

How to Approach God in Prayer

Luke 11:1-13

Pastor Danny Lee

I have always admired stories of endearing parent-child moments; or the scene of a father being tender with his children. Perhaps now that I have two kids of my own I am more aware of the impact my response has on my children. But nothing speaks more kindness to me as when a father is visibly affectionate with his children.

One of the many reasons I admire Abraham Lincoln was the gentleness he composed with his children during the most stressful years of his life. Lincoln and his wife, Mary Todd, had four sons. Only one son survived past the age of 18. Their second and third sons died at the ages of 4 and 11, respectively. Their youngest son, Thomas “Tad” Lincoln, became the object of their affection during the remaining years of Lincoln’s life; he eventually died at age 18, six years after his father was murdered.¹

As the youngest, Tad often took free reign of the White House and was very mischievous. Most of the staff were either very fond of him or very exasperated by him. He had a special code for entering his father’s study – three quick taps and two slow bangs. Some who served on Lincoln’s staff during those years recorded a few of their memories between Abraham and his son Tad.

Noah Brooks wrote that, *“I was once sitting with the President in the library when Tad tore into the room in search of something, and having found it, he threw himself on his father like a small thunderbolt, gave him one wild, fierce hug, and without a word, fled from the room before his father could put out a hand to detain him.”*

According to Assistant Secretary of War Charles A. Dana, *“Often I sat by Tad’s father reporting to him about some important matter that I had been ordered to inquire into, and he would have this boy on his knee; and, while he would perfectly understand the report, the striking thing about him was his affection for the child.”*²

Such images of intimate fondness between father and son are wonderful glimpses into the type of relationship God has with His children. It may seem difficult to picture God as a gentle Father tenderly holding His child while commanding the sun to rise and the oceans swell. But it is this exact image I want to implant in your mind’s eye this morning. *Do you view God as having such personal affection toward you that you can interrupt Him any time night or day and never disrupt Him?*

I don’t know what your view of God and prayer is this morning, if you’re frustrated in prayer because you feel He is not answering you. Or perhaps you are disappointed with His answers to your prayers. Your view of God, view of prayer and your understanding of the gospel shape and effect how you approach Him. Many of you may feel anemic in your prayer lives because you have not been growing in your fear of God. Many of you feel stifled in prayer because you have lost your purpose and mission as a Christian. Others of you simply may not know *how to pray* because you have not grasped the desperately good news of the Gospel as your salvation and life. All these elements fashion your mindset, your approach and your habit in prayer. Turn to Luke 11 as we continue to learn further in Jesus’ School of Prayer.

¹ <http://marriage.about.com/od/presidentialmarriages/a/abelincoln>

² <http://www.mrlincolnwhitehouse.org>

“Teach us to pray”

^{ESV} **Luke 11:1-13** *Now Jesus was praying in a certain place, and when he finished, one of his disciples said to him, “Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples...”*

The burning question of the disciples was a desire to pray like Jesus prayed. By this time in His ministry, they saw Jesus’ habit of prayer (3:21; 6:12; 9:28) and how it was different from the Pharisees. His prayers were intimate, constant, passionate and fervent; contrasted to their prayers which were rote, recited at meals, on special occasions, or worship services led by the worship leaders. Their prayers were out of duty, but His were from delight. At this point, they didn’t so much want to know *what* to pray, but *how* to pray like Jesus was praying.

Jesus answered their question with reminding them of the pattern for prayer then illustrated how they could approach God in prayer. Just as the Lord’s Prayer is the skeletal outline or the scaffolding by which you build your prayers, His illustrations pull back the curtain to God’s presence as motivation in your approach to prayer. Jesus relates two sets of illustrations to highlight God, with an emphasis on our imperative to pray set in between. He uses contrast (unwilling neighbor, evil father) to illustrate a right view of God as He argues from the lesser to the greater. The key to unlock your understanding of how to approach God in prayer is found in vs.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 to those who ask him!”

Bottom line, how you view God affects how you will approach Him in prayer. My prayer this morning is for you to *want to want to pray* to your Almighty, Infinite, Most Honored, Holy and Loving Father because you are living in desperate times which require His limitless, spiritual resources. If you live with a high view of God and His supply, while living out your position as His dearly loved child, you will be enabled to boldly approach God with any matter of prayer consistent with His will. In Luke 11, *Jesus answers for us the burning question of how you can approach God in prayer.*

- **God is never inconvenienced, but eager to answer your prayers**

Luke 11:5 *And he said to them, “Which of you who has a friend will go to him at midnight and say to him, ‘Friend, lend me three loaves,’⁶ for a friend of mine has arrived on a journey, and I have nothing to set before him’;⁷ and he will answer from within, ‘Do not bother me; the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed. I cannot get up and give you anything’?⁸ I tell you, though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, yet because of his impudence he will rise and give him whatever he needs.*

Hospitality measures

Jesus began by posing a hypothetical situation, actually an absurd situation: “*Can you imagine if...*” Hospitality in those days was a sacred duty; in fact, a host in first-century society would be expected to welcome and provide for any visitor no matter the conditions. It was both a personal and societal matter of honor at stake for host and community. It was not the situation or request that was atypical. Bread was baked daily to meet family needs, and three loaves (round pita-sized pieces) were part of a typical evening meal. The midnight friend’s desire for help was not unusual; it was simply a matter of convenience.

The houses were basically one room spaces where the family slept together on mats on the floor for warmth. The doors and windows were heavily bolted shut to keep warmth in and others out. No one knocked on a shut door unless the need was urgent.

Today, there is not the same cultural conscience or obligation toward hospitality. I remember as a boy my mom sending me over to a neighbor's house for some eggs or oil if she ran out during a recipe. Today most don't like to be inconvenienced, or inconvenience others; which is why we have "Convenience Stores."

The hypothetical absurdity of Jesus' scenario was the friend's initial refusal to help his outside friend fulfill his cultural obligation. But the issue wasn't giving the bread, but the inconvenience of getting up and disturbing his sleeping family. The man only relented because his friend was audacious and persistent³.

Inconveniencing God

God is not like the unwilling friend. Jesus contrasted this unwilling friend with what God is not. God is not a slumbering giant who gets angry or annoyed at being aroused by inconvenient matters. Instead, He eagerly awaits your requests so that He can abundantly provide for your needs. *Prayer is not an inconvenience to God, but the privilege of an intimate Father-child relationship.* Unlike your annoyance with a child urgently pestering you with a matter of great importance to him, God relates as a loving Father expectantly wanting you to come to Him in prayer.

How do you feel when you approach God in prayer? Do you feel like an intruder upon God's busy schedule? Do you feel like He doesn't want you to waste His time with trivial matters you should solve yourself? Or do you feel there is no need at all to pray because He already has the answer and will do what He wants? You are never inconveniencing God with your prayers. He expects you to bring all kinds of requests to Him no matter how big or small they seem to you. If God cares about how much sparrows are sold for in the market, or how many hairs are on your head (12:4-7), He absolutely cares for both the great and small details of your life.

- **Approach God with bold perseverance**

Luke 11:9 *And I tell you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.*¹⁰ *For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened.*

Imperatives to pray

Jesus continued His point by further explaining your opportunity in prayer. Since God is not inconvenienced by your prayers, you can never wear Him out. Jesus said for you to boldly approach God with a persevering mindset. He commanded you to continue in present, active prayer. The words can be literally read as, "*keep asking... keep seeking... keep knocking.*"

Your hope and promise is in God's assurance to answer your prayers, "*it will be given... you will find... it will be opened.*"⁴ God always answers your prayers; there is no such thing as unanswered prayers, contrary to what Garth Brooks may sing.

³ ἀναίδεια, ας, ἢ persistence, lit. 'shamelessness'

⁴ Future passive and active verbs

Some of you might fear this sounds like a “blank check” idea to God. Or such bold, persevering prayer can be used as a “Name it & Claim it” approach; if you pray hard enough perhaps you can order, demand, even command God to do certain things for you. If you have enough faith and ask for it long enough, God will have to answer you. However, don’t mistake personal confidence with faith; just because God can do something doesn’t mean He will.

When is bold perseverance appropriate in prayer? When your prayers are consistent with God’s will. Jesus’ previous outline for prayer should guide the content of your prayers. They are not arrogant prayers to satiate personal wants; but humble, desperate pleas to God to supply needs and bring Him glory.

Process of prayer

How have you persevered in prayer? There is more to the privilege of prayer than only getting your answer. Sometimes the process of prayer is more important than your answer to prayer. If God knows the beginning from the end; if He knows your prayers before you pray, and knows how He will answer your prayer, *why pray?* Because God has designed prayer as a means to bring dependent, spiritual growth and tremendous blessing in your life. Sometimes the greatest value gained through prayer is not the final answer you receive, but the result of God’s changing work in your heart and life.

Have you ever had a burdening request that you prayed for over days, weeks, maybe even months? And by the time you received God’s answer, the answer wasn’t as significant as what you learned through the process God took you through. Prayer is meant to stretch, grow and discipline you to reflect greater likeness of God for greater usefulness to Him. Just as a fisherman finds joy in the task of asking for the right bait to use, searching for the exact spot the fish are in, and patiently knocking on their home with his fishing lure and line, so there is joy in prayer which comes through the means of asking, searching and knocking until the discovery is made.

- **Trust in God’s goodness to give you His best**

Luke 11:11 *What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will instead of a fish give him a serpent; ¹² or if he asks for an egg, will give him 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 to those who ask him!*

God’s goodness

Jesus wrapped up this discussion with a final appeal to the father-child relationship. His argument builds from the lesser (“you... who are evil”) to the greater (“how much more”) comparing God to be better than the “best” loving father on earth. If we, by nature, are marred by evil sinfulness and yet retain some ability to show love and goodness to your children; how much better is a perfectly good, loving Heavenly Father able to do for His children! Everything good in your life is given to you because of the goodness of God (Jam 1:17).

Jesus previously made this statement when He exclaimed, “If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!” [Matt 7:11]

If you stand forgiven as a sinner by the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, you stand in the constant love and goodness of God for your life. There is nothing you can ever do to make God love you less, or make Him love you more. He loves you perfectly and completely, always endeavoring to cause all things to work together for your good and His glory (Rom 8:28). God's always answers your prayers according to His goodness. *Do you trust the goodness of God in your prayers?*

God's best

God's also answers your prayers with His best. As a Christian, the best you receive is God Himself, the Holy Spirit. This reply by Jesus to the disciples was different than what He said previously. Jesus elaborates on what the "good things" are that God gives: His Holy Spirit, your highest good. It is because the Holy Spirit is the source to every answer and your supply to every need. God doesn't just give you some wisdom, He gives you His Spirit of Wisdom. He doesn't just give you some comfort, He gives you the Comforter. God gives you His best, which is Himself.

Conclusion

How will you approach God in prayer? Because God deeply loves you and answers every prayer at His appropriate time, you can confidently trust His answers are always for your best – whether Yes or No. But don't pray just to get an answer, pray so you will grow through the process He's prepared for you. Boldly approach God's throne room believing His promise to answer you. As you correct and increase your view of God, it will affect your personal approach in prayer, reflecting Christ as you pray more intimately, more boldly, more fervently and more passionately. *Do you want to want to pray more?* I will pray you do.