

“Lord, Teach Us to Pray!”

“The entire nation is horrified by today's senseless violence in El Paso. Elaine's and my prayers go out to the victims of this terrible violence, their families and friends, and the brave first responders who charged into harm's way” tweeted Senator Mitch McConnell after the latest mass shooting tragedies in El Paso, Texas and Dayton, Ohio recently. Other U.S. lawmakers tweeted out similar thoughts. Some people are reacting negatively to their comments as being tone deaf, a waste of time, and doing nothing to solve the problem. Conservative political commentator, Tomi Lahren, responded to the criticism by saying **"maybe more thought and especially more prayer are exactly what we need in this country"** to help with the problem of gun violence.

My plan this morning is not to get into a big discussion on gun rights and gun control. I share these thoughts with you because some people in this world have little respect for prayer and its benefits. I share these thoughts with you because as a Christian, I sometimes cringe when tragedies like this happen and politicians tweet out “our thoughts and prayers are with you.” I cringe because there is part of me that thinks “thoughts and prayers” just seems so inadequate and insufficient given the tragedy that just occurred. Perhaps Christians, like me, at times give in to the temptation to devalue, disrespect, and underestimate the power of prayer.

Jesus, who was true God, spent quite a bit of time in prayer. That alone is a testament to the power and value of prayer! Since Jesus disciples often observed Jesus praying, he was the perfect one to teach them about prayer. So let's listen in today and let's learn about how to pray from Jesus so that we give prayer the value, respect, and attention that it deserves. Luke 11:1-13.

¹One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he finished, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples."

²He said to them, "When you pray, say: " 'Father, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come. ³Give us each day our daily bread. ⁴Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us. And lead us not into temptation.' "

⁵Then he said to them, "Suppose one of you has a friend, and he goes to him at midnight and says, 'Friend, lend me three loaves of bread, ⁶because a friend of mine on a journey has come to me, and I have nothing to set before him.' ⁷"Then the one inside answers, 'Don't bother me. The door is already locked, and my children are with me in bed. I can't get up and give you anything.' ⁸I tell you, though he will not get up and give him the

bread because he is his friend, yet because of the man's boldness he will get up and give him as much as he needs.

⁹So I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. ¹⁰For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened.

¹¹Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? ¹²Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? ¹³If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"

“Lord, teach us to pray” (vs. 1). Literally the word “boldness” in verse 8 means “shamelessness” or “rudeness.” Normally, telling someone they are shameless or rude is not a compliment. It is a chastisement. You want that person to change that behavior. Jesus, however, encourages shamelessness here. He in essence tells us to pray like the telemarketer who won’t let you off the phone or the car salesman who tries every trick possible to keep you in his office, He says to pray with no shame.

How do you pray? Are you shameless? How many times do you ask God for what you want? How do you ask? Are you confident that God will and must do what is best? If you are like most Christians, and your pastor, you probably have to admit that your prayer life is anything but shamelessly bold. In our lesson we have a promise. Jesus says, **“So I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened”** (vs. 9-10). Jesus promises that the Christian’s prayer will never fall on deaf ears. God will not be ambivalent or apathetic in regard to our requests. So does that mean we will always get what we want? If all my prayers to date had been answered with God’s “yes,” I’d be at least 6’5”, be some sort of professional athlete, and I would have had less trials and struggles in life. No, God does not always answer our prayers with a “yes,” but He does always give us an answer, and His answer is always what is best. I am not a professional athlete, but if I were (knowing the younger me), I think there would have been a good possibility that I would have been way too focused on living the millionaire professional athlete life to care much about spiritual and eternal things. If that prayer was answered “yes” for me then I would have missed out on in depth study of God’s word in school and through 18 years of ministry which has reshaped and refocused my life. And if my life would have had less trials and struggles, I don’t think I would have learned the lesson of perseverance, that there is more to life than life on earth, and that I need to depend on God for all things. And I’m sure when you consider some of the things you have prayed for in the past, you also are glad to have prayers God has answered with His “no.” God’s “no” is not an obstacle to our bold prayers, but a reason for them. If God has said “no” to one request, He has another plan in mind, and we boldly and

shamelessly beg Him to carry it out for our benefit. Jesus uses present tenses when He tells us to seek, ask, and knock which tells us that these prayers should happen continually. Praying should be a way of life: continual seeking, asking, and knocking. Don't do prayer; live prayer, and you will also live God's continual answer.

Jesus also teaches us, **"when you pray, say: Father"** (vs. 2). Pray like little children talking with total confidence and no doubts when they speak with their mom or dad. Through faith in Jesus as our Savior, we pray as a little child makes requests of his or her parents, trusting that our best interests will be kept in mind and knowing that we can't accomplish what we are praying for on our own. Have you ever played with a little child? Have you tossed them in the air? What did you notice, besides the terrified look on the face of the child's mother? It is the implicit trust they have that you will catch them. They don't know they should be afraid. They merely trust and laugh. That is how we live in prayer. Our life is one big toss in the air. Our prayer expresses our implicit trust that God will catch us, a trust granted to us in Baptism and strengthened through the Word and Holy Communion. In fact, more than a few times I have met with a Christian man or woman who was dealing with devastating news or eternity is coming quickly news and all they could do was smile and be at peace, waiting to see how God would catch them.

Do you pray like God is your father, or do you pray like you are talking to the Queen of England over tea? Are you always trying to say the right things in the right way with the right intentions? Is that how you acted toward your parents as a little child? I doubt it. You spoke from the heart and shot from the hip. You were forthcoming, maybe even too forthcoming at times. You were unencumbered, honest, comfortable, and candid. You had an implicit trust that they would make everything alright somehow, and, even when you were going to them to confess you had done something wrong, you did so with a sure knowledge that they were still going to love you when all was said and done, and that they would prove it with a hug or a kiss. Go to your Heavenly Father the same way. **"He will not give you a serpent when you ask for a fish or a scorpion when you ask for an egg"** (vs. 11-12). How do I know? See how He has taken care of you as His child so far. He has given you, not only food and drink, but His Son's very body and blood. He has not only pulled you out of the mud of sin, but bathed you in His grace. He has given you, not only a letter about His love for you, but an entire book. He has given you, not only the promise that He still loves you in spite of your sin, but a constant welcome into His open arms through His forgiveness in absolution. **"God the Father who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all – how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?"** (Romans 8:32).

"Lord, teach us to pray" (vs. 1). Pray boldly like a telemarketer or car salesman without shame. Pray like a child to their father with no doubts like Abraham talking to God on behalf of the Christians in Sodom and Gomorrah. And always remember no matter what is going on in your life or in this world, **"The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective"** (James 5:16). Amen.