

July 27, Ordinary 17C (Luke 11:1-13)

## **Jesus addresses a God who is beyond the human horizon and yet part of the household.**

by [Cathy H. George](#) in the [July 2025](#) issue

Published on July 21, 2025

Luke's version of the Lord's Prayer is shorter than Matthew's. And only in Luke does Jesus offer the prayer in response to a request from one of the disciples: "Lord, teach us to pray." After instructing them in prayer, he tells the parable of the persistent friend, demonstrating the two-way nature of prayer and elevating the role of persistence.

As the reading begins, Jesus is off by himself, praying. This is important to notice, as it tells us that he is not only instructing but also practicing what he teaches others to do. Jesus' pattern of stepping away to be alone and pray is present in all four gospels. He goes off to the mountain, sits by the sea, sneaks off through the middle of a crowd to be alone.

I would guess that he leaves the crowd to escape the pressure of people on every side as the growing crowds follow and find him. He seeks quiet perhaps to hear himself think, to process what is happening around him, to pray for others. He seeks to be fed by the beauty of the mountains, the peace he feels in a boat on a glassy lake, the tranquility of waves on the shore of the sea. And I imagine he goes off to connect to the source of his strength and grace by listening to God.

When Jesus returns and the disciple makes his request, Jesus responds by laying out the essentials of how to talk to God, beginning with a name for God: "Father." This language is familiar to us, and it provokes a variety of reactions. But if we set those reactions aside for a moment, we can take in how startling it might have been for Jesus to call God *Father*. In Greek the word is *Abba*, and the closest English translation is *Daddy*: a familiar, intimate name for one's father. It's a playful, loving name, a household name, a bounce-me-on-your knee and pick-me-up-at-school name. "Daddy" is the name of someone to whom you might tell your worries, your

secrets, and your joys.

It's not "Lord of the heavens." It's not "Governor of the city" or "Sovereign with dominion over all" or even "Creator of the universe." *Daddy* is not just a different kind of name for God; it's a different conception of who God might be in people's lives. The word opens the door to an intimacy Jesus shares with God, the closeness of a father to son.

The God being addressed is beyond the human horizon and yet part of one's household. To make this point, the address to God as "Father" is followed by "hallowed be your name." Jesus does not want to be misunderstood. Though he is calling God *Abba* and resisting established barriers between human and divine, in naming the hallowedness of God he also insists that this intimacy is not a cozy familiarity that diminishes respect.

The Lord's Prayer also instructs the disciples to make a series of requests when they pray. "Your kingdom come" is a prayer of submission, asking that God's ways be manifest in the human condition. "Give us each day our daily bread" is a request that arises from the body, while "forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us" is one that arises from the soul.

When the Lord's Prayer ends, the consultation Jesus is offering is not over. Luke's Jesus offers this terse lesson in prayer and then proceeds to demonstrate an essential ingredient in prayer by telling the parable of the persistent friend. What is our part in prayer? Shameless persistence. The parable Jesus tells, of the impatient neighbor who does not wait until morning but repeatedly bangs on his neighbor's door at night to wake him, is an invitation. The story encourages us to ask and ask, not to hide our needs but to pursue them in prayer, to actively engage in prayer not as a bystander but as a player. If you went to God unashamed to ask for whatever you want and need, what would you ask for?

God does not intend for us to be passive bystanders. Asking and seeking and knocking are all active verbs, verbs that draw us out that engage us. They invite us to answer a question God asks: *What can I do for you?*