

Making Requests of God

By Linda Rex

July 24, 2022, PROPER 12—Looking back at your life, what would you say is your perception of God when it comes to asking him for things? Would you say that God wants to hear from you or that he cares about what is important to you? Or are you hesitant about asking God for anything, believing that he is indifferent to what is important to you or what you are currently going through?

In the gospel reading for this Sunday, Luke 11:1–13, Jesus was asked by his followers to teach them how to pray. They had witnessed his dependency upon God expressed through daily prayer, and wanted to know more about how to do this themselves.

Jesus, rather than teaching them a technique, gave them a template for their prayer and then took them down a different road, a road straight into intimate relationship with his Father. He taught them that they needed to have a different conception of God and what it meant to ask God for things. He began with the words, “Our Father.”

In this beginning of his model prayer, Jesus brought them and each one of us into the midst of his own conversation with his divine Father, the One with whom he had been in relationship before time began as the eternally begotten Son and Word of God. Jesus insists that each of us join with him in engaging his Father in conversation, acknowledging just who he is. We are held with Christ in God even now, so every prayer is a participation in Jesus’ life in the Spirit.

God wants to draw us close to himself, to teach us how to truly be who we are as reflections of his life and love through Jesus in the Spirit. God wants us to reflect his glory and to live in ways that encourage, heal, and bless others. God wants us to experience his forgiveness and acceptance so profoundly that we begin to offer it to those around us. And God wants us to live in full dependency upon him, trusting him to protect us from Satan and the evil in this world. He doesn’t want us to have to deal with constant temptations, but to live victorious, productive lives in his kingdom even now by the power of the Spirit.

Our conversations with God are meant to be two-sided. Most of the time we tend to fall into the ditch of monologues, forgetting that every healthy relationship involves listening and speaking on both sides, going both directions. Constantly having one-sided conversations with someone eventually causes a sense of disconnect in the relationship and prevents true union and communion from developing. Eventually it may become evident that the party doing all the talking is rather self-centered and self-absorbed. The other party may end up asking themselves, “Do they even care how I feel or what I think?”

Have you ever paused in prayer long enough to ask God what he thinks about what you have said or asked, and then sat silently for a while to listen? God speaks to us in more ways than through his written Word. Sometimes the Spirit gives us nudges or impressions or thoughts or pictures as we commune with him in silence. If we never pause to listen, we may not realize he is speaking. And just a suggestion—we may want to write down what he has to say to us. We may want to remember it later and act on it.

In Genesis 18:20–32, the Old Testament passage for this Sunday, we read about three men visiting Abraham, one of whom was the Lord. As they were preparing to leave and visit the towns of Sodom and Gomorrah to see the state of the cities, Abraham dared to ask the Lord whether he would be willing to spare the cities if a certain number of righteous people could be found there. We read about Abraham negotiating with the Lord about the future of the people in those cities. This was a two-way conversation in which Abraham sought to remind the Lord of

who he was, while the Lord graciously listened and responded to Abraham's intercessions on behalf of those living rightly in these towns.

The book of Acts is full of stories of how the early believers had two-way conversations with the Lord in prayer. On one occasion, Ananias questioned the Lord when he told him to go find Saul (Paul) and to lay hands on him so he could receive his sight back. He had a valid concern—possibly dying at the hands of this zealot. The Lord listened to this concern and answered it, telling Ananias why it was important that he go and do as he was asked.

We participate in Jesus' life with the Father in the Spirit. In this passage in Luke, Jesus emphasized asking, seeking, and knocking. He gave the impression that we need to keep asking, and to intensify our asking when we believe God isn't immediately hearing us. Like the neighbor asking for bread in the middle of the night, we want to keep knocking and asking until we receive a response from God. His answer may not be what we expect, but it will be what is best for us.

And that is the tough place we may find ourselves in. Jesus reminded his disciples that the Father they would be praying to is a Father who wants what is best for his children. God may not give us what we want, but he will give us what we need or what is ultimately best. Sometimes his response is the opposite of our desire, and that is when it is imperative that we remember who God is and who we are as his children. We need to remember that the most precious and powerful answer to prayer the Father gives is the gift of his Holy Spirit, Christ in us, at work in our circumstances, hearts, and lives, bringing us into deeper fellowship with himself both now and on into eternity.

In our conversations with God, we want to keep in mind who God is. He is our God who loves us so much that he wants us to live in relationship with him now and forever as his beloved adopted children. God wants us to look and act more and more like his own beloved Son Jesus Christ, so he has given us the Spirit. God's life, Jesus' close relationship with the Father in the Spirit, is our very own, to participate in and live inside. And one way we can experience this close fellowship with God is through the spiritual discipline of prayer.

Father, thank you for inviting us into relationship with you through Jesus in the Spirit. Thank you, Jesus, for teaching us to pray and for making our prayers an acceptable offering for your Father's pleasure. Heavenly Spirit, inspire us to pray and to listen, to have meaningful conversations with the One who has made us his very own, through Jesus our Lord. Amen.

"On the day I called, You answered me; You made me bold with strength in my soul." Psalm 138:5 NASB

"It happened that while Jesus was praying in a certain place, after He had finished, one of His disciples said to Him, 'Lord, teach us to pray just as John also taught his disciples.' And He said to them, 'When you pray, say: "Father, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread. And forgive us our sins, for we ourselves 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 goes to him at midnight and says to him, "Friend, lend me three loaves; for a friend of mine has come to me from a journey, and I have nothing to set before him"; and from inside he answers and says, "Do not bother me; the door has already been shut and my children and I are in bed; I cannot 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 his persistence 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 it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks, receives; and he who seeks, finds; and to him who knocks, it will be opened. Now suppose one of you fathers is asked

July 11, 2022

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by his son for a fish; he will not give him a snake instead of a fish, will he? Or if he is asked for an egg, he will not give him a scorpion, will he? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him?' " Luke 11:1–13 NASB