

# 14

## A Friend's Prayer

*"Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me." (Revelation 3:20)*

In my office there are a number of pictures. Some of them are hand carved or painted. One of them, however, is priceless to me. It is an 8x10 watercolor picture—vibrant and colorful. It speaks of joy and happiness. Some might say it is impressionistic in style. It is a rainbow gone wild. My daughter made it for me when she was in kindergarten. As you can probably tell, I love it. Then again, what child has ever drawn a bad picture for their mother or father? What mom or dad isn't looking for one more picture to place in the office or on the refrigerator? I believe that is how God views the prayers of His children. Just as a child cannot draw a bad picture, the child of God cannot offer a bad prayer.

Prayer is at times difficult and hard. While at times we yearn for it, we also hide from it. Prayer is in many ways the battle. Prayer is, however, bathed in grace and love. God hears us not because of our earnest efforts, but because of nail-pierced hands that pray on our behalf. In prayer we are not trying to overcome God's reluctance; we are taking hold of His willingness. We dare not make prayer about us. It is about Him, not me.

As a way of illustrating this, take a look at Mark 9:14-32. Jesus has just come down from the Mount of Transfiguration. Immediately, he is faced with a problem. A man is asking His disciples to cast out a demon from his son. The boy is thrashing about and foaming at the mouth. Can you imagine how chaotic this moment must have been? The disciples had been unable to cast out the evil spirit. In

regard to that, Jesus is later asked why the disciples could not cast the spirit out. He said, *"This kind can come out only by prayer"* (v. 29).

So the boy's father approaches Jesus and says, *"It has often thrown him into fire or water to kill him. But if you can do anything, take pity on us and help us"* (v. 22). Listen to what follows: *"'If you can?' said Jesus. 'Everything is possible for him who believes.'* Immediately the boy's father exclaimed, *'I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!'"* (vv. 23-24).

The prayer of the boy's dad is not what one would call a classic prayer. It is simple. It is honest. It is childlike. "I believe, help me overcome my unbelief!" That sounds like a prayer that I have offered many times. Jesus responded to the man, not because of his great prayer, but because of Jesus' great love.

I have come to believe that just as we are so apt to think that salvation is in some way tied to our efforts, we are also prone to think that prayer is about us getting it down right. Maybe we hide from prayer because of this inner need to have everything just right. We look to get our faith up to a certain level or our life in order before we pray. These things are important, but we are starting from the wrong end. It is about Him, not us. Who is He? What has He promised?

In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus is teaching His disciples about prayer. After He gives them The Lord's Prayer (or if you will, "The Disciples' Prayer"), He then tells them a parable about a man who gets a visitor at

midnight, but he does not have bread to offer him. He goes to his neighbor and says,

*“Friend, lend me three loaves of bread, because a friend of mine on a journey has come to me, and I have nothing to set before him.” Then the one inside answers, ‘Don’t bother me. The door is already locked, and my children are with me in bed. I can’t get up and give you anything.’ I tell you, though he will not get up and give him the bread because he is his friend, yet because of the man’s persistence he will get up and give him as much as he needs” (Luke 11:5-8).*

Many place the focus of this parable on the neighbor doing the knocking. A closer look will expand this focus. In the culture of Jesus’ day, a guest at one house becomes the guest of the entire village. As the man knocks at the door of his friend, he asks only what is expected of anyone in that village. Turning down such a request is an insult to the guest and would place the man who was in bed in a position of shame the next morning with those in the village. Luke 11:8 is better translated, “I tell you, though he will not get up and give him the bread because he is his friend, yet because of the man’s *shamelessness* he will get up and give him as much as he needs.” The man will get out of bed because he does not want to be put to shame before his own people the next day. What does this tell us about prayer? God has placed His name on the line. He promises to hear us and answer our prayers. *“For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened” (Luke 11:10).* The promise of answered prayer is contingent on His grace and His power that enables us to believe.

Charles Spurgeon once wrote, “Because God is the living God, he can hear; because he is our loving God, he will hear; because he is our covenant God, he has bound himself to hear” (Cook, p. 159).

In the body and blood of Jesus Christ, God has bound Himself to us in that covenant. When we come to Him as His children through Jesus, there is no child that can offer a bad prayer. This is not to say that all of our prayers will be masterpieces. There will be those prayers that might just cause Him to shake His head and wonder. Richard Foster wrote,

“Jesus reminds us that prayer is a little like children coming to their parents. Our children come to us with the craziest requests at times! Often we are grieved by the meanness and selfishness in their requests, but we would be all the more grieved if they never came to us even with their meanness and selfishness. We are simply glad that they do come—mixed motives and all. This is precisely how it is with prayer. We will never have pure enough motives, or be good enough, or know enough in order to pray rightly. We simply must set all these things aside and begin praying. In fact, it is in the very act of prayer itself—the intimate, ongoing interaction with God—that these matters are cared for in due time” (p.8).

In Scripture, there is another picture of a man standing at the door and knocking. *“Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me” (Revelation 3:20).* Regarding this passage, a Lutheran theologian from Norway by the name of O Hallesby said that to pray is to let Jesus come into our hearts. For me, that is a nice way to view prayer. Prayer is not a matter of our taking the first step and wondering, “Will God hear me or answer me?” Prayer is a response to the great love that God reveals to me through His Word.

Jesus is constantly knocking on the door of our hearts. He promises to come into those who open the door. Prayer is one way that we can respond to His knocking. It need not

be a fancy prayer. Simple is good. In my own prayer life, one of the more meaningful times that I shared with Him in prayer was one morning when my body and spirit were exhausted. My prayer time is usually while I walk the dog. That particular morning, the brain was fried and the soul felt empty. I remember saying, “God, I am too tired to talk this morning.” The time that followed was particularly sweet. The words of Psalm 46 came to my mind: *“Be still and know that I am God.”* In those moments, it was as if the door had been opened and Jesus came in to spend some time with me.

Doesn’t it amaze you that He even wants to come into our hearts and fellowship with us? Do you know what it is like when your home is a mess and suddenly you hear that company is on the way? The home of my heart is sometimes such a mess. Maybe

this too is why we sometimes shun prayer and experience prayerlessness. Yet by His grace He wants to spend time with me. St. Augustine once wrote, “God thirsts to be thirsted after.”

*“I stand at the door and knock.”* The picture of Christ at the door has been one that I am familiar with since I was a child. Remember the painting—Jesus holding a lantern, standing at a door with no handle on the outside? The handle is on the inside. He will not force the door open.

He is knocking at the door. Will you go and answer it?

**Prayer:** Father, I come to you as your child. I do not come on my own. You took the first step by coming to me through your Son. Help me to never ignore your knocking on the door of my heart. In Jesus’ name. **Amen.**

**Challenge:** Keep the prayers simple today. Read a verse or two and then just sit quietly reflecting on what God is saying to you.

**Scripture Reading:** Luke 11

**From the Book of Concord:** “According to Christ’s teaching they should abstain from sin, repent, trust the promise, and rely completely upon Christ. Because we are not capable of doing this by our own powers, the Holy Spirit wills to effect repentance and faith in us through the Word and the sacraments. And that we may complete this and persist and remain faithful in it, we should call upon God for his grace, which he has promised us in Holy Baptism, and not doubt that in accord with his promise he will convey it to us, as he has promised: ‘Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for a fish, will give a snake instead of a fish? Or if the child asks for an egg, will give a scorpion? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!’” (Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration, Article XI: Election, pp. 651-652.71-72).

**In Your Own Words:** Write below or in the margins the key thought or lesson you have learned in this chapter on Pray and/or a thought you would like to explore further.