

The Prayer Challenge

Luke 1:1-13

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LISTEN: <http://www.fbcjc.org/sermon/the-prayer-challenge/>

Of the four gospels, Luke has the most to say about prayer. So it's no wonder that in this section about Jesus' final journey to Jerusalem to face the Cross, showing us what discipleship, following God, is all about, this section on prayer would be included. You can't grow as a Christ-follower without prayer. I think I'll repeat that. **You can't be a serious follower of Christ without prayer.**

Our text has two central themes: persistence in prayer, and the relationship between God and the one who prays. First, ***persistence in prayer***. Jesus tells a mini-parable in vv. 5-8. In the ancient Middle East, people often traveled early in the morning and late at night because of the heat. Deciding to stop late at night, they had a choice. The roadside inns were not safe, and were often no more than brothels. So counting on the Eastern custom of hospitality, they would knock on the door of friend. But in Jesus' story, he would-be host already had his children down for the night, on pallets on the floor (in one room homes). He didn't want to be disturbed. But he would finally answer because of the persistent knocking!

The word "persistence" in v. 8 could also be translated shamelessness. The verbs in vv. 9-10 are present imperative, meaning continuous action. Keep asking, searching, knocking. Not a one-time event. And the three imperative verbs are matched by three beautiful promises (v. 10). What treasures of heaven are opened to us when we persistent in prayer? How would you score yourself on persistence in prayer? Your prayers for those without Christ? For global hunger? For family needs? For our society's ills and our nation's pain?

Janet and I were visiting with friends who told us they have just felt oppressed and overwhelmed by the evening news. They almost couldn't bear the violence, controversy and hatred of this season of national life. So they hit on a plan. They would record the news and watch it later, pausing after each segment and one of them praying about what they heard. Then they would play the next segment, and so on. They told us it helps!

Herbert Butterfield, an Oxford University historian, is convinced that what Christians do in prayer is the most significant factor in shaping history--more than war, diplomacy, technology or art [*Under the Unpredictable Plant*, Eugene Peterson, p. 98]. Are we persistent in prayer? Do we panic or do we pray? Are we focusing on the bad news or the Good News?

But there is a beautiful second theme working in the text. That is ***the relationship between God and the pray-er***. The model prayer begins not with "Our God," but with "Our Father." And in Jesus' second mini-parable (vv. 11-12), it is about a father who will provide for his children, not trick them and be cruel to them. Prayer puts us in touch with the character of God. And with

the generosity of God. Karl Barth found in the creation story, the six days of creation in Genesis, this great truth: God has time for us!

Now mark this down: Relationship precedes requests. But requests grow out of relationship. That is, we don't ignore God and then show up with an emergency request. We live in a relationship with God through God's Son, Jesus. In that relationship of forgiveness, rescue and new beginning, we can then make requests.

Would it shock you to know that God yearns for a relationship with you even more than you do with God? Look at v. 13. He longs to impart His Holy Spirit. God longs to deposit a part of God's Self into us. I was visiting once with a man who was really broken. He had strayed from God and neglected his relationship with the Lord. He told me he finally traced things back to the place where he first got off track. It was back to a point of prayerlessness. Then he looked at me and said, "Naming things we need is not prayer! Speed praying is not a relationship."

And so God is calling us into relationships and into prayer. Are you ready? Keep asking. Keep seeking. Keep knocking.