

Introduction.

When was one of the first times you can remember really praying? Not just going through the motions by hurriedly saying “ Now I lay myself,”, before turning out the light: or mumbling “Bless this food...”, before diving into the meal. No, when were you first in a situation where you were desperate for God to do something so you really prayed! For me that sort of experience first occurred when I was about 6. My mother was a very heavy smoker and suffered serious asthma attacks. We also lived in a highly industrial town which had significant air pollution. Most homes were heated by open coal fires. This was not a good combination.

Although I had witnessed a number of my mother’s asthma attacks this particular day she had a terrible one. Her coughing seemed to go on interminably, then she began to wheeze, her breathing became more and more labored and she collapsed onto the floor. I do not know, from a medical point of view how serious her condition was, but at the time I was convinced that she was going to die imminently. I slipped out of the room, got on my own and prayed a very simple yet intense childlike prayer. **“Oh God, I don’t want my Mom to die. If you make her better I’ll do anything for you”**. It was a typical bargaining prayer, which can be criticized for all sorts of theological failures. The point is this was an intense prayer encounter. I meant what I said and had a sense of encountering God. When I returned to my mother, although she was still lying on the floor, she was clearly over the crisis. Often it is fear, need or despair, which drive us to that sort of prayer. God will respond to us however we come to him.

The Disciples Request.

In the case of Jesus’ disciples, they yearned to experience the same intimacy, depth and reality in their own prayer lives that they observed Jesus to have. Assuming they were Observant Jews, they would pray a lot, at home, in the synagogue and when they visited the Temple. But they recognized that, while they were following all the rules and saying all the right prayers, in comparison to Jesus way of praying, they were simply going through the motions. They were dissatisfied by their experience of communicating with God in prayer. For them prayer was something that you did, it was part of your religious duty, for Jesus prayer was as natural and satisfying as breathing. They were not able to be completely honest with Jesus and tell him that their prayer life was shallow and unreal, so instead, just like children do they played the guilt card. **“John the Baptist has taught his disciples how to pray, how come you haven’t taught us?”** But at least they set aside their ego’s, came to Jesus and asked him to help them.

What they wanted and expected was a technique, a fail-safe method guaranteed to improve their prayer lives; and, hopefully, one which would not require too much time or effort on their part. Isn't that what we want? We long for intimacy with God, for his help, wisdom and guidance to be available to us, when we need it. However we hope for this will not interfere too much with our lives.

Jesus Response

The maddening thing as far as the Disciples were concerned about Jesus was that he didn't give them a one- page summary on ***'how to improve your prayer relationship with God in one month by spending just only five minutes in prayer every day'***. But Jesus is not like the golf professional, who in just a few minutes can help us with our swing. He answers his disciples request, but not as they anticipated. He gives them, and by extension us, a model for prayer. We call this ***'The Lord's Prayer'***. it begins not with us and our wants or needs, but focusing on God, by acknowledging and worshipping God. Then It continues by us asking that God's purposes and rule will be realized here on earth, before (finally) moving on to our own daily needs of food, forgiveness and God's resources so that we can face the daily trials and challenges of life. Note the order here: worship; then the achievement of God's purposes for this world and only then our own needs. This prayer is a model and so it teaches us something about what our focus and priorities in praying are to be.

Then Jesus, the realist, continues by urging **persistence** in prayer. That do not be discouraged, keep on in prayer. He tells a story, likening God to a grumpy neighbor who is reluctant to offer any help when asked . What this parable is doing is teaching by contrasts. If this sleepy, grouchy, reluctant neighbor will finally meet his friend's needs, how much more, says Jesus, will the God who loves you and deeply cares for your welfare supply all your needs. Note also that the context of God meeting our needs is when we have come to recognize our poverty. The householder says ***"a friend of mine has arrived on a journey AND I HAVE NOTHING TO SET BEFORE HIM"(v.6).***

At this time I am, with others, running an Alpha course. The real purpose of Alpha is for people to experience real community and for their lives to be transformed by God. While we do a lot of work, planning, organizing, feeding, teaching and leading discussions for Alpha and it is important and necessary, yet, if we fail to recognize and operate from a sense of utter dependence on God to do the deep work of Alpha to touch and affect people's lives we are wasting our time.

Then Jesus goes on to encourage his disciple to expect answers to prayer. That is to believe that God will meet our needs.

***"Ask- and it will be given:
Search- and you will find:***

Knock- and the door will be opened”: (v.9)

In case we are slow learners, Jesus then says the same thing in a slightly different way (v.10).

Effectively Jesus is saying 6 times ask God and He will give you what you need.

Lastly says Jesus, we need not be afraid that if we begin to take God seriously it will lead to hurt or disaster. In v 11 and 12 Jesus promises that God will not play nasty tricks on us. There will never be a sting in the tail to any of God's gifts.

Conclusion.

What is going on in your life at this moment? Where do you most need God to come to you?

Are you asking, seeking and knocking expecting God to work there?