

Scripture:

Luke 11:1-13

Teach Us How to Pray

Prayer is a very personal and intimate thing for many people. That might be why some are reluctant to pray publicly. Prayer for me was something I learned to do from the inception. My mother is a 'prayer' and so I can guarantee that I was prayed for before I was even an embryo. Prayer is a part of who I am and what I do.

Still, one's prayer life is very personal. Getting started at praying is less like learning how to drive a car, how to play the piano, or even how to preach. For most of us it is more like learning how to kiss. You don't take lessons but you learn by watching others do it. Truthfully, you should be discerning about whom you will allow to teach you. You will make mistakes. Maybe you will worry deep down that you might be doing it wrong. You can get books and read articles and listen to sermons about technics and how to get it just right.

And yet, when one of Jesus' disciples requested he teach them about prayer, I don't think the hope was to learn technique, like how to achieve the proper balance among praise, confession, thanksgiving, and so on. Nor do I believe the intention was to get Jesus to institute a prayer that Christians could gather around and speak in unison whenever they meet together for worship, although there's nothing inherently wrong with how we've come to use the Lord's Prayer. We pray because of trust in relationship with God.

The focus is the God to whom we pray - this God is holy, trustworthy, good and dependable. We trust that God will do more than we will do.

Prayer for me is about focussing on who God is and what God does.

When the unnamed disciple asked Jesus to teach them about prayer he wanted to learn more about Jesus' love for God and his intense desire to see God's reign come to full fruition. He wanted to be drawn into an experience of intimacy with the holy, a trust a confidence a relationship like Jesus had. "Teach us to pray" was "Show us your heart" or "Tell us — what is it like to be in communion with God?"

This to me is what scripture and the life of Jesus is about, what we are to learn from both. Don't turn to Jesus and scripture for rumination's on techniques, models, and "best practices." Go there to discover what love looks like — love in action, love for God and neighbour. Matte Skinner writes "If we come to Jesus only to seek information or a pattern to follow, we've hardly experienced all he has to offer."

Prayer isn't a technique, prayer becomes a way of comprehending the world, the rules we live by, and our relationships. Prayer is a trust a persistence. We know we can keep asking and keep praying because we have a relationship with the one to whom we pray. Prayer becomes a lifestyle that is witnessed a work and in worship. In the grocery store, at the budget-planning meeting, through the prayers you compose for your daily life and service. Prayer is found by doing advocacy at the microphone in front of the city council, showing people your heart. When is intimate relationship with the holy you are sharing a passion for God and the promised reign of God. You're describing a meaningful life. You're fostering love for God and neighbour by declaring the ways in which God has already shown us what steadfast love is.

These disciples were not asking for a phrase they were asking for an opening of their hearts. They were beginning to discover that somewhere along the road Jesus had begun to teach them how to pray and they were discovering that they wanted more. They saw the deep abiding love Jesus had for the father.

Relationships that are deep and abiding and trustworthy are ones where you can persist or ask for what you need. You can cast aside what might inhibit you in other relationships. If To be human is to bare the image of God then that is the kind of people we should be - people who are trustworthy and who provide for others in need. But (this is important) also we are in relationship with God and one another and that intimacy leads us to also be open to ask and receive and be cared for. We have to know God to be good to be that kind of good in our lives.

Most of you gathered here today can pray this prayer without even thinking about it. When we begin the prayer we say "let God's name be sacred." To pray 'hallowed be Your name' means to ask God to let His name be worshipped, exalted, honoured, and adored on earth as it is in heaven. It is to ask God to so move and act in the world, that people will worship and treasure God above all else.

When we pray "Hallowed be your name." We align ourselves with God. God's power and essence is known in the world through us. Our own forgiving of others, our own relationship with others is found in how we represent God.

In other words, everything about a prayer reveals something about what the pray-er thinks of God and who God is. Is God merciful? Forgetful? Too busy? Ready to order the entire universe to make you happy? Already way ahead of you? Our prayers will reveal it. Perhaps that is why for many it is easier to get someone else to pray.

Prayer is like articulating a theology is risky business. It's an intimidating thing to do in public when someone else will hear it. Privacy doesn't necessarily make things easier, because we're afraid of coming to grips with how self-centred, needy, or naïve we might be. Matt Skinner writes "Prayer is similar to buying a blank card at the Hallmark store and then coming home and wondering, "Now what in the world am I going to say? Why didn't I just buy the card with the flowers on the front and the generic poem inside?" It's easier to cue up another psalm or let some author from a liturgical clearinghouse compose our prayers than to try to do it ourselves. It's

safer if we don't have to scrutinize the ways we put our theology into a lived, felt context. Let's just borrow someone else's theology and hope for the best."

That's why it's not enough simply *that* Jesus prays in the Gospels. Rather, he offers more than an invitation for us to imitate his practices. His prayer, his life and his parables present us with a sketch of how to imagine who God is and how God operates. Jesus speaks confident declarations:

God hears.

God provides.

God forgives.

God protects.

God expects us to be generous to one another.

Those are all theological statements. They all come from Jesus, who is teaching all of us, whether you are the most gifted preacher alive or the most wounded and fainthearted of saints. This prayer represents a trust and deep listening. A promise that God is listening and paying attention and cares for us. Listens to not only what we want but what we need.

In the end, this week's reading from Luke is less about the specific prayer that Jesus teaches and more about the theological convictions he puts forth for all to consider. Do we dare believe them? Do we dare adopt this theology of a gracious and justice-loving God as our own and pray accordingly? Can I pray with my own cadence and emphasis, with an expression of what I want *my* life to look like in God's hands?

I am just as human as everyone else and there are times when my prayer life is deep and trusting and intimate and it leads my steps of each day. There are times when I forget how important my holy relationship is and I get busy and try to figure it all out on my own, getting selfish and messing up along the way. My attempts usually betray me. I even sometimes worry that prayer doesn't accomplish much. That is why I appreciate Jesus' reminders that the God who hears my words, silences, and incoherent anxieties is generous. Much more generous than anyone I know. It's invaluable that Jesus urges his followers to persist in prayer. This doesn't necessarily mean we need to increase the volume and pray the same things over and over all day. It means that with a God like this the door is always open. An occasion for relationship always exists:

Prayer means that, in some unique way, we're invited into a relationship with someone who hears us when we speak in silence ... Prayer is our sometimes real selves trying to communicate with the Real, with Truth, with the Light. It is reaching out to be heard, hoping to be found by a light and warmth in the world, instead of darkness and cold. Do not walk past an opportunity for intimacy with the Divine.¹

Let us pray.

Our father and mother

Who art in Heaven

Hallowed be your name

Thy Kingdom come.

¹ Much of this sermon is adapted from Matt Skinnners article <https://www.workingpreacher.org/dear-working-preacher/who-taught-you-how-to-pray>

Thy will be done on earth, As it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
As we forgive them that trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation,
But deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
The power, and the glory,
For ever and ever. Amen.