

Praying to Your Father

By David Feddes

Now 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 taught his disciples.” He said to them, “When you pray, say: ‘Father, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread. Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation’”

Then he said to them, “Suppose one of you has a friend, and he goes to him at midnight and says, ‘Friend, lend me three loaves of bread, because a friend of mine on a journey has come to me, and I have nothing to set before him.’ Then the one inside answers, ‘Don’t bother me. The door is already shut, and my children and I are in bed. I can’t get up and give you anything.’ I tell you, even though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, yet because of the man’s boldness he will get up and give him as much as he needs.

“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. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened.

“Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? Or if he asks for an egg, will 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 Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!” (Luke 11:1–13).

As a father, I have some pretty firm notions of how my children ought to ask for things if they actually want to get anything from me. First of all, if they want something, I usually want them to ask for it again and again and again. I really don't want to give it to them the first time they ask. They have to prove themselves to me—that they're good at asking and persistent in asking—before I will give them anything.

And as a father, I want my children to be especially emotional when they ask. They better not just come to me and say, “Here's what I would like you to do.” They must do so with a flood of tears or an outpouring of emotion—or else, no deal, because they were not earnest enough in making that request.

And when they come to me, they had better be absolutely certain that I'm going to do what they ask—or I'm not going to do it. They better not have one shade of doubt that I'm going to come through—or I'm not going to come through. And that's that.

You say, “Boy, that's a strange kind of father.” Yes, I think so. And yet, there's a fairly common view of prayer: that you must ask in a certain way, and if you ask enough times, with enough feeling and enough faith, it will be given to you.

So the keys really are repetition—over and over and over again—and don't give up the first time, or the 14th time, or the 87th time. Just keep after God and keep hassling him and keep bugging him until he comes through and gives it to you.

Repetition is a major key. Another one is passion, or the way you feel. And sometimes it may be that you feel like flattering him and saying all sorts of nice things about him to get on the good side of him. Some of you fathers have experienced that, perhaps—or mothers—where your children are especially flowery that day, and it doesn't happen to be Mother's Day or Father's Day, but they're very flowery. And your first thought is, "Um, what do you want?"

But at any rate, we sometimes transfer that whole idea over to prayer—that we need to be especially flattering or especially tearful or emotional in order to get results from God. And of course, the notion that faith equals absolute certainty that you're going to get what you're asking for—and if you're not absolutely certain of it, you won't get it.

Now, if that's your criteria for what makes a good and effective prayer, then if you want to get results, you need to keep repeating. You need to be passionate. You need to be certain. And if you don't get requests the first time, then ask more often, cry louder, believe harder, and get others to do the same. And maybe eventually you'll bug God into doing what you want him to do.

I think there's a fundamental mistake in this view of prayer, and I think it can be summarized in one word: Father. If God is our Father, this particular view of prayer has its difficulties and its shortcomings.

Well, at any rate, we want to think about how to pray to our Father. And when we think about that, we've got to be like the disciples and go to Jesus.

Why did they go to Jesus and say, "Lord, teach us to pray"? Well, Jesus had done a lot of praying, and especially the Book of Luke emphasizes the prayer life of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Just a few of the incidents that I'll highlight: Jesus was praying after he was baptized by John the Baptist, and as he was praying, God's Spirit came down upon him in a visible form like a dove, and the voice of the Father came from heaven and said, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased" (Luke 3:21–22). That voice and that anointing of the Holy Spirit for ministry came on him in response to prayer.

Scripture says that after doing a lot of miracles and teaching, he would withdraw to desolate places and pray (Luke 5:16). He was, in a sense, just reestablishing communion with his Father and reempowering himself for the next round of teaching and the next round of healing.

Before choosing the twelve apostles, he did not just kind of say, "Well, I'll just pick twelve of them and see how it works out." He spent all night in prayer on a mountain to God, and then the next morning he designated who those twelve apostles would be (Luke 6:12–13).

Another time when Jesus prayed, we read about it: he was near Caesarea Philippi and he was praying. Then after praying, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that I am?" They gave a variety of answers. Then Jesus said, "Who do you say that I am?" And Peter answered, "You are the Christ of God" (Luke 9:18–20).

Now what did that have to do with Jesus praying? Did Luke just kind of happen to throw in there that Jesus prayed and then he asked these questions? Well, we know that Peter said, “You are the Christ of God,” because Jesus explained, “Flesh and blood didn’t reveal that to you, Peter; it was revealed to you by my Father in heaven” (Matthew 16:17). Peter was revealed this insight into Jesus in answer to a prayer of Jesus for his disciples just before he asked them who they thought he was.

Jesus was praying on a mountain with three of his disciples—Peter, James, and John—when he was transfigured. Light shone from him in a dazzling way that they could not even look at him, and the voice of the Father said, “This is my Son, my chosen one” (Luke 9:35).

After seventy of his followers returned from a successful mission, Jesus prayed, “I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and learned and revealed them to little children” (Luke 10:21). He added that nobody knows who the Son is except the Father, and those to whom the Father chooses to reveal him (Luke 10:22). He was praying and thanking God for what had been accomplished.

Later in the book of Luke he said to Peter, “Satan has asked to sift you like wheat, but I have prayed for you” (Luke 22:31–32). If you want to know why Peter, even after denying Jesus three times, still came back and followed the Lord, it was this prayer of Jesus for Peter.

What did Jesus do in the garden? He prayed to the Father—three times—asking again and again, out of the depth of his anguish and desire, that if it was possible he would not have to go through the suffering and anguish of the cross (Matthew 26:39, 42, 44). He was earnest in that prayer; you do not get much more earnest than literally sweating blood (Luke 22:44). His request was not granted, but God did grant something: he sent angels to strengthen him, empowering Jesus to carry on and carry out his mission on earth (Luke 22:43).

When Jesus was on the cross, he was still praying: “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34). His very last words before his death were almost the same: “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit” (Luke 23:46).

Jesus’ life was a life of prayer, and it is no wonder that his disciples said, “Lord, teach us to pray.” He is the greatest communicator with the Father in heaven because he is the only begotten eternal Son; he truly knows how to pray to his Father. Even though he was the Son of God sent into the world, having had all that great divine power from eternity, he drew on his Father’s power through prayer, because he was living on earth as a man. Everything he did was accomplished by the power of the Holy Spirit coming to him in answer to the prayers he offered to his Father.

Jesus was a praying man. Do not think of Jesus only as the Son of God—though you should—but also as a person of prayer. So when he was asked, “How do we pray?” the first thing he taught was simply to say “Father.” The very first word he gave in answer to “Please teach us how to pray” is “Father.” That is the key to prayer. To begin praying, you must know God as Father and know that you are a loved and treasured child of his; otherwise you will hear all sorts

of ideas about how to pray, and they will be fundamentally mistaken because you have mixed up in your mind whom you are talking to. He loves you and he treasures you, so you say, “Father.”

Then you also assume that Father knows best. When you learn how to pray, assume that your heavenly Father knows best. It may sound strange, but ask him for what he wants, because he does not always give what he wants to give if you do not ask. Sometimes fathers want to be asked, even though they do want to give you something good; they still want to be asked for it. So ask him for what he wants to give you.

That is what the Lord’s Prayer is, basically. He wants his name to be hallowed, his kingdom to come, to provide for you every day, to forgive you and see you forgiving others, and to keep you from being tempted beyond what you are able (1 Corinthians 10:13). These are the fundamentals of living for God and having God’s kingdom reign in your life. So you pray to him as your Father, assuming Father knows best. Before you even begin bringing him any requests that are yours and you are not sure how he will answer, first address him as Father and ask for the things you know he wants to give you.

After giving us that Lord’s Prayer, Jesus tells a story that is often used to encourage the particular view of prayer mentioned earlier—the story of the friend at midnight. Some use it to say you should bug God again and again, the way the man in the story bugged his friend until he got the three loaves of bread he wanted. That is not quite the moral of the story. We need to look at how Jesus phrases it.

The very first thing Jesus does is phrase it as a question. He does not say, “This is an exact picture of what prayer is like and how you ought to go about it.” He starts by asking, “Which of you...?” If you can read Greek, “Which of you” is phrased in a way that means not one of us would ever do this in a million years. You could almost paraphrase it: “Now you wouldn’t do this, would you?”—and then he describes it.

You would not go to your friend’s house at midnight, waking your friend, his wife, his kids, and even the animals by hollering for bread. Would you do that? No way. But if you did, he would give you what you asked for—not because he is your buddy but because of your shameless impudence. He might say “Go away,” but then he would come down and give you what you asked for.

Jesus tells the whole story tongue-in-cheek. He says, “Now would you do this? No. But if you did, you would get results.” It is the way Jesus tells some parables, working from the lesser to the greater. If, which you would never do, you went to somebody at midnight and roused him out of bed, you would get results. But you do not have to be impudent going to God, because you are never waking him up in the middle of the night; he never slumbers nor sleeps (Psalm 121:4). You are not bugging someone who is grouchy because you arrived at the wrong time. You are going to your Father, who is more eager to bless you than you are to ask. So Jesus argues from the lesser to the greater: if something you would never do could still get an answer, how much more will your heavenly Father come through, because he is not just a friend and he is not sleepy; he is a Father and he is wide awake. So just ask.

So again, if you go back to that common view of prayer that I mentioned earlier—and I do not want to get it wrong completely—we can ask for things again and again if we still desire them and we are not sure that God has declined them; go ahead and keep asking. If you pray with tears because you are deeply moved by your desire, or if you offer God some praise—not as flattery but because you genuinely praise him—go ahead and do it. If you have a tremendous sense of confidence that he is going to give it to you, it may be that the Holy Spirit gave you that confidence and that God is indeed going to grant it. So do not misunderstand me: I am not saying repetition is always bad, or that you should be as unemotional as possible, or as doubtful as you could ever be. But are these really ways of moving God and getting him to do what you want? In that case you have to ask what kind of Father that would be, and how many prayers and tears are required to move God. When is the bottle full enough of tears? When has the number been reached that brings the desired result?

There were people who believed passionately in repetitive prayer—some of the great prayer warriors of the Old Testament. In 1 Kings 18 there was a showdown between the prophet Elijah—just one man—and the prophets of Baal, about 450 of them, plus another 400 prophets of Asherah. Each group would pray to its god: the prophets of Baal to Baal, and Elijah to the Lord. The prophets of Baal spent the whole day howling and praying. If repetition was the key, they prayed a lot; if passion was the key, when no result came they only grew more passionate, finally cutting themselves in the hope of getting their god's attention. When it was all over, nothing happened for them. Then Elijah prayed—one man, keeping it short and simple: “Lord, show that you are God and that I am your prophet.” Fire fell from heaven and burned up the sacrifice, the stones, and the water. Hundreds prayed passionately and repeatedly and got nothing; one man prayed a short, simple prayer and the fire of God fell. You can explain that easily: if you pray to a god who is no god, you get no results; if you pray to the God who is God, he comes through. That is the main point of the story, but a sub-point is that the prayers of the righteous differ from the prayers of pagans who think they can manipulate their god.

The story does not end there. Another prayer of Elijah is sometimes used by writers, and read by Christians, as a drive to keep praying until you get what you want. After the showdown, Elijah had won, the prophets of Baal were defeated and shamed, and God said he would send rain. Elijah went up the mountain to pray. He prayed, then sent his assistant to look for any sign. The sky was perfectly clear. This happened seven times. On the seventh trip the servant saw a tiny cloud, the size of a man's hand, on the horizon. Elijah said, “Get out of here; it is going to pour,” and it did indeed pour and refresh the land. When that story is applied to prayer, some say it proves you must pray with repetition: “What if Elijah had quit after six tries? He had to pray the seventh time!” Yet the text does not say Elijah prayed seven times. It says he prayed once and sent his servant seven times. There is a difference: he asked once; the servant checked seven times, and on the seventh check the answer appeared. That is a slender basis for saying “repeat, rinse, repeat” until God comes through. Elijah had no doubt: God had already told him what he was going to do, so Elijah prayed once and sent the servant to watch it unfold.

Again, do not misunderstand. If a little baby is sick and you pray one day and the baby is not better, ask the next day. That is still what you want, and God may still give the answer. Keep praying for things when God's answer is still open, when you do not yet know what it will be, but you do know what you desire. Just do not think, “If only I had prayed five times instead of

seven, I would have gotten it from God. If I had just pushed him a little harder, I too would have succeeded.” The risk is that you are hearing the stories through the lens of a teaching that is not really there. The teaching on the friend at midnight hinges on his impudence—not on persistence—and it is a contrary-to-fact question: you would not actually do that. The story of Elijah is often used to emphasize repetition, yet it does not say he prayed seven times; it says he prayed once. We should not build too much teaching that is not actually in the passage.

Repetition has this problem—and this is not true of all repeated prayer—but if you think you are going to get results from God by how often you repeat, you have a pagan mindset: “When you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words” (Matthew 6:7). That is the pagan mindset: if I trot out enough words and enough requests, he has to come through. “Do not be like them; your father knows what you need before you ask him” (Matthew 6:8). The Father comes in again. Then Jesus, right after saying this in Matthew, says, “This, then, is how you should pray,” and gives us the Lord’s Prayer (Matthew 6:9). Your Father knows what you need before you ask him. Do you really think you need to make big speeches?

Answers to prayer are not prizes in a speech contest judged by a stranger. You are talking to your Father. He listens because he loves you; he knows your needs because he is wise. Use simple words, in simple faith, then leave it to him. He can take care of the rest.

How not to pray. Well again, there are basically three ways of approaching prayer that can be misguided, and they’re fairly closely related: magical, mechanical, and manipulative.

One is magical: that certain kinds of special words need to be spoken, and in the uttering of those special words, they have a power almost all their own. So you have special words or rituals or sometimes a feeling of certainty—or almost a mind control of the universe—that tap into a divine magic. This magical view of prayer is a long way from understanding that you’re talking to your Father.

We live in a mechanical age, where science tends to think of everything as a machine. We often think of life as a machine, and we want to learn better techniques. “How-to” books sell big time. So we want “How to pray,” “How to get better results in your prayers,” and we’re told that frequent repetition is one of those techniques. But techniques don’t automatically produce better results, because you’re not dealing with a machine—you are conversing with your Father. If it were a machine, then yes, look for the buttons to push. But there are no buttons on your Father.

Then there’s the manipulative kind of prayer I’ve mentioned already—where you think that maybe if there’s enough flattery, or maybe formality (you come into God’s presence very stern and uptight and straight-laced), that’ll get results. Or maybe it’s tears. Maybe it’s tantrums. Those sometimes work on parents. So does your heavenly Father just kind of say, “I can’t take it anymore! This kid is driving me nuts! I’ll give him what he wants”? You know, harassment, group pressure—when those ideas of prayer come into your head, you’re getting mistaken views of your Father in heaven, who he is, what he’s like, and how he responds to us.

J.I. Packer says: “If you want to judge how well a person understands Christianity, find out how much he makes of the thought of being God’s child and having God as his Father. If this is not the thought that prompts and controls his worship and prayers and his whole outlook on life, it means that he does not understand Christianity very well at all.”

The thought that God is your Father is to control your faith and your life. Who is your Father? Again, that can be hard for some of us, especially if our fathers were cruel to us or abandoned us or wronged us in very grievous ways. Then to have the label “Father” applied to God can sometimes be a bit of a difficulty or a problem. But on the other hand, even if you felt wronged or betrayed or hurt by your father, to know that there is a greater and better Father—one who has loved you forever and who cares for you no matter how an earthly father may have blown it—then to know that that God is listening to you whenever you pray is a tremendous comfort.

And who is he? The Bible says, “God is light; in him there is no darkness at all” (1 John 1:5). When you pray to God, you’re not talking to someone who has a dark streak. The Bible says, “Don’t be deceived, my dear brothers. Every good and perfect gift comes from the Father of lights, who does not change like shifting shadows. He chose to give us birth through the word of truth” (James 1:16–18).

He’s good. And the first thing you really need to know in prayer—again, in one sense, this could be a super, super short sermon—Who is God? He is Father. Who am I? I’m his child. And he loves me. If you know that—absolutely know that—that you’re his child, his son or daughter, and that he loves you, and that he has a tremendous destiny for you, then that changes everything about your prayers. You’re not looking for ways to push his buttons. You know he loves you, so you bring whatever is on your heart to him and then leave it with him.

Jesus has that great story of a father in Luke 15. A son—not such a hot son—wants out. He wishes his father were dead, but since he’s not, the next best thing is, “At least give me the inheritance.” So he wants his inheritance before his father even dies. He gets it. The father says, “OK, here you go.” And as soon as he’s got the money, the son wants nothing to do with the father anymore. He leaves and blows all the money on wild living. He ends up slopping pigs and wishing he could eat their slop.

Then he comes to his senses and says, “I’m an idiot. My dad’s hired men have it a lot better than I do. I’ll go home to my father. I know the prayer I’m going to offer: ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I’m not worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired men’” (Luke 15:18–19).

So he heads home. But he doesn’t get a chance to deliver the whole speech. His father rushes out to him, embraces his muddy, sloppy, stinky son, and welcomes him. He calls for a robe to be put on him. He calls for the family ring to be put on his hand—putting him right back in his old position as son and leader in the household.

Jesus is telling us that this is who our Father is. Even when we’ve gone so far from him—even when it’s true that we’re not worthy to be called his son or daughter—you don’t get to give your whole speech. If you don’t know who you are anymore, or you think you can’t be God’s child

anymore because you blew it so badly—because you were so horrible that he couldn't possibly accept you back—you plan your speech: grovel a little, beg a little, say, “Well, at least give me a few goodies and let me be your slave.”

He's not listening to that part of it. Because he already has rushed out to welcome anyone who comes back. Jesus says, “There is rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents” (Luke 15:7). And that's because of the heart of the Father.

David Crump has a great book on petitionary prayer—prayers that are requests—and he goes through the whole New Testament on all the petitions and themes that bear on that. Here's how he summarizes some of his key thoughts:

“God is the ideal parent who hears every child's request the first time and promises to respond at the right moment in the best possible way. Therefore, ask—anywhere, anytime, in tears or dry-eyed, continually or briefly, passionately or calmly, when it seems convenient, when it appears impossible—just ask. You're always heard because you're always loved.”

“Ask and it will be given to you,” says Jesus. “Seek and you will find. Knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened” (Luke 11:9–10).

Why? Because we're talking to our Father. That's what prayer is. It doesn't always mean we'll get exactly what we asked for. We might get something better. But he will do what he knows to be best for each of us as we continue to interact with him and pray to him.

Then Jesus gives another of his great arguments from the lesser to the greater. He says, “Now you earthly fathers—anyone who's a half-decent father—if his son asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent instead?” (Luke 11:11).

David Crump tells a story in his book: when his son was growing up, he liked snakes and reptiles. He kept all kinds of reptiles in his basement and read all kinds of books about them. He even asked his mom and dad for something more exotic—something more dangerous. Maybe start with a rattlesnake, move on to a cobra, and eventually to pit vipers. He would regale them with stories from his magazines about kids getting swallowed by boa constrictors or bitten by venomous snakes—somehow using those as arguments for why he ought to have these creatures.

Well, he didn't get what he asked for—because his parents weren't eager to give him something poisonous.

So if we're asking for a good fish to eat, God's not going to give us a poisonous snake. And if we're asking for a poisonous snake—if that's what one of our prayers amounts to—if granting it would destroy us spiritually, God's not going to grant that request either. Being a good Father, he's going to give us the good thing, not the bad one.

Or, “If he asks for an egg, will he give him a scorpion?” (Luke 11:12). Same principle. Are you going to ask your father for a nourishing egg, and he says, “Here’s a scorpion—hope it bites you”?

“If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him?” (Luke 11:13).

There again, it’s an argument from the lesser to the greater. If you want an egg from your dad, he’ll give you the egg. If you want the Holy Spirit from your Father in heaven, you’ve got it—because God wants to give the best gifts.

He wants his kingdom to come. He wants his forgiveness to flow in our lives. He wants us to overcome temptation. And how do you get all of that in one swoop? You get the Holy Spirit. So ask.

There are times when we ask, and we’re free to ask for anything. God is free to say “no” sometimes and “yes” sometimes. But he is not free to say “no” when we ask for his Holy Spirit—because he has bound himself to give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him. There are some things that he has promised to give. Just as Elijah had been told the rain was going to come if he asked, we have been told the Holy Spirit will come if we ask (Luke 11:13; cf. 1 Kings 18:1, 42–45).

So pray for the Holy Spirit. And that is one area where repetition is good—not because you have to keep on badgering God until he gives that first little bit of the Holy Spirit, but because once he has given his Holy Spirit, pray for more. Pray to be ever more filled with the Holy Spirit, ever more empowered, ever fuller of this Spirit who fills you with God’s love.

God sent forth his Son so that we would receive adoption as sons. That’s how the Bible explains Jesus’ coming (Galatians 4:4–5). There are different angles to view his coming, but this is an important one: he became like us so that we would become like him—sons and daughters of the Father in heaven.

And because you are sons and daughters, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba, Father” (Galatians 4:6). When you truly call God “Father,” the Holy Spirit is already speaking from within you.

So when you pray, don’t make it too complicated. Don’t try to figure out too many exotic techniques to get the results you’re after. Remember who he is. Remember who you are—his treasured child. And remember what to ask for the most: his Holy Spirit.

Prayer

Father, we pray that you will indeed give us your Holy Spirit. We thank you for the Lord Jesus Christ, who himself was so richly anointed with the Spirit without measure. And we pray that we will participate in his wonderful anointing, that we will rejoice in you as our Father.

Help those of us, Lord, who are discouraged or downcast—perhaps some of us because we’ve wandered far. Help us to know that there is a wonderful welcome waiting for us at home. That you will rejoice that those who were dead are alive again, that those who were lost are found again. That we can be welcomed into your eternal arms of love and regain the destiny that we were meant for: to reign with you and to rejoice in you.

And so, Lord, give us that confidence in you as our Father. Give us confidence, despite our failings and sins, that we are treasured children of yours, that nothing can separate us from your love, and that we are meant to reflect you by the way we live.

Oh, thank you for Jesus, for teaching us to pray, Lord Jesus, and removing all the barriers between us and the Father, so that we can come with boldness to the throne of grace and find mercy and grace to help us in our time of need (Hebrews 4:16).

For Jesus’ sake, Amen.

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Luke 11:1-13

¹ 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.” ² And he said to them, “When you pray, say: “Father, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. ³ Give us each day our daily bread, ⁴ and forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone who is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation.”

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.

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. 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!”

Common view of prayer

- If you ask enough times, with enough feeling and faith, it will be given to you.
 - Repetition
 - Passion
 - Certainty
- If you don’t get your request at first, then ask more often, cry louder, believe harder, and get others to pray.

Prayer advice

- “Prayer works on God’s laws just as sure as the law of gravity.” (Rex Humbard)
- “There is a way things work.” (John Eldredge)
- “We must not only pray, but we must also pray with great urgency, with intentness and with repetition. We must press our prayers on God.” (E. M. Bounds)

Is this helpful advice? Is it biblical? Is this how a Father wants to be approached?

Jesus praying

- Prayed after baptism. Spirit came; Father said, “You are my beloved Son.” (3:21-22)
- He would withdraw to desolate places and pray (5:16) after teaching and miracles.
- Before choosing twelve apostles, he went to a mountain and prayed all night. (6:12)
- He prayed and then questioned disciples. Peter: “You are the Christ of God” (9:18-20)
- Transfigured while praying. Voice: “This is my Son, my Chosen One.” (9:28-35)
- After mission: “I thank you, Father.” (10:21)
- Praying for Peter’s faith (22:32).
- Praying to Father in the Garden (22:41-44)
- On cross: “Father, forgive them.” (23:34)
- “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!” (23:46)

Teach us to pray

¹ 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.” ² And he said to them, “When you pray, say: “Father, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. ³ Give us each day our daily bread, ⁴ and forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone who is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation.” (Luke 11:1-4)

Friend at midnight

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. (Luke 11:5-8)

Common view of prayer

- If you ask enough times, with enough feeling and faith, it will be given to you.
 - Repetition
 - Passion
 - Certainty
- **Exactly how many prayers and tears are required to move God?**

Prayer Warriors?

The prophets of Baal believed that prayer is a matter of repetition, effort, and emotion. Elijah's prayer was short, simple, and **effective!** (1 Kings 18:25-46)

Don't pray like pagans

“And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.” (Matthew 6:7-8)

- Answers to prayer are not prizes in a speech contest judged by a stranger. You're talking to your Father. He listens because He loves you; he knows your needs because He is wise. So use simple words in simple faith.

How not to pray

- **Magical:** special words, rituals, and feelings of certainty do not tap into divine magic
- **Mechanical:** better techniques and frequent repetitions do not automatically produce better results.
- **Manipulative:** flattery, formality, tears, tantrums, harassment, and group pressure do not move God to give us our way

Father's child

If you want to judge how well a person understands Christianity, find out how much he makes of the thought of being God's child, and having God as his Father. If this is not the thought that prompts and controls his worship and prayers and his whole outlook on life, it means that he does not understand Christianity very well at all. (J. I. Packer, *Knowing God*)

Who is God? Who am I?

Father's welcome

The prodigal son had a speech prepared, but his father rushed to welcome him and restore him before he could even finish his speech (Luke 15:20-24). God is a Father eager to welcome us back and to give us more than we dare ask for. We do not have to make fancy speeches or keep repeating the same request over and over while working up feelings to be more tearful and intense.

Always heard, always loved

God is the ideal parent who hears every child's request the first time and promises to respond at the right moment, in the best possible way. Therefore, ask anywhere, anytime, in tears or dry-eyed, continually or briefly, passionately or calmly; when it seems convenient; when it appears impossible. Just ask! You are always heard because you are always loved. (David Crump)

Ask, and it will be given

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. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened. (Luke 11:9-10)

Fish or snake?

“What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will instead of a fish give him a serpent?”
(Luke 11:11)

Egg or scorpion?

“... or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? ” (Luke 11:12)

Best Father, best gift

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! (Luke 11:13)

God sent forth his Son... so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!” (Galatians 4:5-6)