

## ENGAGE

- As you approach the text you may find these questions and thoughts to be helpful.
  - The passage links our requests of our Heavenly Father to the nature of earthly fathers. There are two emphasis in the passage
    - The first is in the nature of the Father
    - The second is in asking of the father.
  - As we are to model and be imagers of God... how then can we apply His giving nature to our lives?

## EXAMINE

Luke 11 begins with Jesus “praying in a certain place.” When he has finished praying, one of his disciples asks, “Lord, teach us to pray...” (11:1). In response, Jesus offers a three-part teaching, including a model prayer, a parable about prayer, and some sayings about prayer.

### The Lord’s Prayer

Jesus’ prayer and the teaching that follows are mutually illuminating. Jesus invites his disciples into a deeply personal relationship with God, encouraging them to call upon God using the same name he uses -- *Abba, Father*. He invites his disciples to call upon God as children call upon a loving parent, trusting that they belong to God and that God wants for them what is good and life giving.

“Father” (*pater*) (v. 2a). In Aramaic, Jesus’ language, the word for father is *abba*—but Luke uses the Greek word, *pater*, which his predominately Gentile audience would better understand. Both are a far remove from the usual Jewish treatment of God’s name, which is *YHWH* or *Yahweh*. Jewish people are so concerned about possibly profaning God’s name that they instead use the word *adonai*, which means “my Lord” (Lockyer, 427).

The idea of God as Father has Old Testament roots. God instructed Nathan to tell David, “I will be his father, and he shall be my son” (2 Samuel 7:14). In a prayer, Isaiah said, “For you are our Father” (Isaiah 63:16). Through Jeremiah, God said to Israel, “You shall call me “My Father,” and shall not turn away from following me” (Jeremiah 3:19) and “for I am a father to Israel” (Jeremiah 31:9). Malachi said, “Don’t we all have one father? Hasn’t one God created us?” (Malachi 2:10).

With the exception of God’s promise to David in 2 Samuel, these Old Testament verses refer to God as Father of the Israelite people. Jesus continues that corporate emphasis in this prayer, teaching us to pray, “Give us“—”forgive us“—”Bring us“.

### Sources

[Workingpreacher.org](http://Workingpreacher.org)

[Bibletools.org](http://Bibletools.org)

[newjerseyubf.org](http://newjerseyubf.org)

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In spite of the Old Testament references to God as Father, however, it must shock the disciples to hear Jesus teach them to open their prayer with the word “Father.” That suggests a familiarity that most Jews would find troublesome.

Jesus’ sayings in 11:11-13 reinforce this invitation. If human parents, with all their faults, know how to give their children gifts that are good for them, how much more will the heavenly Father give good gifts to his children who ask of him, including and especially the gift of the Holy Spirit!

Jesus also invites his disciples to pray that God’s name be hallowed or kept holy (*hagiastheto*). The passive voice indicates that we ask God to hallow God’s own name, to act in such a way that God’s name is held in honor. The petitions that follow flesh out what this means. When God’s name is hallowed and God’s kingdom comes, there is daily bread for all, forgiveness is practiced, and God delivers the faithful from the time of trial.

### The Shameless Friend

To illustrate that God can be trusted to respond to our prayers, Jesus tells the parable of the friend who calls at midnight. Hospitality was of paramount importance in the biblical world, and when a guest arrived -- even unexpected, even at midnight -- there was no question that hospitality must be extended. So when the man in the story finds himself without enough bread for his guest, he goes to a friend and asks to borrow some, even though he must wake up his friend’s entire household.

“Do not bother me,” the friend answers from within. “The door has already been locked, and my children are with me in bed. I cannot get up and give you anything” (11:7). Hearers today might empathize with the woken-up friend and think that the midnight caller is pushing the limits of friendship. But in the culture of the biblical world, it is the woken-up friend who is behaving badly. The ability of his friend to provide hospitality, and thus his honor, is at stake.

Jesus says that the man will eventually respond to his friend’s request, not because he is a friend, but because of his friend’s *shamelessness* (better translation of *anaideia* than the NRSV’s “persistence”) (11:8). His friend displays no shame in asking for help to meet the requirements of hospitality. The woken-up friend would incur dishonor if he failed to help his neighbor in this essential obligation. So he will respond because of social pressure at the very least.

Jesus’ parable implies that if it is so among friends with their mixed motives and self-interest, how much more so with God who wants to give us what is good and life-giving, and who is invested in keeping God’s name holy.

“I tell you, although he will not rise and give it to him because he is his friend, yet because of his persistence (*ten anaideian autou*—the persistence of him), he will get up and give him as many as he

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needs” (v. 8). The interpretation of this parable hangs on these words—*ten anaideian autou*. There are two issues here: First, what does *anaideian* mean? Second, to whom does *autou* refer—the host or the neighbor?

- Ken Bailey says that *anaideian* had two meanings among Christians—shamelessness and persistence. However, in the Greek Septuagint (LXX) version of the Old Testament as well as secular Greek literature, it had only one meaning—shamelessness.

- Bailey then seeks to say that *autou* (“his”) refers to the neighbor rather than the host. He says that it is the neighbor’s *anaideian* at work here rather than the host’s. In other words, it is the neighbor’s concern about being shamed rather than the host’s persistence that turns the tide (Bailey, Poet & Peasant, 125-133).

There is substantial (but not universal) agreement among scholars that *anaideian* has to do with shame rather than persistence here—or, perhaps, a combination of shame and persistence. There is less agreement about whether it is the host’s shameless asking or the neighbor’s concern about being shamed that is involved.

We should also note Ezekiel 36, where God expressed his displeasure with the Israelites who defiled their soil with their ways and deeds (v. 17). Nevertheless, God promised to redeem Israel, saying, “Therefore tell the house of Israel, Thus says the Lord Yahweh: I don’t do this for your sake, house of Israel, but for my holy name, which you have profaned among the nations, where you went” (v. 22).

God thus promises to cleanse the Israelites and to bring them into a land of their own and to give them prosperity. He says: “Then the nations that are left around you shall know that I, Yahweh, have built the ruined places, and planted that which was desolate: I, Yahweh, have spoken it, and I will do it” (v. 36).

In other words, God saves his people lest God’s name be brought to shame. This passage, which would be familiar to Luke’s readers, favors the interpretation that it is the neighbor’s concern about being shamed that saves the day.

### Asking, Seeking, Knocking

Jesus continues: “So I say to you, Ask, and it will be given to you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened” (11:9-10).

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This is perhaps the most difficult part of the passage to preach because our experience contradicts Jesus' words. So often we have asked and not received; we have searched and not found. In spite of our most fervent prayers for their health and safety, we have lost loved ones to cancer and senseless accidents. In spite of the fervent prayers of people around the world, daily we hear of tragedies of violence, hunger, disease, and natural disasters.

If God is like a loving parent who desires to give what is good and life giving (11:11-13), why do so many prayers seem to go unanswered?

There is no simple answer to this question, though simple answers are often given. One answer given is that it only *seems* that God has not answered our prayers; God always answers, but sometimes says no.

There are times, perhaps, when that is the case. We do not always ask wisely, and God, to be a truly loving God, must refuse our request. Yet this explanation cannot account for the many cases in which our requests must surely be in tune with God's will. Scripture bears witness to God's will that everyone have enough to eat and that violence and war cease. Jesus tells us to pray for daily bread and for God's kingdom to come. Yet millions continue to go hungry and wars rage on.

Another explanation often given to the problem of unanswered prayer is that "everything happens for a reason." God has some purpose in everything that happens. No matter how bad it may seem, it is all part of God's plan to bring about some higher good.

This is a troubling explanation, to say the least, as it holds that whatever happens must be God's will. One would then have to say that all kinds of evil -- such as violence, torture, starvation, and premature death -- are the will of God. We dare not call the tragic results of our own sin and rebellion "God's will."

Of course we believe that God can bring good out of evil. Indeed, this is our only hope and the heart of our faith in Jesus' death and resurrection. But that is quite a different thing from saying that whatever evil thing happens is God's will.

What then can we say about unanswered prayer? It is wise to be wary of saying more than we can possibly know. We can, however, affirm what Scripture tells us: that God is all-powerful, yet God is not the only power in the world. There are other powers at work, the powers of Satan and his demons, the powers of evil and death, often manifested in human sin. Although God has won the ultimate victory over these powers through the death and resurrection of Jesus, the battle still rages on. Consequently, God's will can be -- and often is -- thwarted.

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Why bother to pray, then, if God's will can be thwarted? Again we affirm what Scripture tells us, and particularly what Jesus tells us in this passage: that we are invited into relationship with a loving God who wants to give us life, and who continues to work tirelessly for our redemption and that of all creation.

We dare to be shameless in our prayers, to keep bringing our needs and hopes to our heavenly Father, because Jesus tells us to do so, trusting in God's loving purpose for us. Not everything that happens is God's will. But we can affirm with St. Paul, "in all things God works for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:28).

"Which of you fathers...?" is a rhetorical question. The answer is, of course, none of you would hesitate to bless and protect and assist your children. We can learn from our father. We can also learn what to ask for.

## Questions

1. **Read verse 1.** Why was prayer important to Jesus?
2. What request did one disciple make of Jesus?
3. Why were they suddenly interested in prayer?
4. What did Jesus teach them?
5. **Read verse 2.** What did it mean to Jesus to call God "Father"?
6. What does it mean to you? (Ro 8:15; Jn 20:17)
7. What does it mean to hallow God's name? (Jn 17:1,4)
8. How do people dishonor God's name? (Ro 2:24)
9. What does it mean to pray, "your kingdom come"? (See footnote, Lk 17:21.)
10. How is this prayer topic related to Jesus' ministry?
11. Why pray for "daily" bread? (Ex 16:14-21) Why "our"?
12. Why is forgiveness so necessary?
13. Why pray for forgiveness every day?
14. How can we forgive others? (Mt 18:21-35)
15. Why do we need to pray about temptation? (1Pe 5:8)
16. **Read verses 5-8.** What is the main point of this parable?
17. Whose name and reputation is shamed if assistance is not given?
18. **Read verses 9-10.** How do these verses reinforce the lesson of the parable?
19. What must we learn from this practically?
20. **Read verses 11-13.** In what respect are all fathers alike?
21. How much more is our loving heavenly Father likely to give us the best gifts?
22. What is the best gift?
23. How can a father live a life that will resemble the nature of the Heavenly Father here?

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