

An Invitation to Relationship with God Through Prayer

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Genesis 18:20-32

Luke 11:1-13

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How many of you like to go up to complete strangers and ask them for a favor? Vacationers often ask another family to take their picture from them, sometimes even ask for directions. But that is as far as they go. Has anyone ever had to ask a personal favor of a complete stranger? My son and I generally have no fear of asking, where as my wife and daughter would rather die than impose. But even then there are limits. Perhaps you run out of toilet paper in the public restroom, you might have to ask the person in the next stall to share, but you more than likely hope you never run into that person ever again. Nor ever have to ask that question again.

It can be hard and even embarrassing at times to ask. Many would rather die than impose upon another. It is much easier if we know the person or have some type of relationship with them to ask a favor but even then we would rather not. We are often trained from the young age that we need to be self sufficient. Make it on our own. To ask... well we would just rather not.

Sometimes we feel the same way about prayer. We seem to have been taught that the polite "MN Nice" way to pray is to not ask anything for ourselves. To not bother the creator of the universe with our petty needs and issues. I mean, who are we to God anyway. After all Aren't we supposed to pray that God's will to be done, not our own. Ask not, want not.

Besides if you want to ask God it is best to let a pastor pray for you, right. I mean they are closer to God anyway. At least that seems to be the natural course. In a room full of people who have been Christians all of their lives, 99.99% of the time they will ask the pastor to pray. Like we got a direct link to the big man himself or something.

You know what, the disciples were the same way. They saw Jesus praying all the time, before any big happening in his life or when he would call out to God to work miracles. Jesus would often spend quite time alone talking with God, conversing with God, communing with God before doing anything. The disciples saw this and said, "Lord, teach us to pray." We want what you have. So was that ability or something else. Perhaps knowing human nature he said Ok, and gave them this short prayer, or the mechanics of a prayer.

Father, hallowed by your name.

Relationship - Praise

Your kingdom come,

Promise

Give us this day our daily bread.

Request

And forgive us our sins,

Repentance

For we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us.

Action

And do not bring us to the time of trial

Mercy

Now, we all tend to fixate on these mechanics of prayer: the how, why, when. Kneeling, standing, head bowed, eyes closed, because we want to get it right. But Jesus' instructions to his followers, really focused on a different question: the who. Who are we praying to; the creator of the universe or "Abba," our Father. Two completely different images don't you think? Different images that we would speak to very differently. It is often said that the way you pray depicts your impression of who God is. When speaking to the King of the world one might be rather formal, vague, unassuming. But when addressing an intimate "Father" or friend, we more than likely would be rather candid and honest.

Jesus, it seems is more interested in inviting us to consider who we are praying too, rather than how or what we are praying about. In this passage, Jesus invites us into relationship with God through our prayer, offering us the opportunity to approach the God whose name previously was too holy to speak and whose countenance too terrible to behold with the familiarity, the boldness, and the trust of a young child running to her parent for both provision and protection.

Prayer, according to both this passage, and too Luke's larger portrait of Jesus, is not primarily about getting things from God but rather about the relationship we have with God. Hence, after a life and ministry of prayer, Jesus prays yet again while hanging on the cross in accusing and submissive tones. My God why have you forsaken me, my God - to you I commit my spirit. It is a boldness and submission that we probably don't often engage in our own prayer life, and yet Jesus encourages us to be bold.

Look at this parable he tells his disciples here, about the neighbor who demanded bread in the middle of the night. At an inconvenient time, at an inappropriate moment, the neighbor calls to his friend, persistently, more appropriately translated, shamelessly, demanding he meet his duty of hospitality and get up and help him. It is not the persistence that matters but the conviction that as you would call out to the friend at any time, you can also call out to God – at any time, and expect God to want to hear from you.

The shamelessness is a conviction few have but one Abraham also modeled for us. If you notice in the passage from Genesis, Abraham bargains with the Lord to try and save his nephew Lot and the city of Sodom and Gomorrah. You see because of the injustices being done there God was going to blot out the city but Abraham begs God to spare the city if 50, then 40, then 30, then 20, then 10 righteous people lived there. The key to the passage comes in verse 23. Not in the bargained result, but when it says, "Then Abraham came near." Abraham was in a relationship with God that he could "come near" to get God's ear. Abraham could "come near" because he believed in a God that was intimately involved in his life. This was not some aloof God, but a God he was in

close relationship with him and Abraham was reminding God of the promises upon which that relationship was established.

Similarly, we are invited to make all of our needs, wants, hurts, hopes, and desires known to God. Yes, scripture also tells us that God knows our needs without being asked, but here we are invited to make them known, to speak them into existence in the confidence that whatever may happen, this relationship can bear hearing these things and may actually even depend upon hearing them.

If you know this story of Sodom and Gomorrah you know Abraham's specific request is not met, but ultimately his desire for an heir does come, just not in the way he expected. Which is often the case when the answer to our prayer is not what we expect, or even wanted. Sometime the answer is "NO", but we are often looking for more than answers aren't we.

How many times when you ask your spouse or family member a tough question are you really expecting the perfect answer that satisfies all of your curiosity or angst? Do you really expect an answer that gives you exactly what you want? When we ask tough questions, what we are doing is inviting someone else to enter into our discernment, enter into our consternation, to enter into our yearning. We are seeking answers, but more than that we are inviting them into our wrestling with this issue. We are engaging them, as we would engage a living God. When we pray this same way we invite God into relationship with us and with where we are at at that moment. That is prayer!

Jesus' point to his disciples, and to us, is that to enter into conversation with God, don't simply be passive and shy, ... but be bold. Be bold and ASK. I say ASK because it is the idiom of the three action verbs Jesus call upon his disciples to use when praying to and with God. Ask – and it will be give to you, Seek – and you will find, Knock – and the door will be open. All three are action verbs, and all three give permission for us to "come near," to engage God in a living faith. Perhaps even barter.

So what are you looking for? What do you expect in prayer? Answers... or a relationship with the living God. Because God is waiting for you if you are ready. Amen.