

**LUKE 11:1–13.** (EHV)

On another occasion, 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 also taught his disciples.” He said to them, “When you pray, say, ‘Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us each day our daily bread. Forgive us our sins, as we also forgive everyone who sins against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.’” He said to them, “Suppose one of you has a friend, and you go to him at midnight and tell him, ‘Friend, lend me three loaves of bread, because a friend of mine who is on a journey has come to me, and I do not have anything to set before him.’ And the one inside replies, ‘Don’t bother me. The door is already locked, and my children and I are in bed. I can’t get up and give it to you.’ I tell you, even if he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, yet because of his bold persistence, he will get up and give him as much as he needs. I tell you, keep asking, and it will be given to you. Keep seeking, and you will find. Keep knocking, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives. The one who seeks finds. And to the one who knocks, it will be opened. What father among you, if your son asks for bread, would give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, would give him a snake instead of a fish? Or if he asks for an egg, would give him a scorpion? If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him?”

In August of 1881, when President James Garfield was lying on his deathbed as a result of an assassination attempt, a New York City woman named Julia Sand wrote the first of at least twenty-three letters to Vice President Chester A. Arthur, who soon became president. Miss Sand was not the first person to write a letter to the president, and certainly not the last. But what sets her letters apart is that Vice President and then President Arthur actually read them and took some of her advice. In fact, almost a year after she started writing, the president paid her an hour-long visit at her home.

Can you imagine having the ear of the president of the United States, the governor of South Dakota, or some other person in power, and knowing that you did? Would that encourage you to communicate with that person less or more? Don’t you think that it would encourage you to communicate more, since you would know that your questions, concerns, requests, opinions, and advice would actually be heard, and that there was the potential that they would actually be acted on?

In our Gospel this morning, Jesus reminds us that we have the ear of the most powerful being in the universe, the one who made it. And Jesus encourages us to take advantage of that fact in prayer.

**1. Prayer Encouragement from a Story about a Shameless Friend**

Luke begins this section by telling us that Jesus was praying. No one was busier than Jesus. No one had more demands on his time than Jesus. Yet Jesus made time for prayer. He made it a priority. Early in the Gospel of Mark, we’re told that Jesus got up early in the morning, while it was still dark, and went out to a solitary place to pray. When he fed the five thousand, he

went to a solitary place to pray at night, after dismissing the crowds. He made time for prayer every day.

So it's no surprise that Jesus was praying on this occasion. But on this occasion, it seems that the disciples came upon him while he was finishing. They overheard some of his prayer. And that prompted one of them to say to him, "Lord, teach us to pray, just as John also taught his disciples."

That was a request that Jesus was all too happy to fulfill. He began by teaching them the Lord's Prayer, as you heard earlier. It's important to note that, in giving them the Lord's Prayer, he wasn't just giving them the words to say, wasn't just giving them a prayer to memorize. He was also teaching them *how* to pray, that is, what sorts of things to pray for. He was giving them a pattern to follow for all of their prayers.

Now I'm not going to focus on the Lord's Prayer today, since that could be a sermon series all by itself. I would encourage you, though, to review Martin Luther's explanations of the petitions of the Lord's Prayer in the Small Catechism.

Today I'm going to focus on what Jesus says after teaching his disciples the Lord's Prayer, when he teaches them to pray, part two, so to speak. With the Lord's Prayer, he focused more on how to pray as far as content goes. But in what follows, he focuses more on how to pray as far as attitude and mindset goes.

Jesus teaches us the proper attitude and mindset of prayer by giving us two different hypothetical scenarios. The first one goes like this: A man has a friend, and he goes to ask him a favor at the worst time—in the middle of the night. You see, another friend of his is on a journey and has arrived at his house unexpectedly at a very late hour and could really use a meal, but the man has nothing to set before him. So he goes to the friend who lives nearby, in spite of the late hour, and keeps knocking on the door until he gets an answer from a tired voice inside: "Who's there?"

"It's me," the man says. "I really need to you to lend me three loaves of bread. Another friend of mine is on a journey and has showed up at my place and I have nothing to give him."

But his friend responds as you might think he would: "You can't honestly expect me to go through this trouble and inconvenience right now. The door is already locked, and my children are actually in the bed with me." Apparently it's so late the guy's children have already had their nightly spook or bad dream and have joined their parents in bed. "I am not able to get up and get you anything."

Jesus says, "I tell you, even if he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, yet because of his bold persistence, he will get up and give him as much as he needs." In other words, it's already clear that friendship isn't enough in this case. It's too much even for one friend to ask another.

But you can just imagine what this man is like: "C'mon, James, you can't let me down here. Whom else am I going to go to at this hour?" No response. The man knocks again.

"What?!"

"James, you're all I've got, man, and I know you've got bread. I can't take no for an answer. My friend is really hungry. He needs food. I promise I'll pay you back in the morning when the market opens."

No response. The man knocks again. No response. The man knocks again. “James, help me out here.”

Finally the door opens, and three loaves are stuck through the opening. “Here. Now leave me alone.” The friend realizes that he’s not going to get any sleep unless he gives the man what he’s asking for.

Listen as Jesus applies this to us: “I tell you, keep asking, and it will be given to you. Keep seeking, and you will find. Keep knocking, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives. The one who seeks finds. And to the one who knocks, it will be opened.”

Jesus is encouraging us to pray with three different attitudes. First, we should pray with persistence. Keep repeating your petitions and supplications into God’s ears. Don’t let him have any rest. If you ask once, and God seems to say no, and you give up and say, “God either must not exist or he must not care about me,” then you’re ignoring Jesus’s prayer encouragement here.

Second, we should pray with boldness. When Jesus says that the man in his story has “bold persistence,” the Greek word there could also be translated “shamelessness” or even “lack of self-respect.” It’s approaching the lines of rudeness even, without actually crossing that line. Shamelessness is the characteristic you have if you dance like you’re in your room by yourself, but you’re in front of the counter at McDonald’s while waiting for your food, and there are long lines on either side of you. Or if you ask a girl out on a date in front of a whole bunch of fellow students, and you won’t take no for an answer, even though they’re all cringing in sympathy for her and you’ve never even talked to her before.

But this man’s shamelessness is a little different. There might be other people in the neighboring houses poking their heads out of their windows and scowling at the man who keeps knocking and asking his friend for bread. One or two of them might tell him, “Quiet down out there!” But he doesn’t care. *He knows what he’s asking for is good, and he knows that his friend is the only one who can give it to him.* So he keeps knocking, keeps seeking, keeps asking. He is shameless. He is bold. Jesus says we should be that way in prayer to God.

Third, we should pray with confidence. Jesus doesn’t just say, “Keep asking, keep seeking, and keep knocking.” He also says, “It will be given to you. You will find. It will be opened to you. For everyone who keeps asking receives. The one who keeps seeking finds. And to the one who keeps knocking, it will be opened.” Remember the prayer spoken by the father of the boy with the deaf spirit? “If you can, take pity on us and help us.”

Do you remember Jesus’s response? “‘If you can?’” When we’re praying for good things, when we’re praying according to God’s will, when we’re praying according to the pattern of the Lord’s Prayer, Jesus wants us to pray with confidence, not doubt.

## **2. Prayer Encouragement from a Comparison with Ordinary Fathers**

But why should we have confidence when praying? Why should we approach God with boldness and shamelessness, and not expect him to turn away in disgust? Why should we keep repeating our prayers into God’s ears, and not expect him to be annoyed with us?

To answer that, Jesus gives us the second hypothetical scenario: “What father among you, if your son asks for bread, would give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, would give him a snake instead of a fish? Or if he asks for an egg, would give him a scorpion? If you then, though

you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him?"

I remember when I was serving in the rural Wausau, Wisconsin area, I received a call from a man who lived in the city asking for some milk. So I took down his address, purchased some milk, and brought it over to him. It was clear from the moment I ascended his staircase and entered his apartment that this man did not live a healthy or respectable life. And there were these little, poorly dressed kids—I think there were three of them—that he was responsible for, that he was supposed to raise. And I tried to use the opportunity to talk to him about Jesus and the importance of his eternal welfare, but he sloughed me off by telling me that he wasn't really religious. This guy was not a good man, I daresay not even by non-Christian standards.

But even though I shook my head to myself at his replies to what I said and at the entire situation, the fact is that that he still apparently took the effort to get out the phonebook or do a Google search on his phone and call up a bunch of churches until he found someone who would be willing to bring over some milk for his kids. Because whatever else he was (or was not), he was still a dad. And as a dad, he still knew how to give good things to his children.

Even the best of you fathers have sins and shortcomings. There are times when you have done wrong by your kids. God has never done wrong by us. All of us, not just fathers, are evil by nature. God is not. He is good. He is supremely good, the highest good. In fact, he is so good that Jesus doesn't just speak of him as God, but as Father, and not just as *the* heavenly Father—as if he has created us, but that's it, and he wants nothing more to do with us, which would be understandable—but as "*your* heavenly Father." In the Lord's Prayer, Jesus calls him, "*Our* Father." He's our Father, because he sent his own Son to be our brother in the flesh. He's our Father, because he sacrificed his own Son to pay for all of our sins. He's our Father, because through that sacrifice and through his Son's resurrection, we are not just fellow humans with his Son, but also fellow heirs of heaven with him.

So you can ask God for a lot more than milk, though he would care just as much if you asked him for milk. You can ask him for every good gift. You can ask him for the best gift, the Holy Spirit, and all of the spiritual and eternal blessings that come with the Holy Spirit. You can ask him repeatedly, and you should, because that is an act of faith that shows that you trust that he is your perfect Father, who can never be annoyed with you. You can ask him boldly and shamelessly, and you should, because that is an act of faith that shows that you trust that he is never embarrassed by you or put off by you. You can ask him confidently, and you should, because he is your Father, who gave up his own Son for you and is now having his Son prepare a place for you in his own glorious home.

You don't just have the ear of the most powerful being in the universe. The most powerful being in the universe is your dear Father. And he's not just a powerful figure who condescends to read your letters. He hears and answers all your prayers as he knows is best. So keep asking. Keep seeking. Keep knocking. Keep praying. That's not just my encouragement. That's the prayer encouragement of Jesus your Savior himself. Amen.