



## **Ask in Boldness**

### **Colossians 2:6-15; Luke 11:1-13**

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Good interviewers are known for the power of their questions. Their true gift is not in the asking but in their listening. By hearing what the subjects of their interviews are saying, they are able to frame excellent questions to draw out deeper conversation.

Before the encouragement to ask, Jesus listens to the disciples' request and gives them what has become known as the Lord's Prayer, which can be as much about speaking as about listening. In the very moment the petitions are raised to God, they (the petitions) are turned around 180° and now they address the petitioner. In other words, we acknowledge the holiness and justice of God and long to see that spread over the whole world through our participation in the Kingdom and cooperation with the Holy Spirit.

The disciples speak to Jesus with boldness and are invited to use the same boldness in addressing their prayers to God. They know devout Jews pray three times a day. But they have seen Jesus diligently taking off for prayer at other times during the day and night and want more.

The disciples have also seen John teach that skill to his own disciples. They have figured out that there is more to prayer than the prescribed liturgy and don't want to be left out. So, they assume it's time for Jesus to teach them how to pray. They don't just ask. They *tell* Jesus to teach them.

Their boldness is not offensive to Jesus who teaches them in turn a series of imperatives directed at God in a prayer that has become the central Christian prayer for generations throughout the universal Church. Because we don't know what to say in prayer, Jesus offers his own words. Bonhoeffer says it's not only what we want to pray that matters, but what God wants us to pray.

And if it is Jesus' own words the disciples use, how can the Father not listen? It is Jesus praying his own words in us, with us, and for us as we offer to God that prayer. Let's pay attention to what we are asking: Are the words we address to God now somehow challenging us?

The themes of the short prayer Jesus teaches us instill confidence and trust in the sacred relationship between petitioner and God. Line after line persistence is encouraged, even to the extent of being able to ask, search, and knock, knowing that the Lord says we will receive what we ask for. And God wants to give to those who ask. We are to ask in boldness, which comes from being "rooted and built up in [Christ]" (Col. 2:7).

Father Richard Rohr says that those who turn to God always encounter a lover and not an abuser, an account manager, or worst yet, a dictator. God is more than we can imagine or dare to hope for. "When we go into the Presence, we find someone not against us, but someone who is definitely for us! Mystics recognize someone else is holding them. People who pray always say, 'Someone is for me more than I am for myself.' Prayer is being loved at a deep, sweet level... Maybe a lot of us just need to be told that this is what we should expect and seek. We're

afraid to ask for it; we're afraid to seek. It feels presumptuous. We can't trust that such a love exists. But it does."

Do we approach God as if God were Santa Claus or a vending machine ready to distribute graces?

Jesus teaches his disciples to pray with rectitude, asking for that which is good for us. He wants his disciples to use words sparingly ("When you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard because of their many words.")<sup>1</sup> and focus on spiritual goods rather than earthly things ("But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.")<sup>2</sup>

Hence, he is very concise in his prayer and instructs his disciples so:

<sup>2</sup>He said to them, "When you pray, say:

Father, hallowed be your *name*.

Your *kingdom* come.

<sup>3</sup>Give us each day our *daily bread*.

<sup>4</sup>And forgive us our *sins*,

for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us.

And do not bring us to the time of *trial*." (Luke 10)

The disciples are in for a big surprise. They already know that they can approach God in a loving and intimate relationship.<sup>3</sup> Addressing God as 'father' was not unknown in Judaism but was not common.

In Roman culture, the father figure was huge. Professor Ian Paul reminds us that

"If the fatherhood of God was a minor theme in Judaism, the question of the nature of fatherhood loomed large in the Roman imperial context of Luke's audience. The father of the household's primary quality was that of having absolute authority over the members of the household, including in some circumstances the power over life and death. It was the father who decided whether a new-born should be kept or abandoned to exposure. By contrast, Luke portrays God as a father who is full of compassion and mercy."<sup>4</sup>

So, addressing God as "Father" becomes central to a Christian's life and that fatherhood is shared: God is *our* Father. The Lord's prayer is a *collective* prayer: all the pronouns are plural, and all requests and needs are shared.

Thomas Aquinas clarifies that devotion derives from our true love of God and of our neighbor. He writes that "[i]n order to express our love of God we call Him *Father*, and in order to indicate love of our neighbor we pray for all in general: *Our* Father..."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 6:7

<sup>2</sup> Matthew 6:33

<sup>3</sup> [https://www.jewfaq.org/prayers\\_and\\_blessings](https://www.jewfaq.org/prayers_and_blessings)

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.psephizo.com/biblical-studies/how-can-we-pray-like-jesus-in-luke-11/>

<sup>5</sup> Thomas Aquinas, The Lord's Prayer, in The Three Greatest Prayers, p. 103.

Our neighbors become our siblings. In the parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk 10:25-37), Jesus has already clarified for us who our neighbors are. Now, do we feel the need to ask him “Who are our siblings?”

Once we acknowledge our rightful relationship with God and neighbors/siblings, we draw the conclusion that honoring God means to remain in that rightful relationship by laboring together and cooperating with the Spirit to make God’s Kingdom palpable and visible. For this intentional way of living, God will provide all that we need, sustenance and forgiveness, on a daily basis.

However, asking, even persistent asking is encouraged. It isn’t that Jesus encourages us to pester God as a petulant person. Jesus goes on to explain what the attitude behind the asking ought to be. No request is too absurd and unreasonable when addressed to God. He will pick up the same reasoning later when he will talk about “the need to pray always and not to lose heart.”<sup>6</sup> Maybe the hope is that in insisting in our request we can hear ourselves and become more astute and focused, more invested in the asking and the listening.

Suppose, Jesus says, a hungry person (hungry for real food, for sanctuary, for justice) arrives at your door at an inconvenient time. How will you respond to their presence? Will you not move the mountains in faith to assist the person in need? Faith, after all, expresses itself in love.<sup>7</sup> In the act of providing or standing up for another, more people get involved in the process of providing the needed change: moving mountains creates the opportunity for the growth of the Kingdom.

Theologian Mary McGlone comments that “Our prayer for the coming of God’s kingdom is ultimately a prayer of self-offering. God does not promise to rain down bread from heaven, but to empower us to share and to encourage others to do the same. In this vision, we are not relating to a faraway God who must be cajoled into caring and acting; we are communicating with the God who is as near as we are to ourselves, the God whose grace empowers us with the strength and creativity to collaborate with the divine plan.”

So, Jesus does not say, "Learn to beg cleverly enough to get what you want." He says, "Ask, and God will give you the Holy Spirit."

If the first part of Jesus’ reply to the disciples’ request to teach them how to pray is a technical, nuts and bolts response, the second part deals with the character of God and the right attitude in asking and receiving. What matters, Jesus seems to stress, is understanding the nature of the one to whom we pray, a loving and concerned father, not a sleeping and indifferent god, one who is concerned with our needs, and is more than willing to pour out his Spirit upon us.

The reply to our prayers, Jesus tells us, is God’s Spirit who allows us to speak boldly and to be persistent in our prayers. He encourages us to be ready to receive the things for which we ask. When we allow Christ to teach us to pray, we stop asking God to do our bidding and join Christ in doing everything we can for the coming of God’s kingdom. The question becomes, then, are we ready to receive, to listen to the Spirit who intimately asks us to pay attention to what we are asking? Are we aware of what it is we want and need?

Take a moment to enter into the deepest chambers of your heart and ask God to bless you with what you need. What comes to mind as you ask? May the Lord be merciful to ask and shower us with the gift of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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<sup>6</sup> Luke 18:1-8

<sup>7</sup> Matthew 17:20; Luke 17:6; see also Galatians 5:6;