

Pattern for prayer (vv. 2–4). We call this “the Lord’s Prayer,” not because Jesus prayed it (He never had to ask for forgiveness), but because Jesus taught it. There is nothing wrong with praying this prayer personally or as part of a congregation, so long as we do it from a believing heart that is sincere and submitted. How easy it is to “recite” these words and not really mean them, but that can happen even when we sing and preach! The fault lies with us, not with this prayer.

This is a “pattern prayer,” given to guide us in our own praying (see Matt. 6:9–15 for the parallel). It teaches us that true prayer depends on a spiritual relationship with God that enables us to call Him “Father,” and this can come only through faith in Jesus Christ (Rom. 8:14–17; Gal. 4:1–7). Lyndon Johnson’s press secretary, Bill Moyers, was saying grace at a staff lunch, and the president shouted, “Speak up, Bill! I can’t hear a thing!” Moyers quietly replied, “I wasn’t addressing you, Mr. President.”

It is good to remind ourselves that when we pray, we talk to God. True prayer also involves responsibilities: honoring God’s kingdom and doing God’s will (Luke 11:2). It has well been said that the purpose of prayer is not to get man’s will done in heaven, but to get God’s will done on earth. Prayer is not telling God what we want and then selfishly enjoying it.

Prayer is asking God to use us to accomplish what He wants so that His name is glorified. His kingdom is extended and strengthened, and His will is done. I must test all of my personal requests by these overruling concerns if I expect God to hear and answer my prayers. It is important for Christians to know the Word of God, for there we discover the will of God. *We must never separate prayer and the Word (John 15:7).* During my ministry, I have seen professing Christians disobey God and defend themselves by saying,

“I prayed about it and God said it was all right!” This includes a girl who married an unsaved man (2 Cor. 6:14–18), a fellow living with a girl who was not his wife (1 Thess. 4:1–8), and a preacher who started his own church because all the other churches were wrong and only he had true “spiritual insight” (Phil. 2:1–16). Once we are secure in our relationship with God and His will, then we can bring our requests to Him (Luke 11:3–4). We can ask

Him to provide our needs (not our greeds!) for today, to forgive us for what we have done yesterday, and to lead us in the future. All of our needs may be included in these three requests:

1. Material and physical provision
2. Moral and spiritual perfection
3. Divine protection and direction.

If we pray this way, we can be sure of praying in God's will.

Persistence in prayer (vv. 5–8). In this parable, Jesus did not say that God is like this grouchy neighbor. In fact, He said just the opposite. If a tired and selfish neighbor finally meets the needs of a bothersome friend, how much more will a loving heavenly Father meet the needs of His own dear children! He is arguing from the lesser to the greater. We have already seen that prayer is based on sonship ("Our Father"), not on friendship, but Jesus used friendship to illustrate persistence in prayer. God the Father is not like this neighbor, for He never sleeps, never gets impatient or irritable, is always generous, and delights in meeting the needs of His children. The friend at the door had to keep on knocking in order to get what he needed, but God is quick to respond to His children's cries (Luke 18:1–8). The argument is clear. If persistence finally paid off as a man beat on the door of a reluctant friend, how much more would persistence bring blessing as we pray to a loving heavenly Father! After all, we are the children in the house with Him! The word translated "importunity" means "shamelessness" or "avoidance of shame." It can refer to the man at the door who was not ashamed to wake up his friend, but it can also refer to the friend in the house. Hospitality to strangers is a basic law in the East (Gen. 18:1ff.). If a person refused to entertain a guest, he brought disgrace on the whole village and the neighbors would have nothing to do with him. The man in the house knew this and did not want to embarrass himself, his family, or his village, so he got up and met the need. Why does our Father in heaven answer prayer? Not just to meet the needs of His children, but to meet them in such a way that it brings glory to His name. "Hallowed be thy name." When God's people pray, God's

reputation is at stake. The way He takes care of His children is a witness to the world that He can be trusted. Phillips Brooks said that prayer is not overcoming God's reluctance; it is laying hold of His highest willingness.

Persistence in prayer is not an attempt to change God's mind ("thy will be done") but to get ourselves to the place where He can trust us with the answer.

Promises for prayer (vv. 9–13). The tenses of the verbs are important here: "Keep on asking ... keep on seeking ... keep on knocking." In other words, don't come to God only in the midnight emergencies, but keep in constant communion with your Father. Jesus called this "abiding" (John 15:1ff.), and Paul exhorted, "Pray without ceasing" (1 Thess. 5:17). As we pray, God will either answer or show us why He cannot answer. Then it is up to us to do whatever is necessary in our lives so that the Father can trust us with the answer. Note that the lesson closes with an emphasis on God as Father (Luke 11:11–13). Because He knows us and loves us, we never need to be afraid of the answers that He gives. Again, Jesus argued from the lesser to the greater: if an earthly father gives what is best to his children, surely the Father in heaven will do even more. This even includes "the good things of the Holy Spirit" (compare Luke 11:13 with Matt. 7:11), blessings that in the Old Testament were reserved only for a special few.