

[Luke 11:1-13](#)

The late Rob Frost used to run a Christian conference after Easter every year, called Easter People. I don't know whether any of you went to it. Some people described it as Spring Harvest for Methodists who were too scared to go to Spring Harvest. That's a little harsh, but for some people there was some truth in that!

One year, I was asked to be a speaker at a set of seminars where a team of us was going to teach on the meaning of the Lord's Prayer. Each of us had a section of the prayer to expound – one each morning for the week. It is so rich as a prayer that explaining and applying the entire prayer in one talk or one sermon fails to do it justice.

Indeed, when I have taught on it in churches before, I have taken a series of sermons to explore it.

But I don't have that luxury today. So rather than go through the entire prayer at breakneck speed, I want to explore the teaching Jesus gives here immediately after the Lord's Prayer. For it's all very well knowing what to pray, but it helps to know who we are praying to, which is what that teaching is about. It's no good using the right words or formula if we have a distorted picture of God.

Firstly, God is a *friend*. This is the theme of verses 5 to 8, where Jesus tells the story of the man who needs to disturb his friend at night for bread. And it's no coincidence that Jesus mentions bread in this story after the petition in the prayer for 'daily bread' (verse 3). When we need our daily bread, God is our friend.

Jesus tells the story on the assumption that friends are bound together by honour or obligation. This wasn't discussed much in Judaism, but the pagan philosophers of his world certainly explored this, and if we remember that Luke was a Gentile, then we see here some teaching that will make some immediate sense outside of Judaism among the new Gentile converts.

And in fact that is made all the clearer when we look at a difficult part of these verses. The latest version of the NIV translates verse 8 this way:

I tell you, even though he will not get up and give you the bread because of friendship, yet because of your shameless audacity he will surely get up and give you as much as you need.

Did you expect those words 'your shameless audacity'? Aren't you used to hearing 'your persistence', with the preacher then calling you to persistence in prayer?

The trouble is, the old 'persistence' translation is almost certainly wrong. An American scholar, the late Kenneth Bailey, who lived most of his life in the Middle East and who studied the ancient texts, the early translations into other Middle Eastern languages, and the local culture concluded that 'persistence' was wrong. It was wrong as a translation and it was wrong in the culture of hospitality in Palestine.

In fact, Bailey linked it to this concept of honour that I mentioned. The friend would not want his honour to be questioned, however grumpy he was for being woken up at midnight. That desire to maintain his honour would motivate him to answer the request for bread.

And so I go with the alternative translation that is a footnote in the NIV: not 'because of your shameless audacity' but 'to preserve his good name'. God is an honourable friend, so much more honourable than the grumpy friend in Jesus' story. He does not want the honour of his name to be called into question, because it is so important to him that his position as our friend is maintained.

So I wonder what 'daily bread' needs you bring to God? It may literally be daily bread, especially with the problems our world is having with supply and inflation. We now know that Jesus' expression 'daily bread' was one that was in everyday use in his day, because some years ago archaeologists found an ancient shopping list which specifically mentioned daily bread.

If you are bringing your basic needs to God, know that you are bringing them to an honourable friend. And that is not just a formal expression in the way that Members of Parliament refer to MPs of the same party as 'my Honourable Friend', this is real and deep with our God. For the honour of his name as our friend, he will make sure our needs are met. He will not do so miserably or reluctantly, because he cares for us.

I urge you to put aside any thought that it's unworthy to bring your basic needs to God in prayer. As your friend, he cares about the food you eat, the income you have, the energy you need for your home, the clothes you wear, and many other things, too. As Jesus reminded us in the Sermon on the Mount, he does

not want us to worry about these things. Why? Because as an honourable friend, he will see to it that we have enough.

Do not view God as an ogre, says Jesus, view him as your caring friend. He is so much better than that. He is not cruel. He is caring. He is not indifferent and asleep but ready to be asked. Bring him your needs without shame.

Secondly, God is our *Father*.

Now in recognising God as Father, I am of course aware that there are people who have had bad experiences of a human father. That's not something I can say. When my father died five years ago, I wrote on Facebook that a light had gone out of my life.

But what I experienced was growing up in a family where money was tight. Often I tell the story of being a small boy and overhearing my parents talking one evening about how they were going to manage all the bills, so I went into the front room where they were and offered to give up my pocket money. So I didn't have an abusive father like some, but I had an experience of finding it hard to believe that a father could provide everything I asked for.

Things improved as I got older, but the key for me was slowly absorbing the biblical picture of God as a caring, concerned, compassionate Father, who had all the resources of creation at his disposal:

for every animal of the forest is mine,
and the cattle on a thousand hills (Psalm 50:10).

So for those who do not have a good image of the word 'father' I do not take the route of dispensing with it and just using feminine language for God, I prefer over time to rehabilitate the notion of fatherhood, because its use for God is a good and nourishing one.

This is what Jesus basically says to his listeners. Paraphrasing, he says, you know that human fathers want to give what is good to their children, so how much better is your heavenly Father? Scorpions for eggs? No! In the Holy Land, scorpions are common and I read the other day of someone who camped on a beach there and found a small scorpion had crawled into his sleeping bag.¹

But no loving father would do that to their children. And neither will our heavenly Father with us. He will only give us what is best for us.

Now 'what is best' is naturally not necessarily what the world considers 'best'. It is not necessarily the best of material possessions, the highest of incomes, and the most desirable of homes.

Rather, you may have noticed that Luke's account of these words differs in one important way from Matthew's. Here, Jesus does not say, 'how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask him,' he says, 'how much more will your Father in heaven give *the Holy Spirit* to those who ask him' (verse 13).

The very best is God's own presence with us for ever, the Holy Spirit. Can anyone beat such a gift? No!

As parents, Debbie and I will give to our children so that they may make the best of their lives, and we keep savings in order to do that. We do not give to them in order to indulge them, but so that they can have the best we can provide for them to make something worthwhile with their lives.

Well, it's all that and much, much more with God. We can confidently ask him for the good things we need, and because not only is he an honourable friend, he is also a loving Father, he will provide for us. But he will set us up for the life of serving and loving him in his kingdom – the best life of all, even if it is costly – by the gift of his Spirit.

Would it not be the most natural thing of all, therefore, for Christians regularly to be praying for more of the Holy Spirit in their lives? It seems logical to me if we have such a loving and caring Father in heaven.

I know that we still go through hardships. I know that we still face trials. I know that we still face life situations where we do not know why certain things are happening to us. But through all that I am still convinced of God's fatherly goodness to us. Let me tell you one final story about that goodness as I have experienced it.

Much earlier in my ministry, and a little while before I met Debbie, I was considering whether to buy a new computer for my work. I really liked the look of one particular model, and I wanted to buy it.

But I was hesitant. As you know, I like computers! And I didn't want just to kid myself that this was God's will to spend this large amount of money. So I prayed and left it with God.

In my main church was a woman called Mandy. One night at the church prayer meeting she had had such a powerful experience of the Holy Spirit and afterwards she discovered that she had received the spiritual gift of prophecy. Not prophecy in the sense of foretelling the future, but prophecy in the sense of being able to bring direct and relevant messages from God to people.

One Saturday morning she had gone to the church premises to pray on her own. Walking around, she came to the front of the sanctuary, near the communion table and the lectern, and in that area she felt prompted to pray for me.

While she was praying there, she heard God say to her, 'Tell Dave he can have what he wants.'

She relayed that to me sometime in the succeeding days and I knew instantly this referred to my dilemma about the computer. My prayer was answered by a loving Father.

In **conclusion**, I don't want to harangue you about the need for prayer, it's too easy to do that. Instead, I want you to hear just how good and loving our God is. He is the friend who will maintain his honour by providing what we need. He is the Father in heaven who provides the good and the very best for his children.

Let us be confident in this God of love when we pray.

¹ <https://www.psephizo.com/biblical-studies/how-can-we-pray-like-jesus-in-luke-11/>