

We Approach God in Prayer

As Christians, we are knit together in Christ Jesus. In this common life, we often pray together. We see this relationship between Jesus and His disciples. Jesus prayed, and the disciples asked Him how they should pray. As He taught them to pray, He teaches us as well. His Word instructs and inspires us. Together then in response, we offer our words to God our heavenly Father.

Even before we speak to God in prayer, how do we approach God? When Jesus gives us the Lord's Prayer, He teaches us to call God "Father." In the parable of the friend at midnight, Jesus teaches that coming to our Father is like calling on a friend for help. A man is asking his friend for three loaves. This friend must be someone he trusts, someone he knows will help.

Do you consider God to be your friend? Perhaps you don't. If you don't attend church frequently, maybe you feel like a guilty, long-lost relative at the Sunday family reunion. If you're someone who prays only in trouble, you might feel like a guilty, long-lost relative asking for help only when tragedy strikes. And if you don't pray at all, maybe you are simply a guilty, long-lost relative.

Yet it was for guilty people that Jesus came. He came to forgive our guilt and give us hope. So He teaches us that God is our friend. The Bible teaches that Abraham, because he trusted in God, became the friend of God (James 2:23). Jesus Himself is the friend of sinners (Matthew 11:19). He laid down His life for His friends (John 15:13-15). Being full of mercy and compassion, He must be better than the best of friends. We can go to Him at all times, especially when it seems like midnight in our souls.

So if you are baptized, as Jesus was, you may count God as your Father and friend, one on whom you can call at all times. Because we have boldness and confidence as Christians, we can hold God to His promise to help and even in a way demand that God help us, as the friend did in the parable. God wants us to come to him with such confidence.

In this parable of prayer, the friend calls on his friend next door because he has nothing to share, nothing to place before his visiting guest. Certainly all of us can relate to times when we have nothing left spiritually. We want to help a friend, but we feel like we have nothing worthwhile to give. Sometimes we are at the end of our patience, or our strength has left us. Or as in the parable, maybe our cupboards really are empty and we are simply struggling to get some bread. At such times, we can pray, and good things will come from such prayers.

God commands us to pray, but why would He if He were not our friend? Why would we pray if He did not promise to hear us? Prayer is important because it is our end of the conversation with God.

We do not look on the Lord as a cruel and heavy-handed Master. Rather, He is a gracious giver who has plenty in store for us. Because of our own need and our neighbour's need, He has issued the invitation to pray. He has given us prayer also as a weapon against the devil.

Give thanks to Christ Jesus for teaching us to pray. He provided us with a lifeline to a friend who helps us in every need. Even if we have no words to set before Him, we can let out a short "Lord, have mercy!" which says everything that needs to be said. It's not our lack or length of words that makes our prayer effective; rather, it is the ironclad promise of God that moves us to trust Him. So we approach Him in faith.

