

## ***When You Pray***

### **Luke 11: 1 - 13**

October 11, 2009

#### I. Introduction

- A. Maybe you have heard this story before, but it's worth repeating
  - 1. It comes from a mother living in Texas, who says -
- A. My four-year-old daughter was standing on a kitchen chair
  - 1. Staring intensely at the painting hanging on the wall
    - a. Of an older man praying over a small loaf of bread.
- A. "What are you doing, Honey?" I asked. "Looking," she said with a catch in her voice.
  - 1. Noticing tears under her dark lashes, I probed deeper. "What are you thinking?"
    - a. With a heartfelt sigh, she replied, "He doesn't have any peanut butter."
- A. It may have been as simple as that feeling of "something lacking"
  - 1. That caused one of Jesus' disciples to make such a profound request –
    - a. Lord, teach us to pray
- A. The gospel writer, Luke, places this request in the context of a specific time
  - 1. When Jesus had just spent a period of time alone in a secluded place, praying
- A. A quick search through the gospels would tell us that this was not unusual
  - 1. Jesus frequently took time away from the crowds, and even his disciples
    - a. To spend time communing with God
- A. So I'm sure the disciples recognized, without being told
  - 1. That Jesus considered prayer to be a vital and important part
    - a. Of his earthly life and ministry
  - 2. Some of them may have seen the same thing practiced and taught
    - a. By Jesus' cousin, John the Baptist
- A. And so, one of the disciples put into words what many of them may have been thinking
  - 1. If prayer is this important to these powerful men of God
    - a. Then perhaps it should be important to me, too
  - 2. Jesus, would you teach us to pray?

#### II. Does that strike anyone as sounding a little strange? Asking to be taught how to pray?

- A. I won't ask you to hold up your hands this morning, although you can if you want to
  - 1. But, how many of you pray regularly? Or at least once in a while?
- A. I know many of you do, because I've heard you talk about it

1. And how it is an important part of your lives
  - A. And I know many of you pray regularly for this congregation, and for Dottie and me
    1. I covet your prayers on our behalf and I really appreciate it
  - A. So now let me ask you this – who taught you to pray? Or how were you taught to pray?
    1. Some of us might remember the first prayers we memorized as small children
      - a. “Now I lay me down to sleep” or “God is great and God is good...”
    2. That’s about all I can remember when I think of being taught how to pray
      - a. The rest, I probably “learned”, for better or worse
        - (1) From hearing other people pray at home, or in church
          - (a) And later on in other services where public prayers were offered
    3. Along the way, I have had the privilege of spending time in prayer
      - a. With a number of people I really felt that I could learn from
    4. One was a fellow classmate at Hesston College by the name of Thinagar Sittther
      - a. Man, that guy could pray! Totally put me to shame
    5. So, in some sense, I guess I have been taught how to pray by example
  - A. But I feel a little bit jealous, when I think of Jesus’ disciples
    1. Having the opportunity to be taught how we mortal human beings
      - a. Should pray to a divine, eternal God at the feet of Jesus
        - (1) Who they came to recognize as being a part of that divine, eternal Trinity
  - A. On the other hand, God in his wisdom, has made that same teaching, at least in part
    1. Available to us today through the writings of Matthew, who was probably there
      - a. And Luke, who investigated those eyewitness account thoroughly
        - (1) Before writing the words of our text for today
  - A. In effect, we have some of the teaching of Jesus on the matter of prayer
    1. And while I have heard quite a few sermons preached on these texts
      - a. I feel that I still have much to learn from them
- III. There are many things that we could learn about prayer from our text today
- A. But I want to focus on at least two things that I find important
    1. The first one is quite simple – Prayer requires a certain amount of effort
  - A. According to Jesus, it is when prayer is persistent that it is effective
    1. We can see that In the rather humorous story that Jesus tells
      - a. Of a man pounding on his neighbor’s door at midnight
        - (1) Asking for a loaf of bread to feed a late-arriving visitor

- A. I don't know about you, but I don't have much trouble identifying with the neighbor's response – Go away! I'm already in bed, can't it wait until morning?
  - 1. The nerve of the guy, making such a request
    - a. But Jesus turns it into a positive example of how to pray!
- A. Now this is one of Jesus' parables/stories for which we may need to use some caution
  - 1. In how we make interpret what we are intended to learn from it
    - a. If it seems that Jesus is using this neighbor to represent Almighty God
      - (1) To whom we might go with our feeble requests at inopportune times
    - b. Then we should probably be careful about attributing to God
      - (1) All of the characteristics of the neighbor, including his initial response
- A. Does God have times when he has "gone to bed" and doesn't want to be troubled by our prayers, or by our requests?
  - 1. I don't believe that lines up with other scriptures that tell us God is ever watchful
    - a. Always ready to hear the prayers of his children and to respond
- A. Rather, the point that Jesus seems to be making in this parable
  - 1. Is that praying to God is to be a profound, persistent practice
    - a. Not just an emergency number to be called in a time of crisis
- A. Did you notice that when Jesus' disciple asks for help in learning to pray
  - 1. Jesus doesn't say – Well, **if** you should decide to pray about something...
    - a. He says – When you pray...
  - 2. The assumption seems clear – following my example, Jesus says
    - a. Prayer should be a regular, consistent part of life for my disciples
  - 3. And be ready to put some effort into it, be persistent in prayer
- A. Persistence doesn't necessarily mean asking for the same thing over and over again
  - 1. It can also mean that we don't give up on praying
    - a. Just because we don't see the answer we want immediately
      - (1) Sometimes the answer may come in a different way than we expect
  - 2. And sometimes prayer changes us, and our perspective on what we are praying for
    - a. Our prayers may actually change along the way
      - (1) As we gain a new awareness or understanding of the situation
- A. Being persistent in prayer also means that we turn to God first when troubles arise
  - 1. Not after we have tried everything else we can think of
    - a. To fix the problem on our own

- 2. And we continue to open ourselves to God's response, whatever it might be
  - a. And remember to be thankful when the answer comes
    - (1) No matter how long it might take for us to see what God is doing
- A. It doesn't mean that we are to pray about a situation and then just sit back
  - 1. And expect God to take care of all our troubles for us
    - a. Meaningful prayer expects something from us in response
      - (1) As well as anticipating that God will hear and act on our behalf
- A. We see that expressed in the prayer that Jesus taught his disciples and us
  - 1. When we ask for God's intervention in our world or in our lives
    - a. We are asking for God's will to be done, not ours
  - 2. So the first thing praying may do is to change us
    - a. Our attitude, our will, our desires
- A. In fact, Oswald Chambers takes that thought to the next step when he writes -
  - 1. Every time we pray, our horizon is altered, our attitude toward things is altered, not sometimes but every time, and the amazing thing is that we don't pray more.
- A. And then, when we come to a better understanding, and align ourselves
  - 1. With God's will and purpose in the world
    - a. We may find that we are being called to be a part of the answer to our prayers
- A. And example is when we ask God to forgive our sins
  - 1. As we forgive those who have offended us
- A. Or when we pray that we should not be brought into temptation
  - 1. What is our part in the answer? Just to go on doing the same things
    - a. Or going to the same places where we have experienced temptation before
      - (1) I think not!
  - 2. God's presence and power can shield us from many harmful things in life
    - a. But not if we are careless about where we go, who we are with, what we say
      - (1) Those are ways that we may determine the effectiveness of our prayers
- A. Prayer should never be seen as an alternate to taking responsibility upon ourselves
  - 1. It should be a way of making sure that we are in tune with God
    - a. So that we can see or hear God's response and act accordingly
- A. Effective prayer requires an effort on our part
  - 1. We must make it an ongoing habit or discipline in our lives
    - a. And we must be willing to act in response to God's answer to our prayers

A. Corrie ten Boom makes us think about that by asking the question –

1. Is prayer your steering wheel or your spare tire?

a. Sometimes it might be both

IV. A second thing that we can learn about praying is that it demands faith

A. Effective prayer requires the belief that there is Someone listening

1. It seems so simple, and yet I sometimes find myself going through the motions

a. Of praying without giving much thought to what I am doing

A. If you were to ask me, or if I would ask you, I'm sure we would say

1. That we believe God is listening – that God hears us when we pray

A. But regular prayer can also become routine prayer

1. And if we don't see an answer right away, it can be easy to wonder

a. If our prayers really make any difference at all

A. That's where faith comes in, not in making our prayer sound really spiritual

1. Not in using all the "right" language or praying in the "proper" way

A. Even when Jesus says to his disciples, "now pray like this"

1. I don't believe he intended that we use those exact words every time we pray

a. Or even that we must follow the exact pattern that he used in this prayer

A. Rather, from the beginning to the end of the prayer Jesus taught

1. There is a recognition of the power and holiness of God

a. There is the sense that we are children, asking our loving parent

(1) To supply what we really need, and what the world around us needs

2. And there is an expression of the desire that we might see God at work in our world

a. And our willingness to be used in that work

3. Those are the elements that I believe should be a part of our every prayer

a. Whether we put them into words or not

A. Christian author and songwriter, Any Carmichael, says it this way –

1. To look up into a dark sky and see it suddenly open as lightning plays across it

a. To see in one revealing flash deep into the kingdoms of light

(1) Is to know what prayer most truly is

2. There is a mystery, but beyond that darkness is not a deeper darkness, but light

a. Kingdoms of light

A. God's wisdom and power is so far above ours that it can seem like a mystery at times

1. But faith convinces us that God invites our prayers

- a. And that God always responds, even when we don't see the answer right away
- A. Ask, and it will be given you. Seek and you will find. Knock and the door will be opened
  - 1. That is the language of faith
    - a. And it's not a magic formula, it's the expression of a deeply-held belief
  - 2. If the belief is not there, then James Chapter 1 tells us
    - a. That's where our prayer/request should begin
- A. I received an email just this week, from a member of this congregation
  - 1. Who experienced a miraculous healing of mind and body
    - a. As a result of an anointing service and the prayers of God's people
  - 2. I have not experience healing in the same way, but I have seen God answer prayers
    - a. And it can be tempting to say – "See, prayer works!"
  - 3. But it's not our prayers that twist God's arm, and cause good things to happen
    - a. It's really just a demonstration of God's love and affection for his children
- A. If earthly parents care enough to give good gifts to our children, Jesus said
  - 1. How much more will our heavenly Father give of his Spirit to those who ask
- A. Effective prayer requires that we have faith to believe God **will** answer
  - 1. And it requires a kind of faith that can **accept** God's answer
    - a. Whether that answer is "yes", "no", or "not right now"
- A. Scripture is full of examples of the power of prayer
  - 1. We won't take the time to look at them now, but you may recall the stories
    - a. Of Hannah, who prayed and received a child
    - b. The prophet Elijah, who prayed and it stopped raining in Israel for three years
    - c. King Hezekiah, who prayed and his life was extended for fifteen years
    - d. The early church, who prayed and Peter was released from prison
  - 2. But there were also times when God's answer was not "yes"
    - a. The Apostle Paul writes that he prayed diligently for God to remove
      - (1) Some "thorn in the flesh" that he ws experiencing, but God said "no"
        - (a) He would give Paul the grace to endure it instead
  - 3. God also said "no" to the prayer of his Son that he be allowed to escape
    - a. The pain and suffering of the cross
      - (1) Yet God was able to turn that "no" into an even greater blessing in the end
  - 4. And sometimes the answer God gives is "not right now"
    - a. That may be the one that is most difficult to accept at times

(1) We simply have to trust that God's timing is always best

(a) Even when it doesn't always look like it to us

A. The real challenge of prayer is not to ask things of God

1. But to submit ourselves to God's will and God's desire

A. Not to try to use him to get what we want, but to be used of God for his purpose

1. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done

a. In our world, and in my life, as it is already being done in heaven

V. Praying as Jesus taught us to pray can never be selfish or greedy

A. Because it requires us to pray for the good of those around us

1. Even as we ask for our needs to be supplied

A. Someone once put that thought into poetic form this way –

1. You cannot pray the Lord's Prayer and even once say "I."

a. You cannot pray the Lord's Prayer and even once say "My."

2. Nor can you pray the Lord's Prayer and not pray for one another.

a. And when you ask for daily bread, you must include your brother.

3. For others are included ... in each and every plea,

a. From the beginning to the end of it, it doesn't once say "Me."

A. As we close the message this morning, I would invite you to keep that thought in mind

1. And join me in praying "the Lord's Prayer" together

a. Feel free to use the language that you are most familiar with

2. Our hearts will be joined together, even if the words we say are not the same

a. Our Father, who art in heaven,

Hallowed be Thy name

Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done

On earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread,

And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil,

For Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen