

Shamelessly Bold Prayer

Luke 11:1-13 (CSB)

¹ He was praying in a certain place, and when he finished, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray, just as John also taught his disciples." ² He said to them, "Whenever you pray, say, Father, your name be honored as holy. Your kingdom come. ³ Give us each day our daily bread. ⁴ And forgive us our sins, for we ourselves also forgive everyone in debt to us. And do not bring us into temptation." ⁵ He also said to them, "Suppose one of you has a friend and goes to him at midnight and says to him, 'Friend, lend me three loaves of bread, ⁶ because a friend of mine on a journey has come to me, and I don't have anything to offer him.' ⁷ Then he will answer from inside and say, 'Don't bother me! The door is already locked, and my children and I have gone to bed. I can't get up to give you anything.' ⁸ I tell you, even though he won't get up and give him anything because he is his friend, yet because of his friend's shameless boldness, he will get up and give him as much as he needs. 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. ¹⁰ For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened. ¹¹ What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead of a fish? 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?"

How do you feel about your prayer life? Do you pray frequently enough? Hard enough? Are you not sure what to say in your prayers? Do they feel like rambling words without clear direction, maybe missing what you should pray for?

You're not the first to wonder about your prayer life and how it should be done and done better. John the Baptist had taught his disciples how to pray. The Pharisees had taught their followers. Other wanted to know too. Seeing Jesus come back from praying in a certain place, an unnamed disciple makes a request: "Lord, teach us to pray, just as John also taught his disciples." (verse 1)

Jesus answered immediately with a slightly shorter version of what we call the Lord's Prayer, a prayer many of us pray frequently. Before we ponder some of its content, let's go to the part of what Jesus taught what maybe we don't often think about when praying: the how we should pray.

Jesus has us imagine a scenario where a friend comes to your house at midnight and asks for 3 loaves of bread because his friend had just come from a long journey and he doesn't have anything to put before him. The response: "Don't bother me! The door is already locked, and my children and I have gone to bed. I can't get up to give you anything." (verse 7) If it were us, we would probably add, "Seriously, dude, it's midnight. Wait until morning when the stores are open. Or go to the 24-7 Walmart. Or call up DoorDash or UberEats. It's not my fault you don't have anything to give to your friend." And then maybe unfriend him from Facebook and ignore or block his subsequent texts... But this is a different time, different culture, one without our modern and quick solutions.

Even though the man said, "Don't bother me!" - and we probably would too - Jesus tells us that "even though he won't get up and give him anything because he is his friend, yet because of his friend's shameless boldness, he will get up and give him as much as he needs." (verse 8) It was a shamelessly bold ask at midnight and this was the reason he gave the asker as much as he needed - not so much because he cared about his friend or his situation. Jesus is telling us that this shamelessly bold request is a good thing.

Does that sit well with you? Do you feel like the neighbor asking overstepped his boundaries and shouldn't have been so bold? And it might be that you are a guesser and not an asker. There's a whole thing about that and you can Google it later to read more about it, but basically askers have no problem asking and trust that you will say no if it can't be done because they are not trying to inconvenience you but they need help whereas guessers have a hard time asking and only do so when they feel assured that you'll say yes and conversely they feel put out when someone asks them to do something that they don't want to do.

If you're a guesser, Jesus' teaching to pray with shameless boldness might be really difficult for you. In fact, does it translate into your prayer life? Do you only pray about things that you think God will give you, things that you think are worthy of his time? I mean, he does have the whole world to take care of: wars to quell, governments to keep in check, world hunger to cure, lives of the born and unborn to protect, a whole universe to sustain. So maybe I don't need to bother him with my piddly concerns and requests.

Yet Jesus is teaching this to turn that thought habit upside down. He wants you to fight those guesser feelings that stop you from asking and instead be unashamedly bold in your prayers, with any and every request. It's a lesson that Abraham learned and lived out, as we saw in our first Bible reading today. When the LORD had made known to him his intentions to destroy the wicked cities of

Sodom and Gomorrah, Abraham's prayed with shameless boldness. He asked God to spare the cities, all the wicked people, for the sake of just 50 believers. God granted it. Then Abraham prayed that God would spare it for 45. God granted it. Abraham kept going: 40, 30, 20, 10. And God didn't get fed up with Abraham for changing the amount. He didn't get exasperated as Abraham kept asking. No, he invited it, welcomed it, and readily responded as requested. Even Jesus himself made shamelessly bold requests when he prayed that the Father would take his cup of suffering away from him before he went and endured the pain and agony of the cross.

Why can we pray that way, even if it feels arrogant or wrong to put God out with shamelessly bold requests? It's because of the relationship we have with God. Jesus taught his disciples and us to start our prayers simply with "Father." (verse 2) In Jesus' day, it was unheard of to talk to God as a father, let alone your father. But this is the relationship we have with God because Jesus substituted his life for ours, because he lived in perfect obedience to his Father in heaven, spent time in perfect prayer, because he sacrificed his life in payment for our sins. In baptism, God washed away those sins, clothed us with Christ, with his perfection, and then put his name on us – in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit – an adoption that makes us his sons, his children, so that we call him "Father." We have this relationship not because God created us, but because Jesus did everything to remove our sins, perfect us, and give us a right relationship with him.

Maybe this is where things get a bit messy because not all earthly fathers are good fathers so maybe you never felt comfortable and never did ask your father for things. In fact, you may have had a horrible father or no father at all. And that's kind of Jesus' point. A typical father will generally make sure that his kids are fed. "What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead of a fish? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion?" (verses 11-12) In fact, Jesus even acknowledges how bad and awful dads can be: "If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children..." He finishes with a comparison from the lesser to the greater: "How much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him." (verse 13) Yes, earthly fathers can be selfish, lose their patience, refuse a request mainly because they don't want to do it, but God our Father is perfect and kind and gracious and patient and invites all our requests and will answer so much better than any earthly father would. He is the Father we never had here. This is why Jesus teaches us to pray with shameless boldness.

Now, what will you pray for with shameless boldness? Will it be for 1 million dollars? For a Playstation 5? For your dream home or that vacation to Hawaii? Will it be for the Packers to win the Super Bowl (or the Cowboys, Ravens, Chiefs, Seahawks, Bengals, Vikings, Buccaneers, etc.) Will it be for that miracle healing that you want so desperately? Will it be for that raise or that job or scholarship you applied for? Whatever it is, pray for these things with shameless boldness because these all fit into what Jesus taught us to pray – "Give us each day our daily bread." (verse 3)

But we don't want to pray with shameless boldness only for daily bread, physical need items. Jesus said, "The heavenly Father [will] give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him." (verse 13) Jesus focuses us on the Father giving us the Holy Spirit in response to our shamelessly bold prayer, something that he also emphasized through the what, the content, of the Lord's Prayer. With the exception of the daily bread petition, all these asks Jesus taught us to pray are things the Holy Spirit works in us and in other people.

So, what does a shamelessly bold prayer look like when we ask that God's name be honored as holy? "Dear God, let your Word always be taught in truth and purity. Help my pastor to handle your Word with care and to preach with boldness your saving message. Correct those who teach falsely. May your Word never be silenced and that people would honor and respect you and not discard you or blow off who you are or what you've done for them." How about "Your kingdom come"? "Father, bring my family member, my loved one, my coworker, my son, my daughter, my neighbor to faith in you. Turn that hardened atheist from their damning path in life. Bring every single person in the whole world to faith in you. Fill our church or wherever your Word is proclaimed with people eager to listen. Send your Holy Spirit into their hearts. Save them all, God!" "Forgive us our sins." "God, forgive me for my sins, the sins that only you know about, yes, that sin, especially that sin, the one that I'm too ashamed to even say out loud. And do not let me hold others to their sins when they've asked for forgiveness because I know that you've forgiven them just as you've forgiven my horrible, grievous, awful sins." "Do not bring us into temptation." "Father, I can't seem to get a handle on this sin. I keep giving in to it over and over. I'm conflicted because I want the pleasure but I know that this is wrong. I know you hate it. I hate the struggle. I feel weak. I feel inadequate. Take this away from me. Never let it come to my mind and my heart ever again. Make this temptation go away forever!" Brothers and sisters, don't scale back, but pray with shameless boldness.

We have a Father in heaven because Jesus has given us that right relationship with him through his perfect life, perfect prayer life, and his complete sacrifice on our behalf and in our place. Help us, Father, to pray to you with shameless boldness, to ask, seek, and knock as you have taught us, as Abraham did, as Jesus did, knowing that always hear us, you always answer us, and you always give us what's best. Amen.