

July 24, 2016  
Luke 11:1-13  
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## **‘When You Pray.’**

[Begin with video clip. <https://youtu.be/4BleD6-C0XU>]

**We say it every week. We have it memorized. We can say it without thinking. But what does it mean? What does it really say?**

**Did you notice the words ‘I’ and ‘me’ and ‘my’ don’t appear in the Lord’s Prayer? It’s ‘us’ and ‘our,’ and ‘you’ (or thy/thine) when it refers to God. It’s a reminder that the world revolves around God, not us.**

**The drama we watched proves there is more at stake than we think when we say the Lord’s Prayer. Maybe it’s time to dust it off and look at it again. Maybe every Sunday morning when we repeat the words, we stand on holy ground and do not have the good sense to take off our sandals. Maybe we are not yet ready to pray the Lord’s Prayer and own it.<sup>1</sup>**

**The Lord’s Prayer appears in both Luke and Matthew. The versions are different. Matthew’s prayer is part of the Sermon on the Mount. Luke is a slimmed down version that comes at the request of a disciple. The context is Jesus’ healing of the man with a withered hand on the Sabbath. While the Pharisees were fuming over Jesus’ infraction of the law, Jesus escaped to the hills to pray. When he finished praying the disciples said, ‘Lord, teach us to pray.’ They saw prayer was important to Him. They saw the power of prayer in Him. They saw a personality in whom prayer was vital and influential!<sup>2</sup>**

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<sup>1</sup> Not Ready for Prime Time (a sermon), [www.homileticonline.org](http://www.homileticonline.org)

<sup>2</sup> James W Moore, *You Do Have a Prayer*. (a sermon)

**Notice that Jesus didn't start by answering questions about prayer. He gave them a model prayer.**

**Rather than analyzing each phrase of the Lord's Prayer separately, I want to make some general observations about prayer that may hopefully spark an "ah-ha" insight for you.**

**1. Prayer is about relationship. In fact, the Lord's Prayer begins right there: "Our Father?" A little boy was standing on the banks of the Mississippi River waving and shouting at a steamboat going by. He was beckoning the steamboat to come to shore. A stranger nearby said, "Give it up, young man! The boat will never come ashore just because of your waving and shouting." Just then the boat turned and headed for shore. The little boy grinned and said to the stranger, "The captain is my daddy."**

**The captain of the universe is our "Abba." He pays attention to our petitions because he loves us. The first words in the Lord's Prayer encourage us to believe that an intimate conversation with the Lord of the universe is OK.**

**Carveth Mitchell says, "The purpose of prayer is to be in harmony with God, to have a sense of God's presence; to feel the assurance that God is in, around and greater than any circumstance; that, come what may, we belong to God and underneath are the everlasting arms. Prayer is not a trading post -- "if you do that, then I'll do this"--but a line of communication."<sup>3</sup>**

**A man went to sit in a darkened church each day at noon. One day as he came out of the church, a perplexed observer asked him what he did that whole time inside the church. "I just look at God," he answered, "and God looks at me."<sup>4</sup>**

**2. Prayer isn't forcing God's hand. We can't force God's hand into giving us what we want. Rather, "we pray to change, to become, to transcend the situations that surround us and tap into the presence of Holy Love."<sup>5</sup>**

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<sup>3</sup> Carveth Mitchell, *The Sign in the Subway*, CSS Publishing Co.

<sup>4</sup> Elizabeth O'Connor, *Search for Silence* (Word Books, 1972), 120

<sup>5</sup> Rev. Daniel C. Kostakis, Progressive Priest, "Lord's Prayer for a modern people", a blog.

**A perfect illustration is about the mother sent her son to bed. After a few minutes she went to check on him. Sticking her head into his room, she saw that he was kneeling to pray. She paused to listen, and heard her son praying over and over again. “Let it be Tokyo! Please, dear God, let it be Tokyo!” When he finished his prayer, she asked him, “What did you mean, “Let it be Tokyo?” “Oh,” the boy said with embarrassment, “we had our geography test today and I was praying that God would make Tokyo the capital of France.”**

**We can't force God's hand when we pray for others. Douglas Steele and Jane Vennard use the image of a wall to help us understand intercessory prayer. Vennard says our prayers do not force the person being prayed for to change just because we prayed. The effect of praying for others is like lowering the threshold of a wall, so those we prayed for can see what is already there. As the wall comes down, people can choose whether or not to accept God's presence in their lives.<sup>6</sup>**

**We can't force God's hand when we pray for healing from illness. Rabbi Wolpe is a brain cancer and lymphoma survivor. He writes, “My prayer was not answered because I lived; my prayer was answered because I felt better able to cope with my sickness. Each time I go for my regular MRI or PET scan and I am moved into the metal tube, I do not pray that God will give me a clear scan. I pray from gratitude that I am not alone, and that having been near death I am still alive. I pray not for magic, but for closeness; not for miracles, but for love.”**

**3. Prayer needs to be honest. A four-year-old boy was asked to return thanks before New Year's dinner. He thanked God for each family member by name. He thankfully named each food on the table. Then he stopped and became silent. The family waited. Finally, he asked, “If I thank God for the broccoli, won't God know that I'm lying?” That's honest prayer!**

**On the other hand, sometimes our words and actions clash, like the man who always grumbled at the food his wife prepared for family meals. Then he would ask the blessing. One day after his usual**

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<sup>6</sup> Jane Vennard, *Praying for Friends and Enemies*.

complaint/prayer, his little girl asked, "Daddy, does God hear us when we ask the blessing?" "Why, of course," he replied. She paused for a moment, then asked, "Does he hear everything we say the rest of the time?" "Yes, dear, every word," he replied. "Then which does God believe?" she asked.<sup>7</sup>

Do we think we can fool God when we pray by rote without thinking about what we say? Does God ignore our insincerity or inattention when we read scripture or pray? Simeon Weil says, "Prayer is made of attention. It is all the attention that the soul is capable of all directed to God. The quality of attention determines the quality of prayer. It cannot be replaced by the heart's warmth." Heschel adds, "Prayer comes to pass when we forget ourselves." Perhaps our inability to pray and our society's increasing focus on the self are related.

Rabbi Leona Medina explained prayer this way: If you watch a man out on a boat grab a rope and pull his boat to shore, and you don't understand the principles of weight and motion, you might think that he was really pulling the shore to his boat. In spiritual principles of weight and motion, prayer is not pulling God closer to you. Heartfelt prayer pulls you closer to God.

4. God values our persistence. Jesus counseled his disciples to be persistent in prayer -- to the point of peskiness. He illustrates it with the story about the parent in bed with his children who doesn't want to get up to help a neighbor, but because of persistence he finally yields. A current day example is four-year-old Thane who likes to get up at 5 a.m. every day -- weekends, holidays, winter, summer. He immediately climbs into bed with his parents and parlays a series of specific requests: a pop tart, orange juice and a video. Every morning, they groan sleepily and tell him to go back to bed because it is just too early. Every morning, he prevails -- not because they want to make him happy but because they want peace and quiet! His persistence pays off. William McGill says, "The value of persistent prayer is not that God will hear us, but that we will finally hear Him."<sup>8</sup>

**General Observations about the Lord's Prayer**

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<sup>7</sup> Broadcaster.org.uk/section2/jokes/christianjokes.html. Retrieved May 28, 2008

<sup>8</sup> William McGill (illustration from [www.homileticonline.org](http://www.homileticonline.org))

- 1. We begin by acknowledging who God is.**
- 2. We recognize that God is to be honored.**
- 3. We long for God's kingdom to come and will to be here on earth.**
- 4. We are confident that God will provide our daily needs -- and yours.**
- 5. We ask God to forgive our failings, and ask for the power to forgive others.**
- 6. We are called to demonstrate God as intimate and holy, and to help create the kingdom of love here on earth. We are the face of God to our neighbors.**

**Remember in the video how God prodded the pray-er to take the Lord's Prayer seriously? Here's the bottom line. A little boy was seated beside the Ganges River next to a grizzled holy man. "Will you teach me to pray?" the boy asked. "Are you sure that you want to learn?" the holy man asked. "Yes, of course." With that the holy man grabbed the boy's neck and plunged his head into the water. He held it there while the boy kicked and flailed and tried to get away. Finally, the holy man released the boy. "What was that?" the boy asked. "That was your first lesson in prayer," said the holy man. "When you long for God the way that you longed to breathe, then you will be able to pray." Amen?**

**I am going to close with the Lord's Prayer, pausing between phrases. Listen thoughtfully and prayerfully, considering what you have heard today:**

**Our Father in heaven,  
Hallowed be your name.  
Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in  
heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread.  
And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.  
And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.  
For yours is the kingdom . . . and the power . . . and the glory  
forever. Amen.**