



[Pastor Steven Billings](#)

Sermon for Pentecost 7

July 24, 2022

Teach Us to Pray Luke 11:1–13

¹ Now Jesus was praying in a certain place, and when he finished, one of his disciples said to him, “Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples.” ² And he said to them, “When you pray, say: “Father, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. ³ Give us each day our daily bread, ⁴ and forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone who is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation.”

⁵ And he said to them, “Which of you who has a friend will go to him at midnight and say to him, ‘Friend, lend me three loaves, ⁶ for a friend of mine has arrived on a journey, and I have nothing to set before him’; ⁷ and he will answer from within, ‘Do not bother me; the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed. I cannot get up and give you anything’? ⁸ I tell you, though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, yet because of his impudence he will rise and give him whatever he needs. ⁹ And I tell you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. ¹⁰ For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened. ¹¹ What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will instead of a fish give him a serpent; ¹² or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? ¹³ If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!”

Prayer is one of those elements of the Christian life that really make you wonder. It’s talked about a lot, there’s a zillion Bible studies on it, we have many examples of Christ praying in the Gospels, yet, somehow, prayer still makes us uneasy.

Why is it that prayer, which is so much a part of Scripture and our Christian tradition, is so difficult for us? What keeps us from praying? Obviously, prayer is not an isolated habit; it’s not a soliloquy; it’s not a monologue; it’s communication, and that requires another person. If you’re going to pray, you have someone to pray to.

This relational aspect of prayer is one reason why it’s so hard for us. Prayer can be difficult when we’re unsure of our status before God. When there’s discord in your home, there’s not a lot of dialogue. When you and your spouse are angry with one another, it doesn’t make for great conversation, does it. Well, it’s the same in our relationship with God. If our status with Him is uncertain, if there’s tension in the air between us and the Lord, then prayer becomes diffident and timid. If we think God is angry with us, if we feel that He doesn’t accept us, if we worry that we’re unworthy to approach God, we’re not likely to pray.



[Pastor Steven Billings](#)

Sermon for Pentecost 7

July 24, 2022

In today's Gospel, Christ encourages us to pray, but not by giving us 101 ways to a better prayer life. Jesus addresses our status before God. He assures us of who we are in God's eyes and in that way wishes to stimulate our prayer life.

When the disciples, in their uncertainty, asked Jesus to teach them to pray, the first thing He said was that they should call God "Father." Then He explained what kind of Father God is: "What father among you," He began, "if his son asks for a fish, will instead of a fish give him a serpent; or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!" (vs. 11-13)

When Jesus invites us to call God "Father," He's inciting us to remember who we are: children of God. To call God "Father" is to take our place in our baptism, for it's in baptism that God *becomes* our Father. As mere children of the world, conceived in sin and born into a state of cold silence where God is concerned, we don't know Him as Father, but as a distant, demanding Judge. In baptism, however, we die to the world and are "born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" (1 Pet. 1:3). It's in this second birth that God is revealed to us as Father. For in that water we put on Christ. Dead to everything else, we now live to Christ, who is the Son of the living God.

And, as Christ has God for *His* Father, as He prays to His Father in heaven, so we who have put on Christ, we who have died to the world and have been born into the Church, we, too, now have God as *our* Father because Christ has given Him to us. We are in Christ and all that He is has been given to us, including His Sonship to the Father. Baptism, then, transfers us to a new place. We move from the cold, silent world of sin into the kingdom of the Son of God, who is in constant communion with the Father. Baptism places us smack dab in the middle of the Trinity, Father to Son and Son to Father.

So, in prayer before God, we are not unattended and alone; we are in Christ. We pray to the Father in Christ through the Holy Spirit. For Christ is the everlasting Son of the Father, He is Light of Light, very God of very God; He enjoys the closest possible relationship with the Father. And, when He gives us the name "Father" to call upon, He's inviting us to stand in His shoes when we pray. When we address God as Father, we're stepping into Christ; we're putting on our baptism and saying: "God, You are my Father on account of what Christ has done for me. I pray not on my own worthiness but in Christ and He prays in me."

For baptized Christians, then, prayer is simply another facet of being in Christ. When we're in Christ we do what He does because He does it in us. Christ prays to His Father, and since we're in Christ, we pray to His Father who is now also our Father. Prayer is Christ in us. Prayer is being caught up in Christ's movement to the Father. Prayer is simply being a Christian.

Baptism, then, assures us of our status before God, which is that of a child to a loving father, a child who depends, who trusts, who receives all that he has from a giving, loving, bestowing, creating hand. In other words, prayer is based on faith, on trust in the God who gives, bestows, and creates good things for us, His children. Will not the God



[Pastor Steven Billings](#)

Sermon for Pentecost 7

July 24, 2022

who made the heavens and the earth and gave them to us, the God who has fearfully and wonderfully made you and sustains you, the Lord who provides for the sparrow and the lilies of the field, [will He not] listen to His children, His beloved, His family?

Listen: the God we approach in prayer doesn't command us to bow in servile fear, He doesn't demand that we offer sacrifices to appease Him, He doesn't ask us to bring gifts with which to bribe Him. No! He gives more than we can imagine; He grants treasure beyond our wildest dreams. The Psalmist comprehends this God to whom we pray when he exhorts himself, saying: "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits, who forgives all your iniquities, who heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit, who crowns you with loving kindness and tender mercies, who satisfies your mouth with good things." Beloved, our prayer is not based on us and what we do for God; it's based on God, on what He has done, on what He has promised, on His mighty works for us, His children.

Prayer flows out of our identity as Christians – from our baptism, from our incorporation into Christ. This is a great comfort. However, as comforting as this is, when we come to the actual moment of prayer, we often find that words are lacking. It's not only our status before God that hinders our prayers, but it's also that nagging uncertainty as to what we should say.

The disciples had the very same experience. They, too, were uncertain. They didn't know what to say in prayer, so they asked Jesus: "Teach us to pray." And He gave them the very words; He gave them a prayer. He gave them the prayer He Himself prays to the Father.

What a remarkable demonstration of God's grace! He not only commands us to pray, but He gives us the very words with which to pray! Our prayer is not based, then, on the ups and downs of our hearts, but on the never failing treasure of God's giving. He gives us everything, including the words to pray. So you see, prayer is not an offering which we manufacture to give to God; it's giving back to God what He's already given to us.

Think of it this way: How does a child learn to speak? He listens; he learns to imitate the verbalizations of his family. Children listen as we speak to them. And, hopefully, we fill their ears with gracious words like: "I love you. You're my child. I will never abandon you." The child, then, hearing such words, learns to speak back to his parents in the same kind of language, with the same emphases and accents that he's heard. It's the same for us as Christians. We learn to pray to our Father by listening to Him speak to us. We hear His Word and it becomes our word. We hear His speech and it becomes our prayer.

Children in a family learn to speak by being part of the family, by joining in the family discussion, by listening and mimicking the family's talk. We are in the family of God. Christ is our Brother through our baptism and God is our Father. We learn to speak to our Father in the same way that children learn to speak to their parents: by listening and speaking



[Pastor Steven Billings](#)

Sermon for Pentecost 7

July 24, 2022

back the words we hear. In the gathering of the Church it's God's Word which is spoken. God speaks to us and we hear His words in the liturgy, scriptures, and sermon. These, then, become the same words that we pray back to God. God's Word is the language of the Church. God's Word goes in our ears and comes out our mouths.

And those words of God are full of what He has done, is doing, and will do for us: He forgives our trespasses, feeds us daily bread, and rescues us from the clutches of the tempter. In other words, they're full of His grace, His divine acts of salvation. This is not unusual. The Psalms, the prayer book of the Church, are full of prayers telling God what He's done: He's created us and redeemed us in mighty ways. Of course, God doesn't need to hear these things. But we need to speak them. After all, prayer isn't for God's benefit, it's for *ours*.

So, don't be timid in your prayers, beloved, but take your place in Christ. Pray as He has taught you. Pray in faith, knowing that the God who is your Father hears you, has saved you, and will care for you now and always. In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen