

Luke 11:1-13 *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." ²He said to them, "When you pray, say: "Father, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come. ³ Give us each day our daily bread. ⁴ Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us. ¹¹And lead us not into temptation. ⁵Then Jesus said to them, "Suppose you have a friend, and you go to him at midnight and say, 'Friend, lend me three loaves of bread; ⁶a friend of mine on a journey has come to me, and I have no food to offer him.' ⁷And suppose the one inside answers, 'Don't bother me. The door is already locked, and my children and I are in bed. I can't get up and give you anything.' ⁸I tell you, even though he will not get up and give you the bread because of friendship, yet because of your shameless audacity he will surely get up and give you as much as you need. ⁹ "So I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. ¹⁰For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened. ¹¹ "Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead?¹²Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion?¹³If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"*

Dear friends in Christ our Savior,

How is your prayer life? Do you have an active prayer life? Are you a "prayer warrior" busting down the gates of heaven to bring your requests before the throne of our almighty God? Is your prayer life strong and robust...or perhaps do you feel a little inadequate when it comes to praying? Jesus in our text encouraged us, "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you." That sounds easy enough. It seems so easy that it really shouldn't give us pause to storm the gates of heaven regularly and often. Yet sometimes our prayer life can leave a little to be desired. Maybe you're not sure what to say when you pray. Maybe you don't know what things you should be asking for. Maybe you aren't comfortable leading your family in prayer. Maybe you intend to pray for others but just forget to do it. Maybe your prayer life is like the one I saw portrayed on a religious cartoon many years ago. In the first frame 2 friends are talking to each other and one man says to the other, "That sounds terrible, Bob. I'll be sure to remember you in my prayers." The next frame is entitled, "Three days later." In the frame, Bob's friend sees him and the memory balloon above his head thinks, "Oh, man. There's Bob. I need to pray for him. Dear God, help Bob. Amen." He then greets Bob and says, "Hi Bob, I've been praying for you."

Prayer is one of the most powerful tools in our spiritual toolbox. We have the opportunity in prayer to speak directly to the Almighty God and know that he hears our prayers and wants to answer them! Think about that powerful tool that rests in our hands. Yet I might suggest it is also one of the least used tools in our spiritual toolbox. If we took the time to evaluate our prayer life we might say that it isn't overly healthy. If you feel inadequate in the area of prayer, you are not alone. The disciples also felt inadequate in their prayer life. So intense, so frequent, so different was Jesus' prayer life from his disciples that one of them, probably on the behalf of all of them, asked Jesus, "Lord, teach us to pray." It is with humility as God's people, wishing to make full use of all the tools that God gives to us and to receive the blessings which our God intends for us, that we offer the same petition to God this morning, "**Lord, Teach Us to Pray!**"

We need this instruction from God from time to time because it is easy for us to misunderstand what prayer really is. We can use prayer as a lucky rabbit's foot to make sure we get what we want. We can look to God as the magical genie in the sky who will grant our every wish. Like a child who thinks they will get anything they ask for when they tack the word "please" on the end of it, we often feel that no matter what we want, when we pray we will get it. Sometimes, we might even use prayer as a way to bargain or negotiate with God or to coax him and sweet talk him into getting what we want. Some might view prayer as a way of enlightening God about our situation as if he is blind to our needs and needs our help to be made aware of what's going on. Some use prayer as an ambulance only when they are in the midst of an emergency or turn to prayer when there is no other place to go.

Prayer is so much more than this. It is an intimate, personal communication between the created and the creator. It is a way that we worship God and bring him glory by acknowledging him as the source of every blessing that we have. It is a privilege for us to be able through Jesus our Savior to approach our God and speak to him as a dear child speaks to her dear father. Prayer is the means that God has given to us to bring our needs and request directly to him and know that he has heard and answered them.

The prayer which Jesus offered to his disciples to teach them how to pray is what we know today as the Lord's Prayer. We're very familiar with it. We say it at every service. It's the most used prayer in Christendom. The temptation for us is to say it by rote memory without even thinking about it or pondering it at all. Maybe you think about it a little more when you have to look at which version we use. Yet you might already be so comfortable with that version that you are back to reciting without thinking about it. I remember many years ago when we introduced what we refer to as the "new version", an upset man was sitting in my office complaining about this version. In frustration, he blurted out, "Now I have to think when I say the Lord's Prayer." I just replied, "Friend, think about what you just said." Today we get to step back and note what great worth this prayer has in our lives. What Jesus gave to us here in teaching us to pray is the most comprehensive, all-inclusive prayer there is. That's why we say this prayer every time we gather as God's people. It so beautifully covers all that we could possibly need or ask. Note the content of what we ask. There's too much in this prayer to fully cover it all in one sermon. I could preach an entire sermon on each of the petitions. But to look at them in general

gives us plenty of guidance for the prayers we bring before the Lord. Six of the seven petitions ask God for spiritual blessings. We ask that God's name be made holy by his people and that his kingdom would continue to come into the hearts of God's people. Though not here in Luke, but in Matthew, we pray that Jesus' will would be done at all times. We pray that God would forgive our sins and lead us to forgive each other in the same way. We pray that God would keep us away from temptation and would deliver us from any evil he allows or asks us to endure. Only 1 asks for physical blessings—our daily bread, yet this we need too. We need food and water to sustain our life. We need clothes to protect and shield us, a home to live in and friends and family to help us. This prayer Jesus offers us covers all of our needs—spiritually and physically.

How many of your prayers do this? Think about your prayer life for a moment and evaluate the content of your prayers. Too often our prayers are selfish prayers asking for physical needs over against our spiritual needs. Maybe we don't even think about praying for the spiritual things God would want for us. We tack on the end of our prayer, "if your will be done", but what we mean is, "Lord, this really better be your will." It's not wrong for us to ask for physical blessings. It's not wrong to be bold and ask God for things that might be outside of our reach. What's wrong is the attitude of selfishness with which we often approach our God seeking after the things that we will rather than what God wills. Rather than asking God to be faithful to his promises and give to us the things he wants for us, we ask him for the selfish things we want for ourselves. Many of our prayers are "Give me, give me," rather than "Praise you, Lord." Our prayers are often not very intense and rattled off without even thinking about them. Our heads are bowed, our hands are folded, but where are our hearts?

All of this leads us to realize how completely unworthy we are to come before our Lord. We are reminded how far from God we have been separated because of our sins. Even our best attempts to worship God and go before him are unsuitable. What we deserve from God is not access to him and for him to hear and answer our prayers but for him to throw us eternally from his sight for the selfishness that is so evident every day. Yet, Paul reminds us in our lesson from Colossians about the gift God has given us by granting us access to him through Jesus' our Savior. He wrote, "*God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross.*" God has given us fullness in Christ. In him, we already died, were buried and rose. In him, our sins were forgiven and taken away. In him, we have been made God's children, given the gift of heaven and eternal life, and have the privilege of approaching him and bringing our requests before him.

This is why we can be bold and persistent in our prayers and certain that when we ask anything in Jesus' name and according to his will, he will grant our prayer. When our hearts are in mind with God's through the forgiveness of Christ, and when we are asking for the things God wants to bless us with, we can know that God will answer them. This is the point Jesus is making in the final verses. If earthly fathers want good things for their children and give them to their children when they ask, how much more won't our heavenly Father give to us the good things with which he wants to bless us? So ask God for the things he wants. Be persistent in your prayer. Be bold and courageous as you bring your requests to God and be certain that God will grant you his blessings in his way.

What a great example of persistence Abraham was in our First Lesson. It's a lesson that is sometimes hard to read, but important nonetheless. Abraham shamelessly pressed the Lord to live up to his name as the God of free and faithful grace. He simply asked God to be faithful to his promises to protect his faithful people. And God was. Our confidence that God will also do that for us is the same. Do you have a problem that you are facing in life? Take it to the Lord in prayer. Boldly. Courageously. Persistently. Do you know of people who need the strength of faith to face a challenge in life? Take it to the Lord in prayer. Do you know people or are you burdened with sin, loaded with guilt and shame and who are sinking under the weight of it all? Take it to the Lord in prayer. Do you know people who need to hear of their Savior, who do not yet know him, or who are straying away from him? Take it to the Lord in prayer. God answers prayer. He wants to bring his blessings on his people. And he wants his people to honor him by asking for those blessings.

I pray that God helps you to grow in your prayer life. I pray that he leads and guides you to take advantage of this powerful tool which he puts into your spiritual toolbox. I pray that you treasure the privilege and opportunity God gives to you through Jesus your Savior to approach him in prayer and lay your requests before him. May we humbly approach our God like his disciples and ask, "Lord, teach us to pray." Amen.