

Stories from the Road #2

Stories Jesus tells as he is on his way to die outside Jerusalem^a

11 One 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^b taught his disciples."

² He said to them, "When you pray, say:

"Father, hallowed^c be your name, your kingdom come.

³ Give us each day our daily bread.

⁴ Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us.

And lead us not into temptation."

⁵ Then Jesus said to them, "Suppose you have a friend, and you go to him at midnight and say, 'Friend, lend me three loaves of bread; ⁶ a friend of mine on a journey has come to me, and I have no food to offer him.' ⁷ And suppose the one inside answers, 'Don't bother me. The door is already locked, and my children and I are in bed. I can't get up and give you anything.' ⁸ I tell you, even though he will not get up and give you the bread because of friendship, yet because of your shameless audacity^d he will surely get up and give you as much as you need.

⁹ "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. ¹⁰ For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.

¹¹ "Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? ¹² Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? ¹³ If 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^e to those who ask him!" (Luke 11:1-13)^f

Q. What surprises, shocks or startles you in what you have just read?

Q. Which character in the story do you most identify with?

Q. What question would you like to ask Jesus?

^a Luke interviews eyewitnesses and writes his biography of Jesus to a particular person. "I too decided to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, ⁴ so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught." (Luke 1:4). In other words, he wants to add confirmation to what Theophilus already believes about Jesus. This story is from a collection of stories Jesus tells to his followers on the road as he heads towards Jerusalem to die (a journey which begins in Luke 9:51). Jesus is explaining what it will mean to follow him – and not just in a physical sense.

^b John was the cousin of Jesus and a popular prophet.

^c "Hallowed" is the idea of honouring what is holy.

^d "Audacity" is the idea of being willing to take bold risks.

^e The "Holy Spirit" is God's personal spirit. In earlier parts of the Bible, it was given to certain people for certain tasks. The promise was that in the future, it would be given to every one of God's people, to help them live God's way.

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Jesus' followers were familiar with praying to God because it was part of the spiritual life of their community. Having witnessed what Jesus was doing and saying it's logical that they would ask him to teach them to pray.

Firstly, Jesus teaches his followers the "what" of prayer. Jesus' model prayer is more than just talking to God – it's an expression of dependent relationship:

Presupposing an intimate and personal relationship...by calling God "father".

Starting with God's concerns...that more and more people come to honour God as God.

Turning to their concerns...asking for "daily bread" shows the extent of human dependence.

Profiling forgiveness...they cannot ask from God what they are unprepared to do for others.

Profiling protection..."lead us not into temptation" is presumably praying that God wouldn't put them in situations where they will be tempted to give up on God.

Secondly, Jesus teaches the "why" of prayer. This is more important, so Jesus devotes more time to it. Jesus' followers should pray because of the character of the one they are praying to. Prayer "works" because God is generous: he wants to hear and respond to their prayers.

Jesus starts with a negative comparison. God is unlike the friend tucked up in bed who only helps to stop someone from bothering him. God is not a reluctant giver so they don't need to "strong-arm" God in their prayers. They can trust that he is willing to listen and to help. The "ask-seek-knock" with its consequential "given-found-opened" seems like an out of this world promise! But remember Jesus has just given the model prayer. God might be generous but he is not a genie.

Jesus then gives a positive comparison. Human fathers know how to give their children good things. How much more will God the heavenly Father! Jesus finishes his teaching with an implicit challenge: what his followers need to ask God for is the Holy Spirit (God's personal spirit). In asking for this, they are asking to be one of God's people. And the promise is that if they ask for it, it will be given. A follower will ask if they have enough trust that Jesus' words are true.

Q. What surprises, shocks or startles you from what you have just read?

Q. In what way has this story confirmed or challenged your understanding of Jesus?

Q. What do you want to take away and ponder further?