

PRAYER CAN CHANGE YOUR LIFE - Part 1

Luke 11:1-13

April 11, 2010

If you had a face to face meeting with Jesus this afternoon, and you could make one request of Him. what would you ask for? Protection? A new job? Money? I ask, because the scripture today tells us that the disciples had that opportunity. They came to Jesus one day and asked, “*Lord, teach us to pray.*” (Luke 11:1) Of all the things that they could have asked for, why that? Maybe because they had seen Him pray, and then they saw the results of those prayers. His prayers made things happen. He made good things happen. Understand that they had watched Jesus preach the greatest sermons, perform miracles, heal the sick, raise the dead, and yet they didn’t ask for the ability to do any of that. They asked about prayer. They saw the power and the grace that it gave Him. They saw prayer as a key to His life. And it can be a key for us as well. For there is nothing more vital to our faith life, our spiritual life than prayer.

Prayer can change our lives. We know that, or at least we have been told that, but we don’t know how prayer works. And we have a lot of misconceptions about prayer. Some people think that prayer is a magic wand. We wave it at something and we instantly get what we want, as though God is a genie who comes out of a bottle. Just rub the lamp and God grants all your wishes. Some think prayer is an act of desperation, only to be used in emergencies. It’s the last resort. A man came to his pastor one day. His life was falling apart and the pastor said, “Let’s pray about it.” And the member started to cry, saying, “Has it come to that?” When all the appropriate things are done, then we pray. For some, prayer is a tug of war. A religious con game played with God where we try to convince God to do something nice for us. Do we really have to convince God to be nice? But still we keep pestering God until He finally gets so irritated that He just gives in. Actually Jesus told a parable to illustrate the exact opposite of that, but still we believe it.

The worst misconception may be that prayer is simply a religious duty, and the basic motivation behind it is guilt. “I know I should pray more, I ought to pray, it’s something I should do.” We have a sense of obligation that if we don’t pray we’ll get on God’s Bad List. So we go through the motions of saying words that we don’t believe just to satisfy the ritual, just to make God happy. We memorize the religious phrases and clichés and say the same thing over and over. We try to fulfill the obligation rather than exercise the privilege we have to talk to God. So prayer is not a magic wand, an act of desperation, a tug of war, or even an obligation. So what is prayer? And what is the purpose of prayer? Let’s look at the four purposes of prayer.

1. Prayer Is an Act of Dedication.

Prayer is an opportunity to express both our devotion to God and our dependence on God. It is saying, “God, I need You.” Sometimes we don’t pray because we think we can get by on our own. Ever since the Garden of Eden, humanity has vastly overestimated its ability. And so we don’t want to admit that we need the help of God or anyone else. We refuse to recognize that we are inadequate or insufficient to handle the problems at hand. As long as we think we’re self sufficient, prayer will have no meaning for us. And if it has no meaning, it holds no power. Yet we pretend we’ve got our life all together. Our prayers need to be an act of dedication where we say, “God, I need Your help. I can’t do this on my own.” Prayer is a declaration of our devotion to God, and our dependence upon God.

John 15:5-7 Jesus said, “*If a man remains in Me and I in him, he will bear much fruit, but apart from Me, you can do nothing. If anyone doesn’t remain in Me, he’s like a branch that’s thrown away and withers. Such branches are picked up and thrown into the fire and burned. But if you remain in Me [if you are dependent upon Me, and express your trust in Me] and My words remain in you, you can ask whatever you wish and it*

will be given to you.” Understand what a great promise this is. It says that we are like a branch of a tree or a vine. As long as we are connected, we have access to all the power and strength of that vine. But once the branch is cut off, all the power, all the strength, all the life is gone. In the same way, a Christian cut off from God withers. Prayer is an act of dedication that keeps us connected to God. It shows our dependence on God. But until we realize that we need God, we can’t pray effectively.

2. Prayer Is an Act of Communication.

Communication is extremely important. In fact, most of our problems in life are communication problems. Lack of communication will create pain in your relationship with your wife, your husband, your business associates, your teachers, whoever. We cannot understand another person unless you find a way to communicate with them. And we can’t understand God, or God’s will for our life, unless we communicate with Him. And that requires prayer.

I remember the Cuban Missile Crisis. I remember my father telling my siblings and me that we might be at war before we get home from school. But the crisis was averted because communication was established. As a matter of fact, after the crisis, the Hot Line between Washington and Moscow was officially connected so that communication would always be available between the nations. We learned again that communication is vital. And it is vital in the life of every Christian. For prayer is an act of dedication, and an act of communication.

Now we can’t communicate with somebody unless we have some relationship with them. Jesus wants us to have that relationship. John 15:15-16 Jesus said, *“I no longer call you servants because a servant doesn’t know his master’s business. Instead I have called you friends for everything I’ve learned from My Father, I’ve made known unto you. You didn’t choose Me, but I chose you to go and bear fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in My name.”* He says the reason we can ask anything in prayer is because we’re friends. That’s amazing. God says that when we commit to Him, we are not servants, but friends. Think about the power of that. Lobbyists in Washington get big bucks to get close to important, powerful people. Now the most important, most powerful individual in all creation, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords says that you are a friend. I’m His friend And since we are friends, we get to talk to one another all the time. What an advantage. What a privilege. And we can take advantage of it by communicating through prayer.

Now you might wonder why an all powerful God would be interested in us. Because God loves us. There is no logic to it beyond that. But God created us in love, and God continues to love us. In fact, there is nothing we can do to make God love us more. And there is nothing we can do to make God love us less. And because He loves us, He wants to hear from us, and communicate with us, because we love to talk with those who love us. So if you think that prayer is merely a duty, you don’t understand how much God loves you, and how much He’s interested in everything that involves you. And it is all because God says, “We’re friends.”

Prayer is an act of dedication. It is the way we express our dependence on God. Prayer is an act of communication. It is the way we communicate with God. It is the umbilical cord of Christian life from which we draw our energy and our strength. And...

3. Prayer Is an Act of Supplication.

Supplication means request. In Philippians 4:6-7, it says, *“Don’t worry about anything but in everything, with your prayers and your supplications, make your requests known to God and the peace of God which passes all understanding will keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”* The result of asking in prayer, will be

peace of mind. John 16:24 Jesus says, *“Until now you have not asked for anything in My name. Ask and you will receive and your joy will be complete.”* If we are one with Christ, and ask in the name of Christ, we will receive in His name, and discover what joy is all about.

Prayer is the method God has chosen to meet our needs. The Bible teaches that there are some things that God has promised to do only if we pray. Some people think, “God knows what I need so I don’t have to ask. He’ll just give it when I need it.” That’s not true. God has given us free will, and the Lord continues to respect our choices. If we choose to take on life on our own, it may be foolish, but God will let us do that. But if we want His help, we need to ask in prayer. The early Church knew that. The Book of Acts talks about miracle after miracle, because they had a life based on prayer. But the modern church does not have that sort of power. Why? James 4:2b *“You have not because you ask not.”* Over twenty times in the New Testament the Bible says, “Ask”. Ask, seek, knock, and keep on asking. C.H. Spurgeon, a great pastor in London once said, “God never shuts His storehouses until you shut your mouth.” We have to ask. Prayer is an act of supplication. It is a request.

But what do we ask for? Ask for what is on your heart. Psalm 145:15 *“He will fulfill the desires of those who reverence Him.”* If we are giving reverence to God, our hearts and desires are going to be in line with God, and God will fulfill our desires. Psalm 37:4 *ADelight yourself also in the Lord and He will give you the desires of your heart.”* If we’re in God, if we allow God’s Spirit to live in us, we will have righteous desires, and the gifts of God will be with us. Psalm 84:11 *“No good thing will He withhold from those who walk uprightly.”* If we are connected to God, living for God, honoring and worshiping God, God will give us what we need if we ask.

Why does God want us to ask in prayer? Jesus explains it to us in Luke 11:11-13, where He says, *“Which of you, if your son asked for a fish would give him a snake instead? Or if he asked for an egg would 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 the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him.”* If I, being an imperfect father, know how to give good gifts, and know how to answer the requests of my children, how much more does God, who’s perfect, in perfect love, know how to give good gifts to us? God delights in answering requests. So prayer is an act of dedication, communication, and supplication. And...

4. Prayer Is an Act of Cooperation.

God has a plan for each and every one of our lives, and we can cooperate in that plan through prayer. Prayer gets us closer to God and in tune with God’s desires, both for our life, and for the world. And when we are in tune with God, we can do the work of God. Remember that in John 14:11-12, Jesus says, *“Believe Me when I say I am in the Father and the Father is in Me or at least believe the evidence of the miracles themselves. I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in Me will do what I have been doing, and he will do even greater things than these because I’m going to the Father.”* Have you been doing what Jesus did? Heal the sick? Raise the Dead?

This is a tough verse to preach or even hold onto because I don’t see myself doing greater things than Jesus did. And if you are, then we probably ought to change places. You preach, and I’ll listen. But Jesus said it, so we are supposed to believe it. But like so much of the rest of the Bible, we need to read the rest of the message. For He continues in verses 13-14, saying, *“And I will do whatever you ask in My name so that the Father may bring glory to the Son. You may ask Me for anything in My name and I will do it.”*

Understand how this works. When Jesus came to earth, He purposely limited Himself to the laws of physics,

just as every human is limited. He could only be in one place at one time. But now, He is beyond the limitations of time and space, and so He is able to accomplish more. Through prayer, we can connect with Him; we can cooperate with Him, to make miraculous things happen throughout the earth. Through prayer in cooperation with God, we can do greater things than Jesus did while He was here on earth, because prayer is not limited by time and space, and now, neither is Jesus. In Christ, through Christ, even the impossible is possible for us.

Four times in John 14 and 15 Jesus tells us that if we ask in faith, if we ask in Christ, our prayers will be answered. If we do our part, God will do His part. And our part, is cooperating with God's plan for the world through prayer. We can pray. The most important thing we can do in our Christian life is to pray. That's why we're doing this series on prayer, because prayer is so powerful and so important. D. L. Moody once said, "Every great movement of God can be traced to a single praying, kneeling figure."

As the people of God, we want, hope, and expect to see God move through this congregation in a most powerful way. And so, this church needs to be a praying church. A praying church is a holy, committed church. When we pray it makes us sensitive to God and to other people. It sensitizes our life. A praying church is an enthusiastic church. We need to get excited. Churches that pray see miracles and that gets people excited. We need some miracles in our church. We need to connect with the children and youth around us. We need to connect with people of this community. And as they come in, we will need more space and more people to care for it all. It might take a miracle for that to happen. Prayer can make it happen. Some of you need personal miracles. A miracle in your marriage. Or in your health. Maybe you need a miracle in your job, or your finances. Prayer will help make those miracles happen. Miracles can happen in our midst if we dedicate ourselves to God in prayer; if we communicate with God in prayer; if we supplicate our desires in prayer; if we cooperate with God through prayer. And the miraculous can even happen here in our midst. I know it's true. And in your life, you can know it is true, too. So in your life, may it be so. Amen and amen.