “Which of you, if your son asks for bread, will give him a stone? ¹⁰ Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? ¹¹ If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!

Ask, seek, knock. Do not be shy! **Ask boldly** for what it is you want or think you need. But **ask humbly**, knowing that you are a child, with a short-sighted, self-centered perspective, asking a heavenly Father who sees and knows everything and has a plan that involves more than just your life. As we submit our will and our control to His will and kingdom, we also submit our petitions to His wise and loving decision. After all, remember that even Jesus experienced unanswered prayer.

Matthew 26:39 – Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, “My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will.”

So we are beloved children asking our good and loving Father in heaven, so ask BOLDLY. And we are also asking our all-knowing and wise Father in heaven, so ask HUMBLY. Finally:

3) We are beloved children asking our HOLY Father in heaven

God is holy. That means that He is not like us. He is perfect in every way. He is the beginning and the end, the creator and Lord, the one around whom everything revolves, who has the power to give life and take life. Why does this matter when it comes to our praying?

First of all, it means that God will not be treated like a magic genie or an ATM machine or a game that can be hacked if you can figure out the right words to say. Do not approach God like you are the one in charge and He is your servant. There are all kinds of blasphemous approaches to prayer out there, none more than the prosperity gospel, the name-it-claim-it approach to God where people command things as if they are God and God is their servant who needs to do their bidding.

Some of you may remember during COVID, a pastor named Kenneth Copeland commanding COVID-19 to cease and blowing it away. Needless to say, he failed because He is not God, nor is He a little God, or anything like that. God is God, and we are not. He is holy, and approaching him like He is an ATM and then shaking him when we insert our prayer and the answer we want doesn't come out is just wrong. Can you imagine a child asking for candy, not receiving it, and then changing his tone to a command? God will not be used by us. We ask boldly, but we ask humbly and with reverence, for He is a holy God.

Secondly, it means that our holiness, our character, matters greatly to the effectiveness of our prayers. For example:

James 4:2–3 - You desire but do not have, so you kill. You covet but you cannot get what you want, so you quarrel and fight. You do not have because you do not ask God. ³ When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.

God is holy, and calls us to be holy, which means to be set apart, to be like Him, to not be like the world. There are many reasons for unanswered prayer, but one is most certainly that our sin has ruptured our fellowship with God and dulled our spiritual sensitivities, and so we are asking for things that are not in line with His heart and His will. For example:

1 Peter 3:7 - Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers.

Do you hear what Peter is saying? If you are mistreating your wife, do not expect to gain an audience with God. After all, she is His daughter, and a good Father will not tolerate his daughter being mistreated!

God is holy, and when we are asking a holy God, we should take heed to our own character. **After all, if He has been telling you specific things that you need to stop doing or start doing, and you have been ignoring Him, that will impact your prayer life.** If He has told you that you are living in sexual sin, or stealing, or lying, or committing injustices daily, or gossiping, or anything else, and you are ignoring Him, do not expect much impact from your prayer life. You are dulling your sensitivity to God by your disobedience. Stop ignoring Him, and start obeying Him today.

Hebrews 3:7–8 - So, as the Holy Spirit says: “Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as you did in the rebellion, during the time of testing in the wilderness.

One of the most incredible promises Jesus ever made was this:

John 14:12–14 - Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. ¹³ And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. ¹⁴ You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.

He says that we will do greater things than Him. He says that He will do whatever we ask **IN HIS NAME**. What does that mean? This does not mean tacking on “In Jesus’ name” at the end of every prayer. It means praying according to His character, His person. The more that we become like Jesus, the more we will ask for things in line with His character. And then, the more we will see God answer our prayer. It’s like Jesus said in Matthew 6:25-34:

Matthew 6:25–34 - “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? ²⁶ Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? ²⁷ Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life? ²⁸ “And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. ²⁹ Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. ³⁰ If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? ³¹ So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ ³² For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. ³³ But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. ³⁴ Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.”

You concern yourself with my kingdom, with loving me, loving others, living generously making disciples, bringing my justice to the world, and just watch how I will provide for you. Just watch what adventure your life will become.

Yes, you have a lot of things to ask God for. You can ask boldly, because He is loving and good. You can ask humbly, because He is all-knowing and wise. But you can also ask like Jesus, because He is holy. Seek His kingdom, let Him change your priorities, and you will see God answer your prayers.