

**“Teach Me ~~A Prayer~~ to Pray” (Luke 11:1-13)**

“*God is great. God is good. And we thank Him for our food. Amen.*”

My brother & I must have said that prayer THOUSANDS-OF-TIMES when we were kids.

Did any of you have a certain prayer you recited before meals or bedtime?

Do I have ANY VOLUNTEERS who want to recite a childhood prayer?

Several years ago, Janis Pyle wrote about table graces for the Northern Plains District Newsletter.

This was her family’s table grace for the first 11 years of her life: “*Thank you for the food we eat,*

*thank you for the birds that sing, thank you God for everything. Amen.*”

But one morning, her stepmother – Evelyn – issued an ultimatum. Each of the children needed to find a less-childish way to bless the food before meals. With help from *The Presbyterian Book of Common*

*Worship*, this is what Janis came up with: “*Father in Heaven, sustain our bodies with this food, our hearts with true friendship & our souls with Thy truth. Amen.*”

(<http://nplains.org/holiness-in-our-midst-session-10/>)

I like memorized prayers. Someday – if God gives me long life on this earth – I believe a tear will come to my eye when I remember the prayer my brother & I used to pray at our dining room table with my parents when we were little.

There’s a danger, though, with relying too heavily on memorized prayers. They can become rote; if we’re not careful, our prayers can become something we just say instead of a real conversation with God.

My hope is that whenever we pray the Lord’s Prayer together, WE WILL REMEMBER what those first disciples asked Jesus. They asked, “*Lord, teach us TO pray*” NOT “*teach us A prayer.*”

Dave: *“Our Father who art in heaven...”*

God: Yes?

Dave: Ha-ha. Very funny, Jimmy. Let’s stick to the script.

Jimmy: (RAISES HIS HANDS IN THE AIR AS IF TO SAY, “IT WASN’T ME!”)

Dave: If you didn’t put that word on the screen, who did?

God: I Am Who I Am.

Dave: Yeah, right. You expect me to believe that God is speaking through our projection system?

**(IMAGE OF THE BURNING BUSH)**

Dave: You make a good point. If you could talk to Moses through a burning bush, a projection system has to be a piece-of-cake for you. But why would you want to talk to me, Lord? I’m no Moses.

**SILENCE**

Dave: Huh. Maybe I’ve been working too hard...anyway, as I was saying, *“Our Father who art in heaven...”*

God: Yes?

Dave: Why do you keep interrupting me? I’m trying to pray!

God: But you called Me.

Dave: Called you? I didn’t call you. I’m just praying. *“Our Father who art in heaven...”*

God: There, you did it again.

Dave: Did what?

God: Called Me. You said, *“Our Father who art in heaven...”*  
Well, here I Am. What’s on your mind?

Dave: But I didn’t mean anything by it. Our scripture passage is from the 11<sup>th</sup> chapter of Luke’s Gospel & it contains the Lord’s Prayer. I had planned to recite it before making a few points about it to the congregation.

God: All right. Go on.

Dave: Okay.....let me pick up from where I left off. *“Hallowed be thy name.”*

God: Hold on. What do you mean by that?

Dave: By what?

God: By "*Hallowed be thy name.*"

Dave: It means...it means...good grief, I don't know what it means. How should I know?  
It's just part of the prayer. By the way, what does it mean?

God: It means "Honored...Holy...Wonderful...Revered."

Dave: Hey, that makes sense. I had never thought about what "hallowed" meant before.  
The Gaither's were right – "There IS something about that name." (PAUSE)  
*"Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven."*

God: Do you really mean that?

Dave: Ummm...yes?

God: Then what are you going to do about it?

Dave: Do? Nothing, I guess. I just think life would be a whole lot easier if you got control  
of everything down here like you have up there.

God: Have I got control of you?

Dave: I'm standing here this morning, aren't I?

God: That isn't what I asked you. What about your bad habits? What about all of those  
times you spent your money selfishly? And should I even bring up your lack of  
patience?

Dave: Patience? Patience? Why don't you talk to my wife? Just wait till you see  
how she loses her patience when she notices that I still haven't put away our suitcases  
from our trip to the Black Hills!

### **IMAGE OF SPECK & LOG**

Dave: Very funny. I'm worried about the speck in her eye & am unwilling to see the log  
in my own eye. I'm well aware that I'm not perfect, but I'm not the only one!  
Every person here has fallen short of Your will for their lives.

God: But YOU were the one praying for My will to be done. If that is to happen,  
it will have to begin with those who are praying for it. Like you, for example.

Dave: All right! Fine! You've made your point. I have plenty of room for improvement,  
but I don't think we have enough time this morning to discuss my shortcomings.

God: "*With the Lord a day is like a thousand years & a thousand years are like a day*"  
(2 Peter 3:8).

Dave: Ha-ha. You know all of my sins anyway. (PAUSE)  
Lord, I really would like to cut some of those things out of my life.  
I'm tired of carrying those burdens around with me.  
I'd like to be free of them...I mean REALLY free!

God: Good, now we're getting somewhere. I'm proud of you.  
We'll work together, you & Me.

Dave: Lord, I hate to say this, but my watch is telling me that I need to finish up.  
This prayer is taking a lot longer than it usually does...  
"Give us this day our daily bread."

God: You need to cut down on the bread too...you're overweight.

Dave: What is this – "*Criticize Me Day*"? I know I'm not perfect.  
I know I'm "*a work in progress*," but can't I just pray "The Lord's Prayer"  
without being reminded of my shortcomings?

God: Prayer is a dangerous thing. You could wind up changed, you know.  
That's what I'm trying to get across to you. You called me & here I Am.  
It's too late to stop now. Keep on praying. I'm interested in the next part  
of your prayer...well, go on.

Dave: I'm afraid to continue.

God: Afraid? Of what?

Dave: I know what you'll say.

God: Try Me & see.

Dave: "*Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.*"

God: What about Fred?

Dave: I knew it! I knew you would bring him up! Lord, he's gossiped about me  
and cheated me out of money! I could live to be as old as Methusaleh  
and he will never pay me back! All I have to say is "*Never again. Never again.*"  
I've helped him for the last time.

God: But your prayer...what about your prayer?

Dave: I didn't mean it.

God: Well, at least you're honest. But it's not much fun carrying that load of bitterness  
and resentment around inside of you, is it?

Dave: No, but I think I'll feel better as soon as I get even.  
Boy, have I made some plans for ol' Fred! He'll wish he had never met me!

God: You won't feel any better. You'll feel worse. Revenge isn't sweet.  
Think about how unhappy you already are about what has happened between you.  
But I can change that.

Dave: You can? How?

God: Forgive Fred. Then I'll forgive you. Then the hate & the sin will be Fred's problem, not yours. You may lose the money, but you will settle your heart.

Dave: But Lord, I can't forgive Fred.

God: Then I can't forgive you.

Dave: (PAUSE) You're right, Lord. Life's too short. I want to be right with you more than I want revenge on Fred. So I forgive him. He's bound to be awfully miserable, now that I think about it. Help him to find the way that leads to life, Lord.

God: How do you feel?

Dave: Hmm...not bad. Not bad at all. In fact, I feel pretty great. You know, I don't think I'll feel uptight when I go to bed tonight for the first time in a long, long time. And maybe I won't be so tired when I wake up in the morning.

God: You're not through with your prayer...go on.

Dave: Oh, all right...*"And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil."*

God: Good...good. I'll do that. Just don't put yourself in places where you can be tempted.

Dave: What do you mean by that?

God: Quit listening to gossip & watching inappropriate television shows & lusting after that which you don't have. And don't use me as an escape hatch.

Dave: I don't understand.

God: Sure you do. You've done it lots of times. You get into trouble or get caught in a bad situation and then you come running to me: *"Lord, help me out of this mess and I promise I'll never do it again."* Do you remember some of the bargains you have tried to make with me?

Dave: Yes & I'm ashamed, Lord. I acted like a child.

God: Which bargains are you remembering?

Dave: Well, there was the time I told Tammy that I was going to run some errands and instead played a round of Frisbee Golf at Deerwood Park.

What were Craig & Jeanne Brinker doing in Evansdale, anyway? When they waved at me, I remember asking You: *"Lord, please prevent them from telling my wife where they saw me. I will read Your Word every morning if you help me."*

God: The Brinker's didn't tell your wife, but you didn't keep your promise, did you?

Dave: I'm sorry, Lord, I really am.

God: You're halfway home.

Dave: Halfway home? Oh, I get it. Can I at least wait until after worship is over  
to apologize to my wife?

God: Yes, now go ahead & finish your prayer.

Dave: *"For Thine is the kingdom & the power & the glory forever. Amen."*

God: Do you know what would bring me glory? What would make me really happy?

Dave: No, but I'd like to know. I want to please You, Lord.  
You've helped me see all the ways I've been half-hearted in my discipleship.  
From now on, I want to follow you completely. I want to love you with all my heart,  
all my soul, all my mind & all my strength.

God: And?

Dave: I want to love my neighbor as myself.

God: You just answered the question.

Dave: I did?

God: Yes, the one thing that would bring me glory is to have people like you truly love me.  
And I can see that happening between us. Now that some of those old sins are exposed  
and out of the way, well, there's no telling what we can do together.

Dave: Lord, let's see what we can make of me, okay?

God: Yes, let's see...

Before I say "Amen," there's one last point I want to make about our passage. It has to do with something they preached to us all the time at seminary: "Context, context, context!" According to Luke, immediately after Jesus prayed the Lord's Prayer, He told His disciples a Parable about *"a-friend-at-midnight."*

The problem with this parable is that it has often been mistaken for an allegory.

In other words, *"the friend"* who is approached in this parable is really God AND the-moral-of-the-story is that we are supposed to be persistent when we pray.

There's nothing wrong with persistence-in-prayer, but there is something wrong with imagining that God is like a friend who refuses to get up because he is already asleep!

In Psalm 121 we are told that God "*NEVER slumbers nor sleeps*" (verse 4).

Our theology is WRONG if we think prayer is simply twisting the arm of a reluctant God until He says, "*Okay, I give up. Stop pestering me. I'll bless you.*"

In the Parable of the Friend at Midnight, Jesus was using the rabbinical method of CONTRAST.

He did the same thing in Matthew, chapter 7, when he talked about the wise man & the foolish man who built their houses upon the rock & the sand.

If I had to summarize Jesus' words in the Parable of the Friend at Midnight, this is what I would say:

*"There was a man who was sound asleep & didn't want to get up & give his friend what he needed.*

*But because of his friend's perseverance, he reluctantly gives in & provides what his friend needs.*

**BUT GOD IS NOT LIKE THAT!** *Therefore, I say to you, ask & it will be given to you, seek & you will find, knock & the door will be opened to you."*

I like what the 20<sup>th</sup>-century Methodist theologian, E. Stanley Jones, once said about prayer:

*"Prayer is not overcoming God's reluctance; it is cooperating with His highest willingness."*

Prayer is not twisting the arm of God...prayer is believing in a God who hears our prayers, answers our prayers & even exceeds our prayers!

So don't forget! Tie a string around your finger or write it down on your TO-DO list.

Don't forget to give thanks to your Father in heaven!

Don't forget to hallow His name!

Don't forget to work for His kingdom!

Don't forget to thank Him for your daily bread!

Don't forget to thank Him for His forgiveness!

Don't forget to thank Him for His protection from evil!

Don't forget to give thanks to your Father in heaven! Amen.