

Natalie W. Bell
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Praying for You
Luke 11:1-13

Jesus was praying in a certain place, and after he had finished, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples." ² He said to them, "When you pray, say:

Father,^[a] hallowed be your name.

Your kingdom come.^[b]

³ *Give us each day our daily bread.^[c]*

⁴ *And forgive us our sins,*

for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us.

And do not bring us to the time of trial."^[d]

Perseverance in Prayer

⁵ *And he said to them, "Suppose one of you has a friend, and you go to him at midnight and say to him, 'Friend, lend me three loaves of bread; ⁶ for a friend of mine has arrived, and I have nothing to set before him.' ⁷ And he answers from within, 'Do not bother me; the door has already been locked, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot get up and give you anything.' ⁸ I tell you, even though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, at least because of his persistence he will get up and give him whatever he needs.*

⁹ *"So I say to you, Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. ¹⁰ For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. ¹¹ Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for^[e] a fish, will give a snake instead of a fish? ¹² Or if the child asks for an egg, will give a scorpion? ¹³ 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^[f] to those who ask him!"*

Have you ever had **problems praying?** Ever have **doubts** about your prayers?

Do you ever wonder---whether it **works?**

Whether God is **listening?**

Whether you are using the **right words?**

What part makes you most **nervous** about prayer?

Do you ever feel **that** your problems are too big or too small?

I think we've ***ALL had our doubts*** about prayer!

And we are ***ALL children of God***.

able to call upon God, and Jesus and the Holy Spirit,

With ANY words, requests, or praise,

ANYTHING for ourselves, or others.

But ***we don't always believe that***, or feel that way, do we?

How and when do you usually pray right now?

Do you remember ***learning*** to pray?

Or when you learned the ***Lord's Prayer***?

What if the ***Lord's Prayer can help us*** with our prayer doubts and problems?

It might sound strange,

because for many people that prayer is ***so familiar***,

it's kind of like driving somewhere for the millionth time, and not remembering how you got there!

We get so used to saying the words each week, that we no longer think about what we're saying, right?

But what if we ***look again*** at the Lord's Prayer?

It is the prayer that millions have memorized.

That unites us with every follower of Jesus Christ!

For all of us who have ***wondered if we said the right thing*** in a public prayer, ***the Lord's prayer is a help! (and a good prayer to use!)***

It's ***simple, straightforward, and honest!***

Some people might even say it's a bit ***pushy***,

because it doesn't even have the word, ***PLEASE*** in it!

It just says to God: ***Give me, Forgive me, Deliver me!***

This simple prayer—

Was Jesus' answer to his disciples when they asked how to pray.

It's so ***honest and real***—because it reminds us of ***our need*** for God.

This little prayer is **powerful—without heaping up empty words** designed to make other people think we know what we're talking about!

Jesus **warns about 'prayers for show'**

in his Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 6: 7-8:

⁷ *"When you are praying, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do; for they think that 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.*

That's the preamble for the Lord's Prayer in Matthew!

The Lord's prayer is definitely **not for show**.

It's simple, and brief!

It **acknowledges who God is, and who we are,**

And it has **three** main requests:

For God's **provision, forgiveness, and deliverance.**

And it's not just about us and God.

It really follows the **Great Commandment**—

to love God and our neighbors as ourselves.

It guides our relationship to God, and to one another.

It says: *Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors---*

In other words---forgive our sins, as we forgive those who have hurt us.

The Lord's prayer is also great,
because it's in the **context of a relationship.**

Even if you feel distant from God,

When you pray this prayer, **you are entering a relationship** with God.

You are **talking as one of God's kids.**

Just like I was telling the kids today,

when it says **"Our Father"** that original word **Abba, means Daddy.**

Think about that for a minute.

What do you call God when you pray?

We all have different names, and that's ok!

The point is to use a **name** for God

that draws you into a **closer relationship!**

Which brings us to the **strange parable** in Luke 11.

It's a story about hospitality:

“Suppose one of you has a friend, and you go to him at midnight and say to him, ‘Friend, lend me three loaves of bread; ⁶for a friend of mine has arrived, and I have nothing to set before him.’ ⁷And he answers from within, ‘Do not bother me; the door has already been locked, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot get up and give you anything.’ ⁸I tell you, even though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, at least because of his persistence he will get up and give him whatever he needs.

Now, we need to know the **context**.

In Ancient Near Eastern culture, **hospitality was next to godliness!**

If someone arrived at your home, it was **expected** that you would feed them, or at least give them bread, regardless of the hour!

Jesus is basically saying---**we need to approach God**

like we would a friend in the night, seeking what we need!

And God is even more ready to help than a friend!

Let that soak in for a minute—because all too often we call upon **people** before, or more than, we call upon **God!**

Jesus also tells us **how** to talk to God—with **persistence!**

We need to **keep praying, and never give up! To Ask, Seek, Knock!!!**

Luke emphasizes this even more in chapter 18 when Jesus tells the parable of the **widow and the judge**—who finally grants her justice, because she won't quit bothering him! She is relentless.

So, he responds to her persistence!

Just like God responds to ours!

But it's **not easy to be persistent**, is it?

I have some prayers I have been praying, literally for years, decades, and they appear to be unanswered---so, I just keep on praying.

Jesus says we **should be persistent--We should**

ASK, SEEK, and KNOCK!

But what about when we ask, seek, and knock—
and it seems like God is not giving, no one is to be found, and no one is answering
the door??

What do we do with that?

Well, there's not an easy answer to that.

There are times when it seems like God isn't *listening*, or God doesn't *care*,
or God has *better things to do!*

None of which is true.

And **everyone**—including all the saints—
has experienced some frustration with prayer.

Even Mother Teresa had doubts and struggles, for much of her life!

Most people get upset with unanswered prayers, or prayers not answered the
way we are seeking, asking and knocking!

Jesus *doesn't say that we will get EXACTLY* what we are asking for--

And we're told throughout scripture that God's *ways* are not our own.

God's *mind* is not like ours.

God's sense of *time* is not ours.

There is some *mystery* about what God does with our prayers,

Especially if we are expecting to ask for something—and voila! Receive it!

Sometimes prayer is *far deeper* than that.

It's much like a *relationship with a loved one*—especially a loving parent or
mentor or friend.

We may ask, seek and knock—and *not get exactly* what we want.

Why?

They may *know better* about what we really need, right?

How much *more so with God!*

The truth is, prayer is about *relationship*, and sometimes we would prefer it was
more like God the genie in a bottle—where we pray, and automatically receive.

Pastor Cynthia Jarvis wrote:

If we pray, we will find ourselves in conversation with a friend

Who knows our every weakness, because he himself has cried out in anguish...

*A God who will **come after us** when we are **lost**,
Dine with us when we are cast out...
Welcome us home when we have wasted our lives,
Who **keeps us from falling** too far...
We can talk to God, through thick or thin, come hell or high water, no holds
barred, because **nothing** in all creation...
will be able to **silence the Word that answers our prayers, IN HIS FLESH.**
Cynthia Jarvis, Feasting on the Word, Year C, Vol.3, pg. 290.*

Think about that—

What does it mean to you that Jesus answers our prayers---in Himself?

That our awesome God is not distant or aloof,

That God responds to our prayers,

Or Jesus wouldn't have taught us to pray!

Jesus wouldn't have **prayed so much in his own life**, right?

Jesus is our model for a life of prayer.

He prayed before every major event or decision.

We see him going away to pray, praying in front of the crowds,
praying with his disciples, praying before starting his ministry,
before feeding the 5,000, or at the Last Supper.

He prayed when he knew he was going to the cross,
and he even prayed from the cross!

Luke's Gospel especially emphasizes the prayers of Jesus.

Why?

Because WE TOO need to be people of prayer.

So, whatever is impeding our prayer life,

We can and should **ask God** for help with it!

So that we can pray, and keep on praying!

And Paul reminds us in **Romans 8:26-27** that

*the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we **do not know how** to pray as we ought,
but that very Spirit **intercedes**^[a] with sighs too deep for words.²⁷ And God,^[t] who
searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit^[s]
intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.^[t]*

What Paul says is really amazing!
 That, when we do not have the words to pray,
 we can ***call upon the Holy Spirit to pray for us!***
 I find great ***comfort*** in that.
 There are times we don't have words, right?

I also find great comfort in the fact that we can ***say ANYTHING to God.***
 Just look at the Psalms.
 In them, you discover the ***power of honesty*** before God—
 in prayer, praise, lament, confession, and worship.
People say absolutely everything on their hearts and minds in the Psalms,
And so should we.

It doesn't matter if we are praying scripture, the Lord's Prayer,
 or we are simply saying '*Hey God, help me!*'
 It's all prayer.

One of the most powerful prayers in the Bible is
"I believe; help my unbelief!"
 In Matthew 9, Jesus is asked by a Father to cure his son with an evil disabling
 spirit, and Jesus says--*All things can be done for the one who believes.*
And the Dad cries out, "I believe; help my unbelief!"

Presbyterian Pastor Frederick Buechner once said:
go to God the way the father of the sick boy did and ask...
if this little voice inside says, "But I don't believe",
don't worry too much. "I believe, help my unbelief",
*is sometimes **the best any of us can do really, but thank God it is enough.***

Presbyterian author **Anne Lamott** says that she has two basic prayers:
"Thank you, thank you, thank you", and
"Help me, Help me, Help me!"

Praying is really ***like breathing.***
We can ALL do it.
 And most all people do it at one time or another.
 You know the term, ***no atheists in foxholes?***

What if we all know how to pray, the way we know how to breathe?

And what if prayer is JUST as important as breathing?

And with breathing, there are ways to ***make it better***, right?

Think of people who do ***yoga***, and learn how to breathe deeply.

Or ***singers***, or ***public speakers***,

who learn how to breathe from their diaphragm,

because taking such deep breaths helps to ***sing well, or speak clearly?***

Prayer comes naturally,

but we can ***practice*** it to make it ***even more powerful***.

Which brings us to something else important about prayer:

Sometimes ***we don't ask for enough***.

In my favorite devotional, ***Streams in the Desert***, the July 27th entry said this:

*God's ability to perform is far beyond our prayers—even our greatest prayers! I have recently been thinking of some of the requests I have made innumerable times in my prayers. And what have I requested? I have asked for a **cupful**, while God owns the entire **ocean**! I have asked for one simple **ray** of light, and God hold the **sun**!*

God's ability to give is so far beyond our ability to ask!

Are you asking for a **cupful**, when God is able to give the **ocean**?

Are you asking for a **ray** of light, when God is able to give the **sunshine**?

What if this is ***another reason*** Jesus offered the parable after teaching his disciples the Lord's Prayer?

What if Jesus wants us to be ***bold, brave, and even pushy*** in our prayers?

Like that friend knocking on the door at night!

God wants to give us far, far more than bread or fish or an egg!

The Lord's Prayer itself is ***BOLD***—

Give us our daily bread---give us EVERYTHING we need today God!

Think about that.

Forgive us ALL of our sins, as we forgive others.

That's bold.

And a tall order, isn't it?

Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

That's asking a lot, isn't it?

Today I hope you leave with a desire:

To ***pray even more***---and ***keep on*** praying.

To pray ***boldly!***

To enter the ***relationship*** with God—known as prayer!

Because when we do—***our lives are changed forever.***

And we will receive the ***power and presence of God.***

Friends, our ***Good News of the Gospel*** is very simple today:

Pray.

Because God responds!

Ask, Seek, Knock...

And believe that our awesome God is listening, and our God responds.

And for that, all God's people said, Amen.