

Like Your Father, Only Better
LORD, Teach Us to Pray – Part 9

I am all too woefully aware of how inadequate has been my exposition of our LORD's, our elder brother's, masterful instruction on prayer to our heavenly *Abba* Father. There is not only much more that could be said practically about prayer, but there is an entire biblical theological study of prayer that desperately needs all of our attention.

But while there is always more that we could say about prayer there comes a point in all our instruction where we simply have to tuck in and get on with it. It's almost like deeply falling in love. You can read all the books in the world that have elucidated what love is, you can even memorize and quote all the great love poetry from the heart, and sing all the songs that have celebrated the beauty of love BUT until you have truly fallen in love with the "one" whom God has prepared for you, then you really have **no** idea what love is or how to genuinely love someone.

That is why Jesus now turns to address **not** only the urgency of venturing into a life filled with prayer BUT encouraging you **to be bold** in your prayers to your heavenly Father (**vv. 5-13**). It is as if we have just recently been adopted into a new family, after years of abuse, and we are, as can be expected, unsure about how to now approach our new parents who have adopted us. So the biological Son of our new Father comes to us straight-way and assures us to go boldly into our new Father's presence and ask Him for what we need, trusting that He loves you and has every intention to take care of you! The very real trouble of our new relationship with our heavenly Father is that we struggle to believe the assurances of the Son.

We all know God is sovereign – He is the all-powerful, infinite, everlasting King over all creation. And sometime we are tempted to think that He is too great to be approached. Either He is too busy with running the universe that He doesn't have time or concern for someone as small as I am. Or perhaps, we think His knowledge of the world is so vast that I couldn't possibly tell Him something about what I need that He doesn't already know.

But it is to these kinds of concerns to which Jesus now turns. He chooses two pictures/portraits to help transform the way we think about God. Yes, God is indeed the sovereign **King** over the whole universe. Yes, He is holy, just, and righteous. But because of what Jesus has done for you in His life, death, resurrection, and ascension, that same Sovereign King, who holds the entire universe in the palm of His hand, has become your **Friend** (cf. **Prov. 18:24**), who sticks closer to you than a brother, and your **Father**, who so delights in you and enjoys you in His presence that you are never to fear that He will not care for you (**READ John 15:12-17 – brings all this together**). You make Him happy, warts and all. He will never forsake you or abandon you. You can always trust Him. So how best can Jesus drive these two images home for you, to so transform your thinking about God, so that you will no longer waste all that He has encouraged you to pray (**11:1-4**) but instead go **boldly** to the

Father and make your requests known to Him?

Before we consider the manner in which we may approach the throne of God, we must consider how it is even possible that we may approach God's throne in the first place. Look at **Hebrews 4:14-16**. We see in **v. 16** that we are exhorted to “draw near to the throne of grace with **confidence** or **boldness**. The word (*parresia*) connotes something we are willing to do in public. The idea is that there is **no shame** in what we are doing. It is **not** something we have to wait until it is dark because we are too ashamed to do it in the light. Rather, we are willing to go and do it out in the open for all to see.

Further, when you approach God this way - openly, confidently, boldly – you are assured that you will always find God's mercy and grace to help you in your time of need. This is why we never have to be afraid to come clean before God. Because, there will never be a time when you come before God when you need Him most that He will turn you away or refrain from showing you mercy and grace. He is never repulsed by those who come before Him clothed in the beauty of His Son.

Further, He is never too busy for you. He will never make you take a number and sit in the waiting room or put you on hold while He tends to “customers” more important than you. And the fact that He already knows what you need will never keep Him from enjoying the sound of His child coming to Him and asking for what you need. In fact, you know this for certain, absolutely confident, because the throne you are approaching is the “throne of grace.”

Now, how is it that the throne of the Judge of all the earth has become for you the “throne of grace”? Without spending much more time here, the reason the author of Hebrews gives for how the “throne of the King” has become for you the “throne of grace” is because of **WHO Jesus is for you** – your Great High Priest, the Son of God, the Sympathizer of your weaknesses - and **WHAT Jesus did for you** – He wrestled – made war – with sin and yet remained perfectly righteous for you – without sin (**v. 15**) – so that He could offer the perfect – without spot or blemish – sacrifice to atone for all your sin as your Great High Priest (**vv. 14-15**).

But not only was He the perfect sacrifice because He was without any sin, BUT because (1) He became a **human**, like us, because the blood of bulls and goats were never going to be permanent solutions for mankind, **AND** because (2) He didn't simply pass through a curtain of cloth within a temple made with human hands but He carried His own precious blood victoriously through the curtain of the heavens directly into the presence of God Himself to offer the complete cleansing of all your sin forevermore. **That and that alone** is why you may have complete confidence to boldly approach your heavenly Father's throne of grace.

It is because of Jesus' cross, resurrection, and ascension into heaven that He now can speak of God in **Luke 11** as your **Friend**, whom you can boldly approach (**vv. 5-8**), and as your **Father**, whom you can completely trust (**vv. 10-13**).

God is far more reliable than your friend (11:5-8).

Now, in order to drive home how you are to approach your heavenly *Abba* in prayer, Jesus tells a parable about a friend in desperate need (vv. 5-6). Now, for us, in our culture, the problem this man is having hardly seems to warrant such drama. After all, if someone shows up late to our house all we need to do is call in a pizza or run to a twenty-four hour grocer. But in first-century Palestine, there were no such conveniences. Enough bread was baked daily to meet that family's daily needs and to even possess a loaf of bread meant hours of preparation. If someone showed up hungry to their home and the cupboards were bare there was a good chance their guests were going to go to bed hungry unless the host could get some rations from his neighbor. And that's exactly what this man does (vv. 5-6).

Now there are two more cultural necessities we need to be aware of to catch the full impact of this parable. The first one regards the cultural requirement of a good host to a traveler, especially if he or she is also a good friend. We might sum up the host requirement by saying that it was expected of the host to feed and shelter their visitor as if they were family. By coming under the roof of the host, the host has taken on the obligation of protecting and caring for the needs of the visitor. But this obligation also extended to the greater community, so that if the host family was lacking something necessary for the visitor, others in the community were required to help provide those accommodations. Further, this would be compounded if their neighbor also happened to be a good friend (v. 5). In both cases, to fail at being either a good host to the visitor or a good neighbor to your friend's desperate needs would be to incur great shame on the family's name. And in a shame-based culture like this one, such consequences would have been unthinkable.

Now, it's one thing to ask a friend for help when everyone is up and ready to go for the day but once the shades have been drawn and all the children are tucked in, especially if the whole family lives in a one-room dwelling, to wake the master of the house simply to ask for a few loaves of bread is a little over the top (v. 7). I mean, how annoying of a friend do you have to be to show up to your friend's house in the middle of the night to ask for supper?

For some reason, this passage is often characterized as Jesus' teaching on persistence in prayer but that subject will be addressed in another passage we will soon read, D.V., in **Luke 18:1-5(8)**. Here Jesus has something far different in mind. In v. 8 the word translated here "persistence" is what we call a *hapax legomenon*, which means that it occurs only here in the whole New Testament. The Greek word here is very difficult to translate over into English but it has the idea of a combination of "shamelessness" and "boldness," what we might call someone who has the "nerve" or "gall" to wake someone up in the middle of the night for a few loaves of bread. The neighbor is forced into a position to inconvenience himself, as well as his whole family (v. 7), not because he is a friend but because of the shamelessness or boldness of his friend (v. 8).

So Jesus is saying that the neighbor helps his annoying friend not based upon their friendship but based upon how annoying his friend is. One commentator even humorously suggested "if they

neighbor does not get up, then the whole town will soon be up” (cf. Danker, 230 in Bock, 1059). Where the point of friendship does enter into Jesus' image here is the fact that because the man is a friend to his neighbor he does shy away from shamelessly and boldly approaching his friend in time of need where he might be much more reticent if his neighbor was a complete stranger. Now, this opens us a whole vista of images for us to now think about our heavenly Father rightly. You can be just as annoying to God as this friend is to his neighbor because of the eternal friendship that has now been established through the cross of Jesus.

This then makes sense of **vv. 9-10** when Jesus tells us therefore, to ask, to seek, to knock, with the same boldness or shamelessness as this annoying neighbor, who is willing to wake up the entire family of his friend for a few loaves of bread, when you approach your heavenly *Abba* in prayer and trust that when you do He will most certainly give to you, you will find, and He will open it up to you because He loves you and cares for you. Even though “persistence” is not the main focus of Jesus' teaching here, there is a sense of persistence contained in the tense of the three imperatives so that Jesus doesn't say you are to simply ask, seek, knock once but you are to ask and keep on asking, seek and keep on seeking, knock and keep on knocking. Could we dare to pull all these images together and suggest that what Jesus is saying here is that when you come before God in prayer you are not simply to be shameless and bold in your requests BUT you are to continue to do so, trusting that it pleases your heavenly Father not only by your boldness, but your stamina, your tenacity, your endurance in trusting that you come to your Father knowing you have no where else to turn. We might even say it this way, if an earthly friend or neighbor is willing to be inconvenienced in this way, how much more is your gracious, heavenly Father willing to respond to those who are willing to come boldly, resolutely before Him and ask for what you need.

Now what are you to ask Him for? Some folks have been tempted to treat God here as if He were simply a “cosmic genie” who ever lives to give us what we “name and claim” for ourselves. They treat the words of prayer almost like a magical incantation so that by saying the right words they will compel God to open the treasures of this life upon them. But surely you can see the fatal error in such repulsive and blasphemous treatment of our holy God! To treat God in this way is to use Him as a means to something greater than Himself! But God is no means to a greater end. He is the greatest goal of our life. There is nothing more precious in all of life than to know Him and the enjoy Him.

So then what are we to ask Him for? We boldly rush into His presence to cry out to Him that He would sanctify His most holy name in all the earth, that He would invade this world with His Kingdom so that His will would be perfectly fulfilled here on earth as it is in heaven. We ask that He would sustain us with our daily needs and forgive us when we sin against Him and others as we too are forgiving of those who sin against us. We ask Him to protect us from being led into any situation where we might be tempted from the devil, the world, or the flesh to sin against our heavenly Father and cause His precious name to be profaned by us. We love Him and therefore we love the name of our *Abba*. We therefore cry out to Him daily to lead us in the paths of the righteousness of Jesus for His name's sake, for the praise of His marvelous grace!

God is far more gracious than your father (11:10-13).

But the image of boldly approaching a friend is not enough to help us see that our need to go to God in prayer is so great that Jesus must use another image to encourage us to want to petition God and that is -- He is far more gracious than your earthly father (**vv. 10-13**).

Now, I love my children. In fact, I love them so dearly there is absolutely no question, not even a single degree of hesitation, whose life I would gladly lay down in death if I were ever forced to make that choice. But sadly I have had to spend far more time in my relationship with them trying to convince them **that I love them** than I care to admit. **Why?** Because no matter how much I love them and am willing to give up my life for any one of them, I am admittedly a fallen sinner and truth-be-told, I often hurt them. There is a very real and practical reason James, the brother of our LORD, warned us about our tongue and how it is set on fire by the flames of hell (**James 3:6**).

Further, God has made us to learn some things about Him based upon what we know and experience from our relationships with our earthly fathers. We can see that this is true within our passage this morning (**vv. 11-13**). This is especially important for us to remember as fathers and why Paul specially explains to us:

⁴ Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord (**Eph. 6:4**).

As earthly fathers you carry an **enormous** responsibility of being your child's perception of our heavenly Father. That's why you must take **seriously** everything you say and do before your ever-watching, ever-evaluating children so as not to lead the smallest one of them astray from the LORD. Our LORD warns all of us, but especially fathers:

⁴² "Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe to stumble, it would be better for him if, with a heavy millstone hung around his neck, he had been cast into the sea (**Mark 9:42 //**).

Like teachers, every dad will "incur stricter judgment" when you stand before God and give an account of how you led your children – either leading your children to hate God OR to love Him with all their heart, soul, and strength (**cf. James 3:1**). Dads, make sure you are bringing up your children in the instruction of our LORD Jesus so that you will not have to stand before Him ashamed of what you have said and done in front of your children.

Because of the relationships we have with our earthly fathers, there is a tendency within us all that when we hear that God is like our earthly father that we often impute to God the sins of our fathers. Jesus' view of us is pretty straightforward - "you being evil" (**v. 13**). This does not mean, thankfully so, that all fathers are as bad as they can be. It only means that when we compare "earthly" fathers to our "heavenly" Father, who alone is good (**Lk. 18:19 //**), then we are all in the same boat of evil men. But we must always remember that no matter what mistakes, or sins, your earthly father has made, your heavenly Father is far more, **infinitely so**, gracious than your earthly father (**vv. 11-13**).

So even if your father was not all that you wished him to be, Jesus is wanting to assure you here, again as your elder brother, that according to His own testimony (which we might add is pretty reliable seeing that He has known your heavenly Father for all eternity), you can completely trust your *Abba* Father in Heaven – that He loves you and He will care for your every need. Don't hesitate therefore to rush into your *Abba's* presence and ask Him for what you need!

Do you really believe that? Are you willing to trust that your God genuinely loves you far greater than your closest friend, more graciously than your earthly father to give you everything Jesus has taught you to pray for OR are you going to kill His promise with a thousand qualifications which will continue to distort your image of God so that you will go on neglecting your time with your *Abba* Father, wasting these precious moments you have this side of glory to spend with and grow in the grace and knowledge of your God who loves you?

Beloved, there is a coming a day when you will leave behind forever your earthly home and put on your eternal, heavenly dwelling, not made with human hands so that you will be made ready to stand face to face with your beloved *Abba* Father (cf. **2 Cor. 5:1-5**). Don't you want that moment when you first look into His beautiful, glorious eyes to be the eyes of a dear friend, a beloved father whom you have spent your whole life getting to know intimately in prayer? Then take up the mantle today and boldly go before the throne of your Father. Yes, He is your King! He controls every movement of the whole universe. But that should only assure you that He can come to your aid when you need Him most. Trust your elder brother Jesus that your heavenly Father loves you far more than you will ever deserve or you will ever be able to comprehend. So get up and go to Him daily, bother Him as much as you need, as often as you need. And:

since we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus,²⁰ by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh,²¹ and since *we have* a great priest over the house of God,²² let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled *clean* from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.²³ Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful (**Heb. 10:19-23**).

Amen!

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As an ASIDE: Someone might wonder why the differences among Jesus' teachings within similar passages recorded by different gospel writers? For instance, in our passage Jesus asks, "if he asked for an egg, he will not give him a scorpion, will he?" (11:12) but in Matthew's passage Jesus uses, "when his son asks for a loaf, will give him a stone" (Matt. 7:9). Some have tried to point to these kinds of differences to call into question the veracity of God's Word as if these are sufficient examples of errors in the Bible. However, a simple explanation of such differences can be easily be due to the fact that Jesus most likely taught the same lessons many times and in various places throughout the years of His Galilean ministry. In one place, he used the "egg-scorpion" combination, while in another He used the "loaf of bread/stone" combination. This makes perfect sense of the differences and is even further supported by the fact that in the teaching where Jesus uses the "bread/stone" example He is sitting on top of a mountain with His disciples teaching the crowds (see Matt. 5:1), but where He uses the "egg/scorpion" combination He is currently on the move, traveling to Jerusalem with His disciples (see Luke 9:51). While this may not explain every such difference between the Gospel-writers it does demonstrate that many of the examples which are typically marshaled against the innerancy of God's Word are far too optimistic in their efficacy.