

## A Prayer of Submission

We just heard Luke's version of what is commonly referred to as "The Lord's Prayer." Taking into account that Jesus is teaching His disciples how to pray, the name of the prayer is a bit of a misnomer. It probably should be called "The Disciple's Prayer." Be that as it may, it is probably too late to change the name of it now. When preachers come to this text, some would jump down to the second part of the text where Jesus gives an example of the 'how' to pray, be being persistent. At the end of the text, Jesus reminds the disciples that if they, who are 'evil,' know how to give something good to their children, then God, who is good will give even 'better' stuff to His children. The reading from Genesis where Abraham is bargaining with God to save Sodom is used in conjunction with this reading from Luke to emphasize the persistence of praying to God. However, while these themes are good ones and should be emphasized in our prayer life, many times we miss the main theme of the passage, either we ignore it on purpose, or we don't really see it.

The main point of the Lord's Prayer, whether we use Luke's or Matthew's version, is actually a prayer of submission. Notice who does most of the action, who the subject of the petitions is. It is God who does the acting. Even the first line, or petition, "Father, hallowed be your name" is a recognition on our part that God is sovereign, that God is holy. When we factor in that Jesus used the word for "father" to be the more familiar 'daddy' rather than the more formal 'father' we see this closeness to God, yet something much greater than someone who is our friend, so to speak. The rest of the petitions, we are asking God to do something for us, whether it is giving us what we need to live, to forgive us or to save us from evil. In essence, we are submitting our lives to God, we are letting God take care of our needs. So, next time the Lord's Prayer is prayed, remember that it is a prayer in which we ultimately give total control of our lives over to God.

Another part of this passage that is often overlooked or misunderstood is where Jesus talks about asking, seeking and knocking. We often hear it as like a child in a grocery store asking their mom if they could have whatever catches their eye and they keep at it until the mom finally wears down and lets the child have what they want. We want to understand God to be like that or like a 'vending machine' God where after we put in the right amount of 'money' we make our selection and get the goody that we want. Notice that Jesus does not really name what the 'it' is, at least not until the last verse. He does not tell what that for what we are asking will be given to us; He does not say that we will find what we are seeking like a game of "Go Fish;" and He does not tell us that the door we are knocking on is the right door in the first place.

When we take these two parts of the passage together, the first part with the Lord's Prayer and this part about asking, seeking and knocking, we see a transformation within ourselves. As we take the Lord's Prayer to heart and actually submit ourselves to God's will, we will see that we begin to pray for different things. Instead of asking God for things that make our own lives easier, we begin to act more like Abraham where he prays to God that others might be saved from the destruction of Sodom.

But praying is not always easy, at least in the beginning. Prayer takes practice. Any athlete will tell you that they had not achieved the level of success that they have reached only by playing on game days. It takes practice. I once heard that someone had been giving some advice on batting to one of the Twins players. They told them basically that if you want to hit home runs during a game, you have to hit home runs during practice. This is persistence, it is practice. If we want to say 'good' prayers, then we need to practice praying. In Luke's Gospel account, he frequently mentions that Jesus is praying. There is an importance to praying. For those times

when we 'hear' Jesus' prayers, we will notice that there is little mention of what Jesus wants for Himself. Most of the time, Jesus prays for others. The one notable time when Jesus prays for Himself is in Gethsemane before His arrest when He asks if there is another way to achieve the goal without Him dying; but He still prays that it be God's will that is done, not His. Other than this time, Jesus prays for others.

We need to keep in mind that in praying, that is in conversing with God, we enter into a relationship. Conversation is the basis of a relationship. There cannot be a real relationship if there is no conversation. So it is with God. We cannot have a relationship with God if we do not talk with God. As our conversations with God get better, as our prayer life gets better; our relationship with God gets better. As this relationship grows, we become more comfortable in being like Abraham, bargaining with God for the sake of others. Remember, Abraham was not asking for anything for himself, he was petitioning for the sake, for the lives of others.

At the end of this Gospel text, Jesus tells us what we will receive when we are persistent in our prayers. As we continue to take the words of the Lord's Prayer to heart and submit ourselves more and more to God's will, we receive the Holy Spirit to help us continue to improve this relationship. The Holy Spirit also opens our eyes to see the needs of others, seeing that as they suffer, God also suffers and in turn, we suffer also. As our relationship with God grows, we realize that all that we truly need has been given to us and we find a peace in knowing that all will be well in the end. As Jesus said, if we, who are a dim reflection of God, can give our children good gifts, will not God, who is the ultimate Good, who when creating declared that what God did was good, give us even better things.

At first, this may sound like a circular system, that by trusting in God we will become more trusting of God; but really it is a spiral system because we keep growing, we keep getting more and more in tune to God's will, becoming more aware of what God

wants us to do. Not only does God want us to keep growing in our relationship with God, but as that spiral grows, we pray that others may also be brought into that relationship, assured that as vast as the universe is, there are enough of God's good gifts for everyone to have; that no one needs or should be excluded from God's grace. As we do this, as our relationship with God grows and we pray that others be included in this ever-widening spiral, then, in a small way, we are helping to bring the Kingdom of God closer and closer to us. And there is nothing wrong with that!

#### YouTube links

Gospel and Sermon: <https://youtu.be/Vcrl93XWf4w>

Service: <https://youtu.be/YwMMi4cBOzc>