

Main Street

UNITED METHODIST CHURCH



Luke 11:1-13 **“Beginning To Pray With Confidence”**

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(3rd Sunday After Epiphany)

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“Following Christ From City Center!”

D. LUKE 11:1-13 "BEGINNING TO PRAY WITH CONFIDENCE"

Section *Speech Cues*: vv.1a, 2a, 5a, 8a, 9

Request	1) vv.1-4 THE MODEL AND PATTERN FOR PRAYER TO THE FATHER.	WHAT TO PRAY
1	<u>Now it happened</u> that he (i.e. Jesus) was praying in a certain place, and when he ceased, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us (now) to pray, as John (the Baptist) taught his disciples."	His Habit Of Dependence, No Magician 3:21, 4:42, 5:16, 6:12, 9:18, 28, 10:21, Wait Till Finished PRAYER SCHOOL FOR GENTILES
Teaching	//Mt. 6:9-13 Kaddish, Theology Revealed; Communal Identity	
2	And he said to them, "Whenever you pray, say:	1 + 5 COMPONENTS OF DISCIPLE PRAYER
1	FATHER , (10:21-22)	Address 1) RELATIONSHIP WITH <i>ABBA</i> .
2	holy be your name. (Ezek. 36:22-23)	2 <i>Thou</i> Petitions 2a) PRAISE AND WORSHIP
3	Your kingdom come.// (Zech. 14:9)	2b) KINGDOM YEARNING
3	1 Give us each day our daily BREAD ;	(Prov. 30:8-9) 3 <i>Us</i> Petitions 2c) BASIC NEEDS
4	2a and forgive us our sins, (Dt. 15:2)	2d) RECONCILIATION (2 Levels)
b	for we forgive EVERYONE who is indebted to us;	2 Images 1) God, 2) Others Sir. 28:2
3	and lead us not into TEMPTATION ." (I may not hold up!)	2e) SPIRITUAL WARFARE
		No Doxology In Luke, Matthew
	2) vv.5-8 PARABLE OF A FRIEND AT MIDNIGHT: HOW MUCH MORE! HOW TO PRAY	Issue = Our Great God's Approachability/ Non-Reluctance, L Only
Analogy:	a) vv.5-7 What Will Not Happen: Stanza No. 1.	Honor/Shame As Village Code
5	<u>And he said to them,</u>	You Are One To Whom The Friend Has Come!
Question	"Can you imagine having a friend and going to him at midnight	Ps. 121:4, One Long Question? Friendship (4x) Is The Root Analogy
1	and saying to him, ' Friend , lend me three loaves	Request Made (Give)
6	2 for a friend of mine has arrive on a journey	Reason
	3 and I have nothing to set before him.'	Appeal To Duty
7	3' And he will answer from within, 'Don't bother me.	Duty Refused
	2' The door is now closed and my children are in bed with me.	Reason Prov. 3:28-29
1'	I cannot get up and get you anything"?	Request Refused (Give) No Way!
		God Is More Responsive Than The Honor-Bound Neighbor!
Answer	b) v.8 What Will Happen: Stanza No. 2 (Prov. 3:28, Ezek. 36:22-23).	
8	1 <u>I tell you</u> , though he will not <u>give</u> him anything,	Request Refused (Give)
	2 after having arisen,	Arising
	3 because of being his friend ,	Not For Friend
	3' but because of his avoidance of shame (Gk. <i>anadeia</i> , not <i>persistence</i>)	But For Honor
	2' he will get up	Get Up
1'	and <u>give</u> him whatever he wants.	Request Granted (Give)
		Direct Link To vv.5-8, Addresses The Issue Of Good Gifts
Exhortation	1') vv.9-13 A POEM ON THE FATHER'S GIFTS: HOW MUCH MORE GOD!	//Mt. 7:7-11
9 A1	<u>And I tell you</u> , ASK and it shall be GIVEN to you;	Ask 2 nd Person: You 2, 3-Line Stanzas
	seek, and you will find;	Seek Ask Continually, P.V. = By God
	knock, and it will be opened to you.	Knock 13:22-34, Father Is Responsive
10 2	For EVERYONE who asks receives,	Ask 3 rd Person: All
	and he who seeks finds,	Seek Opened Eyes/Scripture/Minds In 24:31, 35, 45
	and to him who knocks it will be opened.	Knock Seek The Kingdom As Needy
Illustration		Mt. 7:9-10, Gives Nothing Harmful
11	B1 And will any one of you, if the son asks the FATHER for BREAD ,	3, 2-Line Stanzas
	will he give him a stone?	(Of course not!, Teeth) 4:1-15, 3 Look-Alikes
	2 Or a fish, instead of a fish,	
	will he give him an eel (snake)?	(Of course not! Hand bitten) 3 Basic Foods
12	3 Or if he asks an egg,	
	will he give him a scorpion?	(Of course not!, Mouth) Not A Cruel Trickster
Comparison		Evil Compared With God
13 A'1	If therefore you being EVIL ,	Giver 2 nd Person: You 2, 3-Line Stanzas
	you know good gifts	Gift //12:31-32, Logic = Lesser To Greater
	to give to your children;	Receiver Know Your Need/ Your Father!
2	how much more the FATHER	Giver 3 rd Person: All James 1:5-8, 17
	out of heaven the Holy Spirit	Gift 10:21-24, 24;49, Kingdom = Trinitarian Reality!
	shall GIVE to those ASKING him.	Receiver Acts 1:5, 8, 2:1-4, Gives Best!
		Prayer/Parable/Poem About God's Nature, Come Confident Of A Response

A Brief Treatment Of Luke 11:1-13

The next thought unit is on prayer. Inclusions are *Father* (v.2 // vv. 11, 13b), *bread* (v.3 // v.11), *everyone* (v.4 // v.10), *temptation/evil* (v.4 // v.13). The surface structure is a 4:2 concentric pattern (1-2a // 2b-1'). The first section is parallel to Mt. 6:9-13, and the last section parallel to Mt. 7:7-11, thus Q tradition; the central section is found only in Luke (L). The opening phrase "Now it happened" (*kai egeneto*) is a Lukan standard; four *speech introductions* mark out the sections (v.2, "And he said to them," v.5, "And he said to them," v.8, "I tell you," and v.9, "And I tell you"). Several genres are brought together to create a composite: teaching and prayer (vv.2-4), a parable (vv.5-7) plus exposition (v.8) in question and answer form, an exhortation (vv.9-10), an illustration in three questions with implied answers (vv.11-12), and finally an application using a *minor to major* argument (i.e. *how much more*) in v.13. Seeing the whole helps understand each part. Luke's intent is to teach a simple way to pray to an approachable Father who is eager to give good gifts and never cruel. The *blank check* of vv.9-10 is not for anything one wants; it's a promise God will supply the necessities required by disciples until the kingdom comes. The prayer teaches the Father is present, is pure, is powerful, provides, pardons and protects (Note 16: 60-61).

There is a saying from the East, *When the student is ready, the teacher appears*. Having been with Jesus, his example stirs an interest, "Lord, teach us to pray as John taught his disciples." What follows is *The Disciples' Prayer*. Jesus offers a concise form in three parts: 1) an address, 2) two *thou* petitions on God's purposes, 3) three *us* petitions on our needs. It is a communal prayer as signaled by the plurals *us*, *our*, and *we* throughout. The address in Aramaic is *Abba*, signaling both the intimacy and respect of a child. The request that God sanctify or defend his name as holy is parallel to the petition for the divine rule (kingdom) to break across the tortured earth like a great wave. Followers pray that the kingdom Jesus previews become the only reality, and immediately! It's a cry to end the world as we know it. But until that event, however long, they need to be sustained with daily bread (plus fish and eggs, vv.11-12), live in mutual forgiveness, and be protected from powers that would overwhelm them, now and at the end. We live in the old world while yearning for the new, with Jesus as a preview of coming attractions. Only a divine arrival will fix things, and we who follow Jesus are ever-dependent on God's supply and protection. Having answered their request, Jesus does not stop but goes on to instruct them in proper confidence.

The central section is a parable (vv.5-7) and explanation (v.8) in question and answer that presumes knowledge of villages where hospitality was a high communal value. No matter when a guest arrived, they must be welcomed, else the village reputation suffers. The answer to Jesus' question is, "No, I cannot imagine anyone giving such a flimsy excuse not to help a friend show hospitality. Even if my request as a friend was not enough motivation, to avoid shaming the village would be." *How much more* approachable is our heavenly Father to give what we need to bless others, so pray with the confidence of a friend who at midnight went to a friend to ask bread for a friend. When we share good things with visitors, the reputation of our village (the church) is enhanced. Do not fear to ask; go in confidence.

The last section opens (vv.9-10) and closes (v.13) with two 3-line stanzas which share the terms *ask/ing* and *give/ing* (v.9a // v.13f) as inclusions. The center (vv.11-12) shifts to three 2-line stanzas, each a question with implied negative answer. The lesson is that while we must always seek/knock/ask, God delights to respond, and never with cruel surprises. God is better than the best earthly parent, and his best gift is the divine presence, the Holy Spirit given to each and all as a permanent communications link.

BEGINNING TO PRAY WITH CONFIDENCE

“Lord, teach us to pray as John taught his disciples.”

LUKE 11:1

The disciples begin to ask for the right stuff!

Early one morning in India a boy watched a holy man on the banks of the River Ganges. When the guru completed his prayers, the boy came near and asked, “Will you teach me to pray?”

The holy man studied the boy’s face without a word. Then, swift as a cobra, he reached for both the boy’s ears and plunged his head beneath the river. The boy struggled frantically to escape suffocation, but the grip upon him was iron. Finally the holy man released his hold; the boy gasped and said, “What did you do that for?”

“I answered your request; that was your first lesson.”

“What do you mean?” asked the bewildered boy.

“Well,” said the teacher, “when you long to pray as much as you longed to breathe when your head was under, then will I be able to teach you to pray.”¹

Ought, must, and should may lead to prayers begrudgingly spoken, but they do not lead to prayer which is an ongoing conversation with the God who, in the words of Michael Dwinell, has “a ferocious... love affair with creation.”² Words like *curiosity* and *desire, yearning* and *desperation* capture the disposition that leads to this kind of prayer. Pastor Bill Hybels confesses for all of us:

"Prayer is an unnatural activity. From birth we have been learning the rules of self-reliance as we strain and struggle to achieve self-sufficiency. Prayer flies in the face of those deep-seated values. It

¹ Edited, J.S. Hewett, *Illustrations Unlimited* (Wheaton, ILL: Tyndale, 1988), 422.

² *Being Priests to One Another* (Ligouri, MO: Triumph Books, 1966), 36.

is an assault on human autonomy, an indictment of independent living. To people in the fast lane... prayer is an embarrassing interruption."³

Corrie Ten Boom, whose life was portrayed in the movie *The Hiding Place*, often asked, "Is prayer your spare tire or your steering wheel?"⁴ Only for emergencies, or the guidance system? Prayer does not begin with techniques but with the desire to pray; that desire is itself a work the Holy Spirit. Life has a way of exposing our plans for self-sufficiency. So prayer, at least at the start, is a kind of death, an admission I am not a little god but a needy creature. The prayer Jesus gave also helps us see the world as it is; it's a world where many either deny God or pray to many gods but not to *the Father*, a world where God's name is often cursed as unholy and where another kingdom has effective local rule; it's a world where some have too much bread and others too little, where sin and unforgiveness are epidemic, and where every temptation and evil abound.⁵ The Lord's Prayer is a call to humility and sobriety. I am not the center of life; God the Father is, and both me and my world are a mess. So says Jesus. To pray this prayer is to agree with his diagnosis.

TURNING TO THE TEXT

Example And Pattern (vv.1-4)

Jesus was a man of prayer, a Jewish mystic whose time in prayer renewed his inner life with the Holy Spirit's divine energies. His fragile humanity, like our own except that he had no inner rebellion against God and thus no history of sin, needed filling from the drain of the crowds and of his friends! His public activity sprang out of his private communion with One he addressed as *Abba/Father*. He prayed verbally; it was the synagogue custom, but much of his time was no doubt spent in meditation or contemplation in which there is internal stillness and listening. A place was found,

³ *Too Busy Not To Pray* (Downer's Grove, ILL: IVP, 1988), 7.

⁴ Quoted in Larry Lea, *Could You Not Tarry One Hour* (Altamonte Springs, FLA: Creation House, 1987), 34.

⁵ An insight from Martin Luther, "An Exposition of the Lord's Prayer for Simple Laymen," *Luther Works*, Vol. 42, (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1969), 27.

prayers said, the mind was stilled and the heart directed to God.⁶

It was out of this communion that wisdom and strength came for the day's ministry and major decisions such as the choice of the twelve.⁷ There were forty days of prayer and fasting in the wilderness before his ministry began, the only recorded words being the Scriptures Jesus spoke against the Evil One.⁸ Mostly silence and desert solitude. Jesus prayed after his baptism as the Spirit came upon him to give power for the work.⁹ It was a great filling of a deep, internal reservoir. There were also regular strategic withdrawals for prayer as in Luke 5:16, "But he withdrew to the wilderness and prayed."¹⁰ He prayed in joy when the seventy-two disciples return from their mission of healing,¹¹ and he prayed with sorrow in Gethsemane.¹² In offering his disciples a prayer, Jesus was drawing them more deeply into his world.

A priest once noticed a member of his Sunday congregation who seemed rapt in prayer throughout the Mass. Eager to learn, he asked what form her prayer took, "I say the *Our Father*," was her simple response.

"But surely you must do more than that."

"No," she said. "You see, when I'm in good form for prayer all I say is the first two words: *Our Father*. When in middling form I'm able to get halfway through, but if there's something on my mind and I'm in really bad form, I can finish it and maybe say it two or three times."¹³

Words are important; Jesus taught a brief pattern of words, but prayer as

⁶ On early Jewish prayer, see Marcus Borg, *Jesus: A New Vision* (San Francisco, CA: Harper and Row, 1987).

⁷ 6:12-13.

⁸ 4:1-13.

⁹ 3:21-22.

¹⁰ 9:18, "Now it happened as he was praying alone...."

¹¹ 10:21-22.

¹² 22:39ff.

¹³ Edited, James Feehan, *Story Power* (San Jose, CA: Resource Publications, 1994), 100-101.

communion is more than words. Prayer is knowing and being known by the God who is, as Tennyson, said, “nearer than breathing and closer than hands and feet.”

The disciples knew prayers; after all, they were children of the synagogue and the psalms and of pilgrimages to the Jerusalem temple. But here was something different. Jesus’ example awakened their curiosity. They saw what he did during the day: the healings, the teaching, the exorcisms, the confrontations, his uncanny knowledge of the human heart, his poise and the presence that accompanied him. There was a connection, and they wanted to be *in on it*. They knew where to find him that morning, and one was nominated to speak on behalf of all. There they stood, respectfully waiting for him to finish. Then one of them spoke up, “Lord, teach us to pray, as John (the Baptist) taught his disciples.” It was a turning point.

Interesting request in that it comes from the group. These men and women saw themselves as a unit with an identity. Others were gathered around John the Baptist and had prayer forms that embodied their leader’s mission. But they were gathered around Jesus and wanted a prayer to sum up their life and mission with him.

If you listen to how groups and individuals pray, you find out what they really believe at an operational level. Note their formal doctrines because they give the official boundaries; but if you listen to their prayers you will find the heart. There was not a request for individual spiritual direction but a community prayer. Not an *I* and *me* prayer but a *we* and *us* prayer. It was a teachable moment; they were curious and assertive enough to come to Jesus with a clear request. The Holy Spirit was at work *in them*, and now Jesus would take up the work of teaching prayer *with them*.

He responded to his friends’ request in a straightforward manner, “When you pray, say these words...” He gave them what they asked for, a model prayer that summed up what he and they were all about in this new experiment of traveling about watching God work. The salty grace of life created in them a thirst he then quenched. Access to a person who prays is the beginning of prayer, one life sparking fire in another. There were already his followers, but here they ask to enter the reality of his intimate communion with the Father who directed him and the Spirit who empowered him. To this point they’d been careful observers of *the outside* of his ministry; now they wanted access to *the inside*. In him the lights were always on; now they wanted to see the power plant, to go to the source, not just in its public effects. They asked and he gave; they sought and found; they knocked and he opened so there is perfect congruence between how Jesus behaved and what he taught.

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It was a simple prayer and clearly structured like a memorable melody, one to be memorized and played with variations without needing to look at the music. Jesus was the living example used by the Holy Spirit to create in them a hunger to be a community of prayer. They used the words he gave but moved through them to the One to whom Jesus spoke with such freedom.

The prayer as Luke records it has only thirty-eight words in Greek. It is shorter than Matthew's fuller form from which we derive our church version of the prayer with the added doxology at the end. It's been called many things: the perfect prayer, a school of prayer, the model prayer, the disciples' prayer, the *Our Father*, a summary of the whole gospel, the love song of the whole world, and a battle shout for the end of time.¹⁴ In Jesus' mother tongue of Aramaic it has rhyme and meter and a careful structure.¹⁵ It's a crafted prayer with only the essentials present and much space for silence and reflection between the phrases. It is both a prayer and an outline of topics to be expanded in conversation with God. It pulses with energy, and each short phrase builds on the others to a sobering climax where we pray for divine protection.

The only prayer Jesus ever gave his followers begins with an invitation to say something the disciples never said before, at least not to God; it would seem too familiar and irreverent had it not come from Jesus.¹⁶ It may be why Matthew added,

¹⁴ A catalog of titles from across church history, found in Nicholas Ayo, *The Lord's Prayer* (Notre Dame, IN: University Of Notre Dame Press, 1992), 5-7.

¹⁵ Joachim Jeremias, *The Prayers of Jesus* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1977), 94-95.

¹⁶ For recent scholarly work on the Lord's Prayer, see Oscar Cullmann, *Prayer In The New Testament* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1995), 37-69; John Koenig, *Rediscovering New Testament Prayer* (San Francisco, AA: HarperCollins, 1992), 40-52. N.T. Wright, "The Lord's Prayer as a Paradigm of Christian Prayer," in Richard Longnecker, editor, *Into God's Presence* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001), 132-154; Robert Karris, *Prayer And The New Testament*, chapter 1, "Prayer and the Historical Jesus," (New York: Crossroads, 2000), 1-39; for political implications, see the provocative John Dominic Crossan, *The Greatest Prayer* (San Francisco, CA: HarperOne, 2010); for a theological treatment, William Willimon and Stanley Hauerwas, *Lord, Teach Us* (Nashville, TN: Abington, 1996); for a devotional treatment, Steve Harper, *Praying Through the Lord's Prayer* (Nashville, TN: The Upper Room, 1992); for a fresh treatment with an eye to spiritual formation, see James Bryan Smith, *The Good and Beautiful God: Falling In Love With The God Jesus Knows* (Downer's Grove, ILL: IVP, 2009), Chapter 3, "God Is

“Our Father, *who art in heaven*,” to avoid it being too *chummy*. To them God was *the holy one of Israel* and *the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob*. But Jesus used a family term *Abba*, Aramaic for *Pappa*; it was unadorned and direct, like a boy or girl to their Dad, full of affection and respect at the same time.

To pray is to place myself as a child before One who loves me. Most of our inherited sense of religiosity and propriety is left at the gate of prayer. But to say that God is *Father* is not to say God is male.¹⁷ All the highest qualities we associate with father and mother are included in Jesus’ address. But for many people to call God *Father* is difficult; their earthly fathers were violent or absent or drunk or unpredictable, and for them it may take much listening and emotional healing before the reality of the Father’s love is stronger than the memories.¹⁸ For every good quality our earthly father or mother had, God is more, but God is also unlike them in all the qualities that were not so good. So the first step in prayer is address, like a child to a loving Father who’s eager to hear what he already knows. We speak; God listens; God speaks, we listen, and the simple address *Father* is where we start.

The first two petitions are set in parallel as imperatives, “Your name, may it be counted holy; your kingdom reign and rule, may it come.” These are bold requests that God do what no human being can do, which is to make himself known to reclaim the earth from sin and evil and death. It’s a bold prayer for God to immediately bring the new age promised by the prophets. It’s a prayer for a revolution, that this world and its values come under the final siege of God’s inbreaking rule. It’s not a request for a bit of progress to make life a bit better on our watch; it is- shockingly- a prayer for the immediate end of the world as we know it, for it to be swallowed in one great gulp. The one who prays admits from the beginning that she stands in captive territory behind enemy lines where God’s name is not counted holy and where lots of *someone else’s* have a say in how things are run. It’s a Frenchman standing on the beaches of

Trustworthy,” 54-73.

¹⁷ For solid arguments against the naming of Yahweh as *Mother* because of a loss of transcendence and tendency to pantheism with the world viewed as an extension of God’s being as God’s body, see Elizabeth Achtemeier, “God the Father or God the Mother,” *Mission and Ministry*, Vol. 8, Fall 1990, 18-30; also “Why God Is Not Mother,” *Christianity Today*, No. 9, Aug. 16, 1993, 16-23.

¹⁸ On this pastoral issue, see James Bryan Smith, *The Good and Beautiful God* (Downer’s Grove, Ill: IVP, 2009), 58-60.

Normandy on June 5, 1944 and crying into night, "Allies come. Eisenhower, deliver us; we are in captivity." Christian prayer is not holding God at a distance and presenting a wish list. It is to be close enough to feel the Father's heartbeat and to see this world's corrupted state, "Holy be your name here on battlefield earth. Your kingdom come now!" Intimacy with God and a cry for freedom: this is where Jesus said prayer begins. Over a hundred years ago Charles H. Spurgeon wrote of our forebears:

"I have no small liking to those rare old-fashioned Methodist prayers as made the walls ring. Oh! for a revival of those glorious, violent prayers which flow like hot-shot against the battlements of heaven.... For more of the prayer of God... the body and spirit working together... the whole person being aroused to the highest intensity to wrestle with God."¹⁹

So the first part of the disciples' prayer is for a full arrival of what they've already seen unfolding in Jesus. Not the appetizers of the kingdom but the full meal. Not just a bit of healing for this or that person but the immediate healing of the world and the removal of all God's enemies, demonic and human. The full healing and restoration of the entire creation is the goal of the prayer Jesus gave.

But, because it didn't happen quite that quickly, and because we are still praying the same prayer far down the corridors of time, there are three things we need from God to survive as Jesus' followers as we witness to God's kingdom: 1) to be fed and sustained, 2) to forgive and be forgiven, and 3) to be defended and protected.²⁰

We need bread and all the basics that go with it because we are creatures and not angels. We ask for a day's rations, not a stockpile. Not lavish or gourmet, but bread, not too much to make us obese or too little to leave us famished, but enough bread for the day's good work. And since bread comes from wheat, and grain from the sowing and harvesting of the farmer, there's an ecological and agricultural angle waiting to be explored. What does it mean to pray for daily bread in a county obsessed with weight and dieting? Where young women are anorexic and bulimic because of body dysmorphic disorder? For them to eat daily bread is a healing. What

¹⁹ Albert Wells, ed., *Inspiring Quotations* (Nashville, TN: Nelson, 1988), 161.

²⁰ On petitionary prayer and the Lord's Prayer, see Richard Foster, *Prayer* (San Francisco, CA: HarperCollins, 1992), chapter 16, "Petitionary Prayer," 179-190.

does it mean to pray for daily bread when much of the world is hungry? What about poor neighborhoods where few have transportation and grocery stores are far away? They all them *food deserts*, and we have those here in Greenwood. What about those in this church who eat most meals alone? How often do we break bread with those of different color, culture or class? The prayer for our most basic need is full of ethical implications. All our material life and the work that undergirds it is set in the service of the coming kingdom, each meal an appetizer of the heavenly banquet, each day's labor an offering to God. And when bread is joined with the words of Jesus, it becomes the bread of life in communion. Don't eat without thanks for daily bread.

The second petition is an exercise in corporate humility, "And forgive us our sins, as we forgive everyone who is indebted to us." What kind of community is this? An honest one, a community of sinners following Jesus and in perpetual need of both receiving and passing on forgiveness and the freedom it restores.²¹ And this petition is not just for individual sins, but also the ones we commit in groups for which no single person seems responsible, "Forgive *us our* sins," and our part in them. It's what makes issues like racism and poverty so hard to deal with. It's an infection of the whole and not just of a single part that can be isolated and called to repentance. It is only a forgiven and free people who have the moral courage and the ethical vocabulary to face the sins we commit together without spin or excuse.

A little boy was saying his prayers as his grandmother listened. He said, "If I should die before I wake," then paused.

"Go on," his grandmother urged, "finish your prayer." But the little boy scrambled to his feet, hurried downstairs, then in a few moments was back in his place again, taking up his prayers where he left off.

His grandmother asked him where he'd gone in such a hurry. "I was thinking what I was saying," he insisted. "That's why I had to stop. You see, I'd mixed up my brother's zoo, and stood all his wooden soldiers on their heads, just to see how angry he'd get in the morning. But, if I should die before I wake, why, I wouldn't want him to find them that way, so I had to go down and fix them up."

With a quiver in her voice his grandmother said, "I imagine there are a good many prayers that would not be hurt by stopping in the middle to undo a wrong."²²

²¹ For a challenging read on grace, vulnerability and sin, see John Lynch, et. al., *The Cure: What if God isn't who you think He is and neither are you* (San Clemente, CA: CrossSection, 2011).

²² L. Flynn, *Come Alive With Illustrations* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1990), 188.

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If there is a weighty pause in the Lord's Prayer, it's here. Jesus had the nastiest habit of linking our ability to receive forgiveness with our willingness to pass it on. Those who hold grudges and nurse inner resentments cannot progress in prayer. They are frozen in the fire of their own resentment and choked by the gall of their own bitterness. The willingness to receive mercy from God and pass it on to others is basic; without it there can be no real community, not in a marriage, not between parent and child, not between the generations and the races, and not in a church.

God is dead serious about community this side of the kingdom, and among us sinners there can be none without a constant flow of forgiveness *to us* from God and *through us* to one another, and the blockage is always on our side. Forgiveness may take time. The deeper the wound, the harder it is. What a torrent of love it would release if each of us would, under the Spirit's guidance, make that needed phone call, tear up a mental IOU, write that letter, or go to that grave side with words of forgiveness. I did this not long ago at a cemetery between here and Saluda. I needed to forgive my father's father Carl for the deep damage he did to our family and how it affected me two generations down the line. With forgiveness it is never a matter of *I can't* but always a matter of *I won't* because God always supplies sufficient grace for us to forgive and release others so that we can be free in our relationship with God. We let God deal with what they did to us, however awful.

Not that it didn't happen. Not that it wasn't wrong. Not that it didn't hurt. Not that I minimize it or rationalize it. Not that it means automatic reconciliation. Not that it gets rid of all consequences, legal and otherwise. I choose to forgive because Christ has forgiven me. I pass on the gift and ask release from the pain so I can remember without torment. It sets me free from being bound by the other person's sin and from being forever held hostage by them.²³ I no longer rent them space in my head and heart. I am no longer a victim but a victor, Christ giving away through me what he has already given to me. Ultimately the decision not to forgive blocks the flow of what I most need from God. Nothing will shrivel your soul and make you easy prey to a whole host of mental disorders like unforgiveness. It's demon food.

So in the Lord's Prayer we ask for three things for ourselves: *Father, feed us*: our bodies; *Father, forgive us*: our relationships vertical and horizontal; and thirdly,

²³ On forgiveness and its social implications, see Gary Thomas, "The Forgiveness Factor," *Christianity Today*, January 10, 2000, 38-45 with bibliography. Our best researcher on these issues is the psychologist Everett Worthington. See his *Handbook of Forgiveness* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2006) for a collection of research articles.

Luke 11:1-13 13

Father, defend us: our ongoing battle with temptation and testing, with sin and evil. The problem is not just around us or between us but *in us*. “And lead us not into temptation” is where the prayer abruptly ends in Luke’s version. This petition is misunderstood if it’s read to imply that God is the source of temptation. It is rather a prayer that we as a community not be overwhelmed or give in in any ultimate sense to the forces of darkness that assault us within and without, “O God, protect us from ever selling out. Don’t let us meet more than we can stand.”

The strength to stay true to God and others comes from God, and to take this petition on my lips is to confess we cannot do it alone. This is not a prayer for lonely heroes or casual religious bystanders but for a huddle of disciples who know they will be shredded without the Father’s protection. This prayer is not surface or safe. It deals with ultimate issues of this world and of good and evil. It’s not self-therapy. It’s not a good luck charm. It’s not about more stuff beyond the basics. It’s about thriving in the mission we share with Jesus and crying for God’s intervention. This marks us as his disciples. This is *what* we are to pray for; the rest of the text tells *why*.

God Is Eager And Generous To Give (vv.5-13).

Nazareth was a small village in the hill country of Galilee where hospitality was a matter of community pride. They would never say to a guest, “You have honored *me*,” but rather, “You have honored *Nazareth*.” Every family bakes its own bread, often enough for a week, and everyone knows who’s baking that day and has a fresh supply; you can smell it in the air. The loaves are large, as much as two feet across, and are used in place of utensils. With each mouthful you break and use a fresh piece as a scoop for the dishes on the table. A guest must not be given a fragment but at least one whole loaf. Less than that is just not fitting, like us giving someone a knife but no fork or spoon. With each guest the honor of the whole village is at stake. This is the world of meaning and obligation in which the parable is told.²⁴

“Can you imagine?” said Jesus, “going to a friend at midnight and getting turned down?” They shake their heads.

“Can you imagine meeting trivial excuses like the children are sleeping or the door barred?” They sneer.

“Can you even perceive such a thing happening?”

“No. Not ever. Not in my village. We have too much honor at stake. We will

²⁴ This interpretation depends on the work of Kenneth Bailey, *Poet and Peasant* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmanns, 1976), 119-141.

do anything to avoid the shame.”

“Then you know as well as I do,” said Jesus, “that even if the one who knocks is not a friend that you’d help rather than be shamed in the street the next day.” They all agree.

But Jesus is not speaking about the reputation and honor of the village but about the reputation of God. If you go confidently to a friend at midnight, as they did in that part of the world, how much more can you go to *the Father* knowing he will respond? The argument is from the lesser to the greater. When we pray for what Jesus says to pray for: the honor of God’s name, the arrival of God’s kingdom, that as followers God feed us, forgive us and defends us, then we can pray with reckless confidence. Nancy Spiegelberg summed it up:

“Lord,
I crawled through the barrenness
to you with my empty cup
Uncertain in asking any small drop of refreshment.
If only I had known you better I’ve have come running with a bucket.”²⁵

God’s Best Gift Is Not Stuff (vv.9-13)

So far we have a *personal example*: Jesus, a *prayer*: the Lord’s Prayer, a *parable*: the friend at midnight, and finally a *poem* in verses 9 through 13. You get the impression this stuff that it was not just ripped off but carefully crafted so as to be memorable.

When someone *asks*, it’s because there’s a question burning within. And when someone *seeks*, it’s because something’s either lost or desired. And when someone *knocks*, it’s because they want someone on the other side to lift the latch and let them in. “Keep at it,” says Jesus using present imperatives, “Don’t quit too soon.” Ask hard questions, keep looking and demand to be let in. God loves it when he becomes the focus of our desires. A genuine spiritual hunger after the God of Jesus will always be satisfied, “For everyone....” Chase God, and he will find you!

As a pastor I often hear stories of abusive parents. Brutal stuff, some of it criminal. As children they asked for kindness and got cruelty, for safety and were sexually violated, for love and received alcoholic rage, for the basics and saw family

²⁵ Michael Green, ed., *Illustrations for Biblical Preaching* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1990), 273.

finances thrown away in gambling. Nothing so rips a hole in the soul, in my estimation, as cruelty from those who are supposed to be parents. If that's your experience, it may be hard at first to call God *Father*. The lesson for you is that God is *not like* your parents and that God will be for you what they never were.

Your heavenly Father is not a cruel trickster. If you need bread, you will not crack your teeth on a look-alike stone while God and the angels laugh at your expense. And since there was a fish-type in the sea of Galilee that walked on land, God will not play bait-and-switch there either. No ugly surprises. God does not play practical jokes on needy children. It is possible in the shadows to see a curled up scorpion and mistake it for an egg. Reach for food and get a stinger! "Not with my God," says Jesus. God's gifts do not hurt but heal. And part of the healing Christ offers is for people to be re-parented and re-taught by their heavenly Father in a new family of brothers and sisters known as *church*. Jesus wants to breed in us the same confidence he has in the Father who gives in answer to our requests. So if there is some essential nutrient you did not receive growing up, there's good news; you can find it here among God's people.

But God's best gift is not stuff; it is himself. Jesus speaks a Trinitarian reality, "how much more the Father out of heaven the Holy Spirit shall give to those asking him." The Pentecostals and Charismatics are right in their excitement. Something wonderful happens in the church when people ask God to so fill them with the Spirit so that when the world presses down on them, Jesus runs out. Prayer is Trinitarian. The Son asks us to pray to the Father and ask for the filling of the Spirit. In prayer we are drawn into the life and work of the Trinitarian God. We become partners in the remaking of this world in anticipation of the next.

CONCLUSION

See what you make of the following story:

"After many years of labor an inventor discovered the art of making fire. He took his tools to the snow-clad northern regions and initiated a tribe into his art- and the advantages- of making fire. The people became so absorbed in the novelty that it did not occur to them to thank the inventor, who one day quietly slipped away. Being one of those rare human beings endowed with greatness, he had no desire to be remembered or revered; all he sought was the satisfaction of knowing someone had benefitted from his discovery.

The next tribe he went to was just as eager to learn as the first. But the local priests, jealous of the stranger's hold on people, had him assassinated. To allay any suspicion of the crime, they had a portrait of the Great Inventor enthroned upon the main altar of the temple, and a liturgy designed so that his named would be revered and his memory kept alive. The greatest care was taken that not a single rubric of the liturgy was altered or omitted. The tools for making fire were enshrined within a casket and were said to bring healing to all who laid their hands on them with faith.

The High Priest himself then undertook the task of compiling a *Life of the Inventor*. This became the holy book in which the Inventor's loving-kindness was offered as an example for all to emulate, his glorious deeds were eulogized, his superhuman nature made an article of faith. The priests saw to it that the book was handed down to future generations, while they authoritatively interpreted the meaning of his words and the significance of his holy life and death. They ruthlessly punished or excommunicated anyone who deviated from their doctrine. Caught up as they were in these tasks, the people completely forgot the art of making fire."²⁶

And when we ask what the disciples asked, "Lord, teach us to pray," we will be on our way to making fire again.

²⁶ Edited, Anthony de Mello, *Taking Flight* (New York: Doubleday, 1988), 19-20.
