

Prayer Can Change Your Life
Part 1 - Prayer Can Change Your Life
Luke 11:1-13
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If you could talk with Jesus, face to face, and ask Him any question, what would it be? Maybe you'd ask Him to help you find a new job. Or maybe you'd ask Him to help you have a better relationship with your spouse or children. Or maybe you'd ask Him to heal a loved one who is terminally ill. What would you ask?

The disciples had that opportunity to talk to Jesus face to face and ask Him anything they wanted. You know what they asked? They asked, "**Lord, teach us how to pray.**" Of all the things they could have asked, why that? - because they saw the effects of prayer in His life. They didn't ask Him to teach them how to preach with authority or to teach them how to perform miracles. They asked Jesus to teach them how to pray because they saw the results of prayer in His life. They saw that prayer was the source of His power. They figured out the secret to His power and success. If they could learn how to tap into that power source, they'd be able to do all the things Jesus did. Prayer was the key to His life and the disciples could see that. Of all the things Jesus could do, it was His ability to pray that got the disciples' attention.

Well guess what? There is nothing more vital to your life as a Christian than prayer. **Prayer is the key to living a vibrant and dynamic Christian life.**

There are a lot of misconceptions about prayer. A lot of people know more about the Steelers than they do about prayer. Over the next few weeks we're going to look at the importance of prayer - why we should pray and when we should pray. Some people think prayer is like a magic wand you wave around and it makes something happen. Some people think prayer is like a fire alarm that should only be used as a last resort. An elder came to meet with the pastor to talk about the church's finances and the pastor said, "**We need to pray.**" And the elder said, "**Oh my. I didn't know it was that bad?**"

Some people think prayer is like a tug of war with God. You keep praying for something and eventually you'll wear God down and you'll win. Some people think prayer is a religious duty. They pray out of a sense of duty, using only canned prayers said over and over in a meaningless ritual. Prayer for this group is something to endure rather than enjoy. They do it as an act of penance. If you think prayer is a duty rather than a gift, you've missed the whole point.

Why are we to pray? There are **FOUR PURPOSES OF PRAYER.**

FIRST, PRAYER IS AN ACT OF DEVOTION TO GOD. It is an opportunity for us to express our devotion to God and acknowledge our dependence on Him. When we pray, we are declaring, "We need you God!" We are declaring we need God's power in our lives. But here's the problem. We don't like to admit we need God's help or anyone else's help for that matter. We don't like being dependent on anyone. We don't want to admit we're inadequate. The desire to be independent has been part of our human nature since our first parents, Adam and Eve. As long as you think you can live life on your own, you won't pray. As long as you think you don't need God, you won't pray. The truth is - we need God. God made us for Himself. He made us to

be in a loving relationship with Him. He made us to need Him. Through prayer we express our devotion to God and declare our dependence on Him.

Jesus said, "I am the vine; you are the branches. If you abide in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing" (John 15:5). Jesus is using the metaphor of a vine. If a branch of the vine is torn off the plant it will wither and die.

Prayer is our declaration of dependence. As long as we stay connected to God through prayer we will be sustained in our spiritual lives. The biggest problem is admitting our need. The cost of prayer is honesty. We have to be honest with ourselves and admit we can't live the Christian life in our own strength.

SECOND, PRAYER IS AN ACT OF COMMUNICATION WITH GOD. When you think about it, most of our problems boiled down to communication problems, whether it's with a spouse or a child or a boss or an employee or a neighbor or a friend. The problems in our lives most often stem from communication problems - miss communication. Communication is the key to good relationships.

A number of years ago our country experienced a near disaster that came to be known as the Cuban missile crisis? It was a standoff between the US and Russia. We almost blew each other up over miss communication. It was scary. President Kennedy and Premiere Kruchev recognized the need for better communication between our nations and they decided they would each have a red phone placed on their desks and no matter what they were told by their advisors, they vowed to call each other directly before reacting. There wasn't anybody else they had to go through to communicate with each other. There would be no more near wars due to mere miscommunication.

Prayer is our red phone to God. In prayer we can talk to God directly and we don't have to go through anybody else. We can talk directly to God and tell Him exactly what we're experiencing and ask him for help.

Prayer is possible because of the kind of relationship we have with God. Jesus said, *"I no longer call you servants ...but friends... That is why the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name"* (John 15 & 16b). He considers us His friends, not just servants or pawns in His kingdom.

The problem is - we have a hard time believing that God is interested in our lives. We can't imagine the transcendent God of the universe being interested in us. When we finally grasp that - when we really realize how much God loves us, we won't have a problem with prayer. The lines of communication will be open.

Do you notice how you love to talk to people who really love you? Our family stays in contact with our cell phones. We all have cell phones. Daughter Kate lives in Atlanta, GA. Son, Jay is in Statesville, NC. Daughter Ali lives in Bristol, TN. Son, David is in Williamsport, PA going to college. My mother is now in Grove City. I talk to them almost every day because I know how much they love me and I want them to know how much I love them. I enjoy hearing what's going on in their lives. I enjoy telling them what's going on in my life. When you

understand how much God loves you, you won't have a problem with prayer. He loves you so much and He's interested in what we're your going through. He cares about every last detail of your life. But when you don't understand how much God loves you, it's hard to pray. It's hard to open up and tell God what you're going through.

THIRD, PRAYER IS AN ACT OF SUPPLICATION. Supplication is making your requests known to God - asking Him for specific help. The Bible says, *"Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus"* (Philippians 4:6-7). Why are we to bring our requests before God? So that we can experience the peace God wants us to have. Not only is prayer God's chosen method for meeting your needs, He also gives you His peace to guard your hearts and minds from anxiety. Prayer is the antidote to worry.

The Bible tells us there are some things that God will only give us when we pray, some things He will only do when we pray. There are a lot of people who think, **"Why should I pray when God already knows what I need. He knows everything, right? Why should I pray?"** Why? Because there are certain things that God only gives you when you pray. **One** of those things is **power**. He only gives you power when you pray. The disciples figured that out and that's why they asked Jesus to teach them to pray. They saw that when Jesus prayed He was filled with fresh new power.

The early church was filled with power. That power came from the fact that they devoted themselves to the teachings of the apostles' and to prayer. If you were walking down the street in first century Palestine and you ran into a Christian and you asked him, "How's it going?" he'd tell you, **"Oh, business as usual. We're doing all kinds of miracles and God is adding to our numbers hundreds of people each day."** That was business as usual for the early church. Why? Because they were people of prayer and that tapped them into the greatest power source available.

Over twenty times in the Bible we are commanded to ask. Jesus said, *"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"* (Matthew 7:7 & 8). James says in the fourth chapter of his letter, *"You have not because you ask not."*

The story goes: a man died and went to heaven and while he was walking around heaven he noticed one storehouse after storehouse filled with gifts. The man asked his neighbor, **"What are all these gifts just sitting around in these storehouses? We have all we need but why haven't they been given to the people on earth so they can be enjoyed?"** His neighbor answered, **"Just read the tags on them and you'll understand."** The man went into one of the store houses and began to read the tags attached to each gift. Each gift was tagged: **"NEVER ASKED FOR."**

James tells us, we have not because we ask not. Is there something you've been lacking in your life simply because you've never asked God to give it to you? You may have tried to get it on your own, but you've never asked God to supply it. Psalm 37:4 says, ***"He will give you the desires of your heart."*** Psalm 84:11 says, ***"No good thing will He withhold..."*** Why is it so hard to believe that? We're interested in everything about the people we love. Why is it so hard for us to think God is interested in us? We need to ask God for the desires of our hearts. Why? Why does God command us to ask for the desires of our hearts? So that our joy may be complete. God wants joyful children, not miserable children who suffer through life because they never ask God for what they need. Joyful children bring Him glory, not miserable children.

Think about it. When you ask God for something everyone gets blessed. First, God gets blessed because it reveals His nature. God is a great gift giver. Second, you get blessed by getting what you asked for. Third, the world gets blessed because you have a testimony and you tell others about God's gift to you. You tell people about it. You can't keep quiet about the blessings of God. The Bible tells us that God delights in giving us what we ask for. ***"Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? 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... to those who ask"*** (Luke 11:11).

FOURTH, PRAYER IS AN ACT OF COOPERATION. When we pray we are cooperating with God to accomplish His purpose here on earth. Prayer is God's way of getting His work done on earth. Jesus said, ***"Anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing."*** That's really hard to believe. But then Jesus says, ***"He will do even greater things than these because I am going to the Father. And I will do whatever you ask in my name..."*** How is that going to be possible? How is a person of faith going to do greater things than Jesus? The answer is THROUGH PRAYER. We will accomplish greater things than Jesus did through prayer. When Jesus was on earth in bodily form, He could only be one place at a time. He was confined by space and time. Today we can pray and our prayers are not bound by space and time. We can pray for someone on the other side of the world and our prayers take God's power directly to that person. We can do greater things than Jesus did while here on earth because God's power is unleashed through our prayers. When my son flew to Brazil, it took him 27 hours to get there. When I prayed each day for him, the benefits of my prayers went immediately to him. Our prayers are not bound by space and time. When we pray for others God's power is going directly to them.

We all have people in our lives who aren't believers. They don't believe in Christ. They reject our arguments, our reasoning, our pleading, but God uses our prayers to cut to their hearts and change their minds. God can even change the course of human history through our prayers. When you're discouraged and say, ***"I guess all I can do is pray,"*** that's GREAT! That's when God comes through for us. God uses our prayers to make the impossible possible, because all of the sudden we're not trying to do it on our own - we're not depending on our own

strength - we're depending on God. God says, "If you ask... I will do it." Our part is to ask. Our part in cooperating with God's purpose is to ask. The most important thing you and I can do as Christians is to PRAY.

Do you want to know the true heroes of the faith? They're not the Billy Grahams or the Rick Warrens or the James Dobsons. The true heroes of the faith are all the little known people who pray. The true heroes are the people who prayed for Billy Graham's ministry to reach more people and change more hearts for Christ. God blesses the superstars of the Christian faith because the little people have prayed for them. In God's eyes there are no little people.

Dwight L. Moody once said, **"Every great movement of God can be traced to a single praying, kneeling people."**

Why is it so important for our congregation to learn how to pray? - Because a praying church is a holy church. When we pray it makes us more sensitive to God. A praying church is an enthusiastic church. Its members are excited because they're seeing miracles happen. God knows we need those miracles - in our church, in our marriages, in our careers, in our families, in our communities, and in our world. We need to pray that God will give us those miracles. By our asking we are cooperating with God and His redemptive work in the world.