

One day 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.” ² He said to them, “When you pray, say: “ ‘Father, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come. ³Give us each day our daily bread. ⁴Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us. And lead us not into temptation.’ ” ⁵ 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, ⁶ because a friend of mine on a journey has come to me, and I have nothing to set before him.’

⁷ “Then the one inside answers, ‘Don’t bother me. The door is already locked, and my children are with me in bed. I can’t get up and give you anything.’ ⁸ I tell you, though he will not get up and give him the bread because he is his friend, yet because of the man’s 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; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened.

¹¹ “Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? ¹² Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? ¹³ 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!”

In the name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, dear friends,

Everyone knows that you don’t just wake up one morning and decide you’ll play the piano and find yourself to be an instant professional. You might play around a little bit, find “middle C” and possibly plunk out the melody of a familiar song like “*Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star*.” But to be good, you need to be shown how to play. If you were taught by a great concert pianist, you might learn far more than you would in a typical piano lesson. You might learn some little-known touches and advanced techniques that I wouldn’t have the first clue about because I don’t know how to play.

Some of you are going to have difficulty believing what I’m about to tell you, but some of you are going to totally relate. Here it is: some people don’t know how to pray. That sounds crazy to some of you who have grown up in a Christian home and had a parent teach you, “*Now I lay me down to sleep...*” That sounds weird to some of you who have been Lutherans forever and to whom “*Come, Lord Jesus, be our guest and let these gifts to us be blessed. Amen.*” is as well-known to you as your own name. But others of you may remember back to your wonderings about how exactly a person is supposed to pray. Or maybe you’re still not sure about it. Maybe you have questions:

Do I have to speak out loud or just in my head?

Formal or informal—does God care?

Can I ask *anything*?

Does God get sick of hearing me? Am I just whining?

Does God hear any prayer?

How interested is the Lord in folded hands?

Bowed heads?

Closed eyes?

There’s a lot to prayer once you start thinking about it!

If you want to learn about prayer or be reminded of the different aspects of prayer, there is no better place to go than to our Savior and to his Word. Jesus is the expert who can explain. What we don’t really know naturally, Jesus can teach us, just as he did for his disciples.

JESUS TEACHES US TO PRAY

You notice that the disciples didn't understand prayer. They knew that John the Baptist had taught his disciples, but they—Jesus' disciples—weren't sure about prayer. As Jesus teaches them how to pray, he uses what we call "The Lord's Prayer." You probably noted that as the gospel from Luke 11 was read, two lines were missing. Matthew records this prayer of Jesus also and provides those other lines. The fact that it is not identical suggests that this is not a prayer that must be said above all other prayers, but is instead a pattern of prayer. Nonetheless, the very similar content found in the two accounts is prayer straight from Jesus' lips, so we do value it as a model prayer and we do use it regularly in addition to other prayers.

As he teaches us to pray, Jesus tells us WHAT TO PRAY FOR. We are to pray for God's name to be "hallowed" or "holy." ***"God's name is certainly holy by itself, but we pray in this petition that we too may keep it holy."*** That's how Martin Luther explained this first part of the Lord's Prayer. If we fail to consider what we're praying here in the Lord's Prayer, we might go a long time before we, on our own, think of praying to God, telling him we want to glorify him in all that we do! Our sinful nature gets caught up with other things—and so does our faith—and we may forget that one. But our lives do one of two things, don't they? They either bring shame or glory to ourselves or they bring shame or glory to our Savior. Unfortunately we do some of both. If we're thinking about these words, ***"hallowed be your name"***—and we mean them—it is the sign of a repentant heart that wants to reflect what a glorious God we have by the way that we live.

Jesus also tells us to pray that God's Kingdom would come. Luther said, ***God's kingdom comes when our heavenly Father gives his Holy Spirit, so that by his grace we believe his Holy Word and lead a godly life now on earth and forever in heaven."*** We want God to rule in our hearts, don't we? We also want the love of the Savior to rule in the hearts of all those who don't know him, don't we? That's what we're praying for in the Lord's Prayer when we ask God to let his kingdom come! You and I have been touched by the love of Jesus and the power of the Holy Spirit. We have been forgiven and know that we are saved. We want the gospel of Christ to continue to rule in our hearts and extend to the hearts of all people. Jesus told his disciples that that's something to pray for.

And we can ask God for things too. It really is okay—specifically, Jesus calls it "daily bread." In Luther's Catechism we're reminded that "daily bread" is ***"everything we need for our bodily welfare"*** and that ***"God surely gives daily bread without our asking, even to all the wicked, but we pray in this petition that he would lead us to realize this and to receive our daily bread with thanksgiving."*** Every time we ask God for something, we really are acknowledging that he is the Giver of all things. It often happens that our prayers are focused on what we *want*. If we really sat down and considered whether the things we asked for are absolutely necessary or simply things we desire, we'd probably have to admit that we could do without a lot of it. It's an amazing thing all by itself, isn't it, that God gives us enough to survive day by day?! It's good for us to acknowledge God's gracious gifts.

And how vital to our prayer life are Jesus' next words about WHAT TO PRAY FOR. ***"Forgive us our sins."*** If we know God's expectations of a perfect life lived for him, and we know our own lives, then we know the importance of regularly asking God for forgiveness, don't we? Even as we consider prayer today, we probably find several ways we sin—just in our prayer lives! ***"Forgive us our sins"*** is a prayer we could pray several times a day. The same Jesus who showed those disciples and us how to pray also showed the world the greatest love ever seen as he bled and died on the cross of Calvary. He showed why he can forgive sins when tomb was found empty. The Savior who forgives instructs us to forgive each other in the same way we have been forgiven by him.

Jesus gives one other thing to pray for—to keep temptation away from us so that we don't sin. Perhaps we should pray that more often. We often welcome temptation or don't recognize temptation or maybe even think that certain sins could never tempt us. Fools. That's really what we are—sinful fools who often don't realize the danger and the cost until we have given in to the temptation. God wants us to seek his help in avoiding tempting situations altogether. Only the person who recognizes their weakness will pray for that kind of help.

Those are all wonderful things to pray for—and important enough for Jesus to teach us. You may have noticed that he included both material things and spiritual things. Those are not new to many of you this morning, but perhaps Jesus' words are at least a reminder to include all those things in prayer and to really think about them as you pray the Lord's Prayer.

But there is even more here than those several items to pray for. Jesus also teaches us HOW TO PRAY.

If you read the gospels, you run across times where Jesus went off to pray—often alone, sometimes with his disciples. This was an occasion where the disciples observed Jesus praying. As he earnestly prayed to his Father in heaven, he modeled prayer for those around him. When he would retreat to be with his Father and when he prayed before meals (like the feeding of the 5,000) people witnessed our Savior in prayer. Today is a good time to consider how we might model prayer for those around us also. Do children and grandchildren see us pray? Do kids at school see us silently bow our heads at lunch? Do you do the same at a business lunch? What about when your family is out at a restaurant? It's worth thinking about.

In teaching us HOW TO PRAY, Jesus uses a parable, a story, as he often did. You heard that story. A man looking for some bread for his guests goes to his friend's house in the middle of the night. It wasn't the fact that they were friends that moved the neighbor to open the door and give the man what he needed, it was the man's persistence. The guy just wouldn't shut up! He stood outside the door and relentlessly pursued what he needed.

What did that little story have to do with the prayers of God's people? Persistence. Jesus was teaching persistence in prayer. If you're a parent, you have—or you will—

hear persistence in your children as they bring you requests. As parents, we get exasperated at times, don't we, by the same questions being asked over and over? It won't surprise you to hear that earthly parents and our heavenly Father are a bit different. What we get tired of hearing, God invites! Yes, God does want us to come repeatedly to him. With divine patience, God willingly hears our every prayer. He wants that ongoing relationship and dialogue with us. He wants to speak to us in his Word and wants us to talk to him in prayer.

I remember a not-so-favorite request dialogue from years gone by. It went like this: "Dad?" "Yes, son?" "You'll probably say 'no' but do you think that..." And then the request would come. "Don't do that to God!" Jesus says. Go to God; ask him! Keep asking him! Don't take your concern to the Lord and in the back of your mind be thinking, "*It'll probably never happen.*" If it's important enough to you, serious enough to be anxious about or to want or you're just so thankful that you have to tell God a hundred times, then it's something that you should keep asking or telling your heavenly Father! Jesus says, "Go ahead...ask...seek...knock..."

When you pray, do so trusting that God has the power to do anything that you need and even more than you can imagine. Do so with confidence in his love for you. Faith is trusting God and his love. It is trusting his promises to listen when we pray and take care of us in just the right way. That's HOW we are to pray. That is the confident attitude of faith that approaches God in prayer!

That's the point of Jesus comparing earthly fathers to our heavenly Father. If a son asks for a fish, no father is going to give him a snake! A child asks for something good and useful and his father gives him something that harms? No way! Earthly dads know how to give good things to their kids, Jesus says. And he assures us, "***How much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!***" Earthly fathers give good gifts but Jesus points to the great gift of the heavenly Father—the gift of the Holy Spirit. As God's children ask him for his blessings, they will most certainly ask for a greater measure of the Spirit so that they can grow in faith and continue to live lives of thanks to God.

It may be that you've been plunking out simple prayers—simple melodies to God, like a person for whom the piano is new. Have no doubt that those prayers are heard by your Father in heaven. But God wants us to fully realize all the aspects of prayer, like a great pianist wants the beginner to learn more than keys and pedals, but how to fully use them. Jesus helps us with that today as he TEACHES US TO PRAY.

Prayer is one of the greatest gifts God gives and a privilege only his children enjoy. Thank God that because of the forgiveness you have in Christ and the gift of faith that you have by the Holy Spirit, you can speak to God about anything at any time and as many times as you want. Your patient, loving, and powerful heavenly Father listens and he acts in your life for your good and for your salvation. Pray with confidence that God loved you enough to give you his Son and he wants to hear from you. Amen.

Now the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.