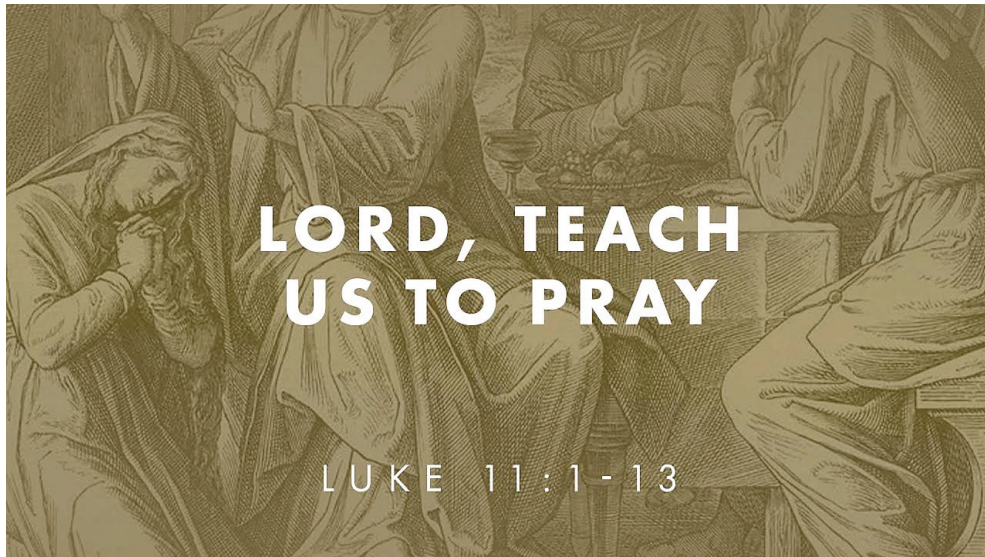


# “Lord, Teach Us to Pray”

by Rev. John C. Cheek



## Prayer

"Lord, teach us to pray,  
just as John taught  
his followers to pray."  
Amen.

## Introduction

A reminder about parables. Parables are stories that a teacher would use to illustrate the idea or concept being taught. They can include outlandish elements to further emphasize the point.

Honor and shame. As I've said before, at the time of Jesus, and to some extent today, the social structure in the Middle East was driven by the concept of honor and shame. People followed society's rules because they wanted to be in positions of honor. Those on the margins, including those in unclean trades, tax collectors, and women, were kept in their place by the fact that they were regarded as being in a place of shame. I'll be referring to the honor-shame implications in the parable. I'll go to some work to explain these implications, but the disciples would have understood them intuitively.

## Hospitality

1. At the time of Jesus, and today, hospitality is an extremely high cultural value among those who live or have lived in the Middle East. My wife and I once visited a family who had recently immigrated from Iraq. They were exceedingly poor, and yet they brought

out the very best of what they had to show us hospitality. It's very hard for us in our culture to understand the power of hospitality and the demands that it puts on a host.

2. We'll see in the parable how hospitality is the driving concern for these neighbors.

## Prayer

This is a teaching about prayer from beginning to end. Jesus is not intending to teach a specific prayer formula which has magical powers. Rather, Jesus is teaching the mindset and the heartset (*I know that isn't a word, but in this case, it should be*) that we are to bring to our prayers. You will notice that the prayer we're looking at this morning is not the one we pray together every Sunday. That form of the Lord's Prayer is found in [Matthew 6](#).

### Scripture: Luke 11:1-13 (NIV)

<sup>1</sup> 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." <sup>2</sup> He said to them, "When you pray, say:

" 'Father,

hallowed be your name,

your kingdom come.

<sup>3</sup> Give us each day our daily bread.

<sup>4</sup> Forgive us our sins,

for we also forgive everyone who sins against us.

And lead us not into temptation. ' "

<sup>5</sup> Then Jesus said to them, "Suppose you have a friend, and you go to him at midnight and say, 'Friend, lend me three loaves of bread;' <sup>6</sup> a friend of mine on a journey has come to me, and I have no food to offer him.' <sup>7</sup> And suppose the one inside answers, 'Don't bother me. The door is already locked, and my children and I are in bed. I can't get up and give you anything.' <sup>8</sup> I tell you, even though he will not get up and give you the bread because of friendship, yet because of your shameless audacity he will surely get up and give you as much as you need.

<sup>9</sup> "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. <sup>10</sup> For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.

<sup>11</sup> "Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? <sup>12</sup> Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? <sup>13</sup> 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!"

**The grass withers and the flower fades,  
but the Word of God endures forever.**

## SERMON – “Lord, Teach Us to Pray”

- A. (v. 1) 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.” *[The request shows a desire on the part of the disciples to imitate Jesus. This is a desire that is valid for us today.]*
- B. (v. 2–4) He said to them, “When you pray, say:
1. (v. 2) Father, *[This form of address invites us into a relationship of intimacy with God. Although this story comes to us in Greek, where the word is interpreted “Father,” it’s almost certain that in Jesus’s words, this was “Abba” which can be translated variously as “Papa,” “Daddy,” or “Grandpa.” All of these speak to a relationship of closeness and love, rather than formality and distance.]*
    - a. Hallowed be your name,
    - b. Your kingdom come.
  2. (v. 3) Give us each day our daily bread. *[The disciples would have reflected back to the accounts in Exodus 16 and Numbers of God providing manna to sustain Israel in their wanderings in the desert. Remember that the Israelites were to gather only enough manna to feed them for a single day, except on the day before the Sabbath, when they gathered enough for two days. The prayer Jesus teaches requests that which is necessary for life.]*
  3. (v. 4 a & b) Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us. *[I think one of the aspects of our American culture is that we are highly transactional. If I want to have X, I know that I’m going to have to give Y. If you invite me to dinner at your house, I have to reciprocate. We make a mistake if we bring this kind of quid pro quo idea to this portion of the prayer. A better understanding of this portion of the prayer is to say, “God, please continue to forgive us. Your forgiveness of us teaches us to forgive others.”]*
  4. (v. 4c) And lead us not into temptation.”
- C. (v. 5–8) *[This is the parable I spoke of before]* Then Jesus said to them,
1. (v. 5b & 6) “Suppose you have a friend, and you go to him at midnight and say ‘Friend, loan me three loaves of bread; a friend of mine on a journey has come to me, and I have no food to offer him.’ *[This is an issue of both hospitality and honor-shame. The man whose friend has arrived on a journey at midnight has the duty of preparing a meal for the traveler. To fail to do so would put the man in a position of shame. He goes to his neighbor, knocks on the door, and asks for bread to serve his guest. The neighbor is also under an honor-shame burden of helping preserve the honor of the first man.]*
  2. (v. 7) And suppose the one inside answers, ‘Don’t bother me. The door is already bolted, and my children and I are in bed. I can’t get up and give you anything.’ *[This response,*

*even though it makes sense to us, is impossible. There would be a terrible cost in terms of shame if the man were to do that.]*

3. (v. 8) I tell you, even though he will not get up and give you bread because of friendship, yet because of your shameless audacity, he will surely get up and give you as much as you need.

D. (v. 9–11) So I say to you:

1. (v. 9b) 'Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.
2. (v. 10) For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.
3. (v. 11) Which of you fathers,
  - a. (v. 11b) If your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead?
  - b. (v. 12) Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion?
  - c. (v. 13) If you then, though you are evil [*compared to God*], 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!" [*Clearly Jesus is teaching that receiving Holy Spirit is the most precious of gifts.*]

### **What can we take away from this passage this morning?**

The first thing I want to reiterate is that our prayers, including the Lord's Prayer, are not magic words. They are precious to us, but we don't think that they have magical power.

Jesus teaches the disciples the kinds of things that are appropriate to pray for. More than that, he teaches them and us the kind of heart that we need to bring to our prayer relationship with God. The prayer which Jesus teaches in this passage is characterized by a clear understanding of who is who in the relationship. It is certainly true that Jesus teaches us that our relationship with God is not one of a stern, distant God, but rather one of intimacy. At the same time, it is clear that God is the one whose name is to be proclaimed as holy, that it is God's will which we should desire, rather than our own. In my relationship with God, I'm at my best when I recognize that God is God and I'm not.

There are quite a few ways that this passage can be misunderstood. One of those ways is to think of God as a genie who will give you three wishes, but you can't wish for more wishes and you can't wish for another genie with three more wishes. When I was attending the University of Arizona the first time, there was a group of students who identified as Druids. This group spread the word that they were going to gather in front of the administration building on a particular

day and time, and they were going to send the building rushing through the air to Phoenix, where it would crush the state capitol building.

Now, I thought it was silly, but probably not any sillier than we are when we imagine that, if we pray hard enough and believe it hard enough, we can pull a mountain from its place and set it down somewhere else. It might have been a good idea for those Druids to have asked their various gods whether or not the administration should fly to Phoenix, and I'm pretty sure that, if those gods had been real, the answer would have been no.

So, then, what about "Ask and it will be given; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you?" I doubt that I'm the only person here who has sincerely prayed for something which didn't come to pass. So, how do we deal with that? One thing Christians gravitate to is the unhealthy perspective that my prayer didn't have the result I wanted because I didn't believe it strongly enough, that my faith was insufficient. This idea is not only a lie, but a very destructive lie. MY favorite seminary professor used to say that this kind of faith is not faith at all, but rather a holy wish. If I believe it hard enough, and if I don't become distracted, and I close my eyes and grit my teeth and clench my fists, it will come true. My dear friends, a real faith is one which says, these are the things I need and the things I desire, but I know with absolute certainty that, regardless of what I have or lack, I belong, body and soul, to my God, who loves me extravagantly. The further I travel with Jesus, the more the things I desire will be the things which God desires for me.

In a world where sin exists, tragedy also exists. Terrible things happen. Some are devastating for nations and the whole world. Others are devastating to ourselves and our families. I don't believe for a minute that God causes those tragedies. I do believe, as I said a few weeks ago, that God brings beauty out of them. God's love for us is such that, the gifts we receive from God are good, and they're good for us.

We are invited into a relationship with God which is intimate and filled with love. This extravagant love, which God showers on us, leads us to love others extravagantly and to move out of our comfort zone and to change the world. Do you believe that to be true? Do you know and experience God's love? Are you ready to change the world, or at least that part of it that's within your sphere of influence?

May it be so. Amen

---

Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV® Copyright ©1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.® Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.