

It was date #2 for the young couple. And from the movie, to the dinner, to the long moonlit stroll, everything went really well. So well in fact, that when it was time for the young woman to go home, the young man's mind and heart were racing. "Should I kiss her? Is date #2 too soon? Does she like me too, or is she just being nice? How's my breath?"

He wasn't confident enough about how she felt to boldly go for the first kiss, so he played it safe. He gave her a hug and went back to his dorm... kicking himself. Maybe you can understand how that young man felt, because you've been there. I certainly can...because that young man was me!

In subsequent chats, she and I revealed our feelings for each other. I even discovered that she was hoping I would kiss her that night. Armed with confidence from what I now knew, I had no trouble boldly going for the first kiss the next date we had. I'd say it all worked out, too. I ended up marrying her!

When my confidence was low because of uncertainty, it was hard to be bold. But when my confidence grew because of what I came to know, being bold was suddenly easy. That's because **Confidence Leads to Boldness**. That truth doesn't just apply to first kisses. Confident basketball players boldly shoot the game winning shot. Confident public speakers boldly give speeches to thousands. Employees, confident in their value for their company boldly asks their boss for a raise. Knowing the truth leads to confidence, and confidence leads to boldness...in our prayer lives too! In today's gospel, Jesus explains why we can have all the confidence we need to pray boldly in any and every situation.

One day, as Jesus was praying, one of his followers requested, "**Lord, teach us to pray.**" That disciple wasn't the only one who wanted some pointers about praying. One of the most frequent reasons people give for why they don't pray regularly is that they don't know what to say, or what to pray about. And I can understand that. If you feel like your prayers are nothing but stammering or stumbling, you probably won't be very confident to pray boldly.

I think that's one reason why Jesus teaches his followers the most widely known, heavily used prayer in Christendom: The Lord's Prayer. Now, understand, Jesus doesn't teach us the Lord's Prayer because he wants it to be, word for word, the only prayer we ever pray. In fact, Jesus doesn't even use the same exact wording the two times he teaches the Lord's Prayer to his followers. We certainly can pray the Lord's Prayer like we do every week in church, but Jesus also intends this prayer to be a model or outline for our own prayers.

There are some key things to take away if we want to use the Lord's Prayer as a model for our prayers. First, out of all the things Jesus says we should pray for, only one is about physical needs—daily bread—the rest are spiritual needs. I can acknowledge that far too often, my prayers revolve around physical needs, not spiritual. That doesn't mean it's wrong to pray that God would provide for our physical needs. Jesus tells us to! But like we discussed last week, spiritual things take priority. We can confidently prioritize spiritual things in our prayers though, because Jesus promises, "**Seek first God's kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.**"

The Lord's Prayer is also a great model prayer, because it covers all the bases of what kind of prayers we should pray. You can summarize the four components of prayer with the acronym **A.C.T.S.** A is for Adoration—praising and worshiping God for who he is. C is for Confession—repentantly admitting and forsaking our sins. T is for Thanksgiving—simply thanking God for the blessings he's poured into our lives. And S is for Supplication—things we request from God for ourselves, and for others. When you use that as a basic outline to build your prayers on, you know you're praying what God wants you to pray. It's like you're a student about

to take a test that the teacher gave you all the answers for. You'd feel pretty confident, right? We can have confidence that leads to boldness in our prayer lives, because Jesus teaches us HOW to pray.

Besides not knowing what to pray about, many others lack a bold prayer life, because they don't think prayer works. Maybe there was a time in their lives when they prayed for something with great boldness and persistence, but they felt like God never answered it; like God remained distant and unconcerned. So they just gave up on praying. If you don't have confidence that prayer does anything, you certainly won't pray boldly and persistently.

A recent study reported that 55% of Americans pray daily. But only 25% of praying adults believe that God answers all their prayers. That means 75% believe that sometimes when they pray, it falls on deaf ears and is a waste of time. No wonder people lack confidence in praying boldly! That's why Jesus gives us reasons to have confidence to pray boldly by reminding us WHO we're praying to.

Jesus tells a parable about a man who has an unexpected guest arrive at his house at midnight. And in a Jewish culture that highly values hospitality, he's got empty cupboards. So he rushes to a nearby friend's house and begs him to give him some bread. At first, the friend won't get up. It's the middle of the night, the door's locked, the kids are already sleeping. And who can blame him? But the man at the door is bold and persistent. He keeps knocking and pleading, until his friend gets up and gives him everything he needs.

Jesus explains, ***"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."*** Jesus' point isn't, "If you pester God enough, eventually he'll cave so you'll get off his back." Rather, Jesus makes "an argument from the lesser to the greater." If the friend in the parable won't give the guy what he needs because he's his friend (and he might have been reevaluating that friendship!) he'll eventually give in to get the guy off his porch! While that man provides what his friend needs, he does it out of concern for his own best interests—getting back to bed. But our Father in Heaven will give us whatever you need, not to get rid of us, but because he has our best interests in mind!

Jesus then assures us of the Father's care once more. If a son asks his dad for a fish to eat, dad won't hand him a snake. If a child wants an egg, dad won't hand him a scorpion. That's pretty basic dad stuff, right? A father who truly loves his children will give them what they need, not something harmful! If sinful fathers with imperfect knowledge do that, then how much more will your perfect, all-knowing heavenly Father always answer your prayers with your best interests in mind?

I hope the phrase "Our Father" takes your breath away every time you pray the Lord's Prayer. Jesus says that God—the all-powerful, all-knowing, eternal, holy, creator God of the Universe... is your Father! That's mind blowing, isn't it?

Maybe your earthly father is warm, loving, and always looks out for your needs; always there to offer help and wise advice when you need it. If that's the case, then the imagery of God as your Father is incredibly comforting! Because as great as your earthly father might be, your heavenly Father is infinitely greater!

But maybe your earthly father is cold, and distant. He's never there for you when you needed; or if he was, he was only concerned about himself. Maybe then the image of God as your Father leaves you wondering if God is really a Father you can trust and go to boldly for what you need.

But this is where having a proper understanding leads to confidence, and confidence leads to boldness in prayer. What kind of father is our heavenly Father? Look at what the Bible tells us about our Father. ***"The LORD is gracious and compassionate; slow to anger and rich in love."*** ***"The Lord is not slow in keeping his***

**promise.” “He has said, Never will I leave you. Never will I forsake you.” “In all things, God works for the good of those who love him.” “No matter how many promises God has made, they are “Yes” in Christ.”**

The Bible makes it very clear that your heavenly Father always looks out for your best interests; always loves you perfectly; always knows exactly what you need; always listens; is always there; always answers your prayers. And when we know and trust that about our Heavenly Father, then **“we may pray to him as boldly and confidently as dear children ask their dear father,”** as Luther writes.

Do you know the most compelling reason we can go to God boldly with our prayers? Jesus. Jesus doesn’t just teach us the model prayer. He’s the reason we can pray to the Father. Sin is always a barrier that separates sinners from a Holy God. Without Jesus, we’d be God’s enemies, not his children. But Christ tore down that wall between us and God, so that we can call him “Our Father.” Through Jesus, **“God made us alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us.”** We can confidently and boldly bring our prayers to God, because we know who our God is— the one who loved us so much, that **“He did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all.”**

That’s why, when Jesus gives us that threefold command—Ask! Seek! Knock--In fact, those Greek verbs are continuing actions—keep asking, keep seeking, keep knocking—we can trust in the matching threefold promise he makes—Ask, and you will receive. Seek, and you will find. Knock, and the door will be opened to you. Not “might.” Will! That’s what praying boldly and persistently to God is—simply holding God to the promises he’s already made to us, and trust that he will.

But what about the times when God doesn’t seem to answer our bold, persistent prayers? Abraham prayed to God to save Sodom 6 times in a row in order to save his nephew Lot and Lot’s family. And yet, God still sent fire from heaven to destroy the city. God didn’t answer Abraham’s prayer, did he? He did, actually. He answered it differently than Abraham asked, but he did answer. God still destroyed the city, but he sent angels to usher Lot and his daughters to safety.

The same is true for all your prayers. Sometimes God answers them differently or at a different time than we’d choose. But God’s answer to our prayers is always filled with his grace and mercy, as he answers according to what he knows we need the most. That’s why you can have the confidence to pray boldly and persistently to the Father—because you know who he is, and you know what he’s promised.