

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.*

³ *Give us each day our daily bread.*

⁴ *Forgive 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!" (Luke 11:1-13)*

Pray!

Friday at noon, our Vacation Bible School ended. We spent the week teaching the children that Jesus is their good shepherd who cares for them and forgives them and brings them home to heaven. After lunch, my daughter skyped me from Germany. She's studying in Munich. She skyped to tell me that there was some kind of shooting going on in Munich near the Olympic stadium and she wanted us to know she was alright. I asked her where that was in relation to her dorm and she told it's a mile and a half away. She could hear sirens and helicopters. They had shut down the public transportation system. They were warning everyone to stay indoors. We skyped several times during the day. Thankfully, through it all, our daughter was safe and calm. Truth be told, in the ten months she's been studying there, we've had multiple conversations with her because of the terrorist attacks you've seen on the news. But this is the closest anything has been to her.

What an encouragement for a parent to pray! What else could we do? We had to pray and entrust our daughter's safety to the Lord. And we've been doing that all through this year abroad. This morning, our Lord reminds us of just how important prayer is. It's not just something therapeutic. It's not designed to give us something to do so we don't worry. It's not something there just to help us deal with the hurts and sorrows of life. Jesus doesn't say any of those things to us today. He focuses on what God does when we pray. So, my friends, in every situation, **pray!**

I.

Pray because Jesus invites us to. The disciples asked Jesus to teach them how to pray. When he taught them the Lord's Prayer, he gave them a prayer that's full of requests. "Deliver us from evil." "Give us this day our daily bread." And so on. We pray because God wants to deal with the things that worry us and make our lives hard. Jesus invites us to pray so that we can experience his love and blessing.

Jesus asked us to imagine that a friend who was traveling came to our home in the middle of the night. Of course, after traveling he would be hungry. But you might not have anything to feed him. Now, Jesus' story might not make as much sense to us today as it did when he told it. First of all, we live in a world that's governed by the clock. People can call us and warn us that they're coming and they can get a motel if it's really

late. Today we all have freezers and refrigerators where we can store food. If we're truly out of food, grocery stores and fast food places are open all night. None of those things was true in Jesus' day. Motels as we know them didn't exist. If you were traveling, you had to hope someone would take you in when it got dark. You might have to go late into the night if you were nowhere near civilization. If you happened to know someone along the way, you might knock on their door late at night. And nobody had a refrigerator, so people generally bought only as much food as they were going to eat that day.

So if what Jesus described happened to you, what would you do? You couldn't just ask those travelers to wait until morning. Their culture demanded that you feed them. So you'd go bang on your neighbor's or your best friend's door. He might not appreciate that. In Jesus' example, it was midnight and everyone was in bed. The friend or neighbor wanted to say no. But in the end he would get up and give you whatever you need. Why? Not because he's such a good friend, but because you keep pounding on the door.

What is Jesus' point? That God doesn't want to answer our prayers but if you keep banging on his door, he will? Not at all. God is not like the friend who only acts to get rid of us. God is waiting to hear from us. Jesus' point is about us. In a crisis, we might very well camp out on our neighbor's doorstep, demanding that he help us, even if he doesn't want to. How much more shouldn't we take every need to God who is just waiting to answer our prayers?

The prayer Jesus gave shows how well God understands our needs. The truth is, he understands our needs better than we do ourselves. You see that in the kinds of things Jesus tells us to pray for. If I were to take a survey right now of the kinds of things we pray for, what do you think I would hear? We pray that our children be kept safe, right? We pray for our marriages and for friends who are driving late at night. We pray for people in the hospital. And we pray for all the things that worry us. We pray for jobs and the money we need to pay our bills and many other things. All those things are good things to pray for. God wants to hear those prayers.

But notice what Jesus taught us to pray for: that his name be kept holy, that his kingdom would come, that we would be forgiven and that we would avoid temptation. Those are different kinds of prayers, aren't they? Now, Jesus did teach us pray for our daily bread. In that one simple request, he included everything we need. And it's not wrong to go to God with all those other specific requests. But do we remember to pray for the spiritual things? Do we remember to ask God to keep us from temptation? The devil wants to destroy our faith. Our sinful flesh wants to let him. We need God's help. Do we ask for it? Do we remember to pray for forgiveness when we do sin? Do we pray for God's kingdom to come – both in the sense of the gospel spreading throughout the world and in the sense of Jesus coming back? Do we pray that God's name would be kept holy in this day when so many people can't wait to insult or blaspheme him?

It's easy to focus our prayers only on what we need here and now. It's hard to remember the spiritual things. What does that say about us and our faith? It shows how weak we are. But the one who invites to pray is also the one who laid down his life and paid for all our sins. Jesus paid for our pride and our arrogance even when it shows itself in how we pray. Jesus paid for our mixed up priorities, even when we forget how important the spiritual things are. Jesus paid for all the times we rush into temptation. And he rose to tell us that all that sin is forgiven.

The same Jesus who died to pay for our sin assures us that God is listening. He invites us to pray just as he did. In fact, he himself was an example of prayer. The disciples asked him to teach them to pray because he was praying and they had seen him do it so often. If the Son of God who is perfect in all that he is and does prayed regularly, how much more do we sinners need to take all our hurts, all our wants, and all our spiritual needs to the God of all grace? Jesus invites us to do what we need most. What love!

II.

Of course, I believe that our daughter is safe this morning because our God answers prayer. Now, many people would say that she's safe because she did what the authorities told her to do and stayed inside, or because Munich is a huge city and the odds of actually being in the wrong place at the wrong time are pretty high – so she just got lucky. God had nothing to do with it. And, of course, there's some truth in the facts they would point to. But God often works through things we can see. And while there's no way to prove that God is working when those other things are true, we Christians know what God promises. Those promises are the reason Jesus speaks these words to us. **Pray because God knows how to answer.**

Jesus tells us, **“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.”** Those are pretty strong words. Jesus does not intend for us to understand that God never says no to our prayers. He does sometimes. But only when that’s better than what we’re asking for. Even then, God strives to give and to love and to care for us. God wants us to find his love. God wants us to ask so that he can give to us.

Absolutely all that he gives is good. Jesus asks, **“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?”** Jesus isn’t above using the absurd to make his point. If your child were hungry, you wouldn’t hand him or her a live poisonous snake would you? If your child asked you for a hard-boiled egg, would you drop a live scorpion in their hand, would you? Of course you wouldn’t! Then Jesus makes his point: **“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!”**

God knows how to give good gifts. Every gift he gives is for our good. We just can’t say that. Even when we try to do our best, some of our gifts fall short. If you think of things like feeding and caring for your children as “gifts” – which is what Jesus says here – it gets even worse. I remember someone telling me once about buckling their child into their car seat and having that baby scream all the way home. When she went to get the child out, she realized that his fingers were being pinched under the armrest. How many times have we looked the other way and our kids fell? How many times have we given permission only to have it blow up in our faces? Jesus calls us evil – we’re imperfect sinners and sometimes even when we mean well, our gifts, our care, our love falls short. God’s love never does. Every gift he gives us is for our good. Jesus compares our best efforts to God the Father’s and says, “You can trust his answer to your prayers, because he does it even better than you would do for your own child.”

That applies to every answer for every prayer we ever offer. Every time we were worried because someone we loved was in danger – all Friday afternoon while we skyped and emailed back and forth with our daughter – God’s answers are always what’s best for us. Even when we don’t like the answer, even when we don’t understand the answer, it’s still the answer that comes from perfect love. I think that’s the hardest thing about this. We can all think of times when God didn’t give us what we wanted. While some of those requests might have been questionable, as far as we can see, most of them don’t seem like they were bad things. But God said no. Why? He doesn’t tell us. He merely reminds us that he knows better than we ever will how to give good gifts. Even if we forget all the failures and only focus on the best things we’ve done for our children, the gifts that our Father in heaven gives us are still infinitely better. Trust his answers!

How do we know that’s true? Because he sent his Son to die for us. Because he raised his Son from the dead for us. Because he has taken away all our sin and given us eternal life. He promises to do all things to bring us home safely to heaven. The real gift that Jesus is talking about here is the gift of the Holy Spirit – one of the greatest gifts we can ever receive. The Holy Spirit works through the gospel to comfort us and to enable us to trust what God is doing. The Holy Spirit works in our hearts to make our prayers more like the things God wants us to pray for, so that we get more yeses. The Holy Spirit sustains us in the faith until we reach eternal life. When we pray for the Spirit, God’s answer is always yes. So ask God to give that gift!

We spent this whole week teaching the children in our VBS that Jesus loves us, now and forever. We used the 23rd Psalm, “The Lord is my shepherd,” to make that point. For me, that point was reinforced by God’s answering our prayers to keep our daughter safe – a prayer we’ll continue to offer until she comes home in a couple of weeks. God hears and answers all our prayers. But that is not enough for him. He loves us so much that he invites to keep coming back. We don’t need to worry that we’re bothering him or that we’ve taken up too much of his time. We can never reach the point where he’s tired of hearing our requests. Jesus loves us and he taught us to pray. My friends, keep on praying. Amen.