

A mother had been teaching her three-year-old daughter the Lord's Prayer. Several evenings at bedtime, the little girl would repeat lines from the prayer after her mother. Finally, the little girl decided to go solo. Her Mom listened with pride as the child carefully said each word right up to the end of the prayer: ***"Lead us not into temptation," she prayed, "but deliver us some E-mail."***

Well, she nearly got it right. It reminds me of another child, a boy, who was also into computers. His Sunday School class was discussing prayer. The children all knew that the way to end a prayer was with **"AMEN."** ***"Does anyone know what 'AMEN' means?"*** the teacher asked. There was a long silence. Then this little fellow piped up and said, "Well, I think it means, **"SEND."**

Of course, not every child thinks in COMPUTER TERMS. A four-year-old boy added this interpretation to one part of the Lord's Prayer: ***"And forgive us our trash baskets as we forgive those who put trash in our baskets."***

Actually, he may be on to something...

We're sometimes surprised at the spin children put on things. **It's delightful.** In some ways I'm often surprised at the way Jesus expressed certain things. As many have said, ***"Jesus was an out of the box thinker."*** He could afford to be an out of the box thinker since his Father invented the box. **But it is challenging to those of us who are not as gifted as he was, which means all of us.** It's not easy sometimes to figure out what he is saying. ***Take today's lesson from Luke.***

He begins with that wonderful prayer that is at the heart of Christian worship all over the world. **We know it simply as the Lord's Prayer.**

Luke tells us that one day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he finished, one of his disciples said to him, ***"Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples."***

Jesus said to them, ***"When you pray, say: 'Father, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread. Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us. And lead us not into temptation.'"***

That's a SHORTENED version of the prayer as we know it, but all of us can recognize the beauty and the power of the prayer that has meant so much to so many in their spiritual development. **Then, Christ sets out to explain elements of the prayer. And this is where things get a LITTLE FUZZY.**

He says to them, ***"Suppose one of you has a friend, and he goes to him at midnight 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 boldness he will get up and give him as much as he needs."

What does this mean? Does it mean that when we come to God with our needs we are to knock on his door over and over until God gives us what we want? That doesn't sound very spiritual. Or does it mean that we are simply to be bold in our asking, **whatever that means.**

Then he continues, ***"So I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened."***

Think about that for a moment: everyone who asks receives. Have you received everything you've ever prayed for? It sounds so simple. ***"Ask and it will be given to you."*** That is not my experience. There are many things I have asked God for that I haven't received. Some of them I'm glad I didn't. Sometimes I want to sing with Garth Brooks, ***"Thank God for unanswered prayers . . ."*** **ASK...SEEK...KNOCK... it's a beautiful passage, but what does it mean? It's not easy to figure out.**

There are three lessons I take away from these teachings of our Lord about PRAYER. *These lessons are not superficial or shallow, like so many of our prayers. They are the product of a lifetime of struggling with the teachings of Jesus and seeking to apply them to everyday life.*

First of all...PRAYER IS ESSENTIAL TO THE LIFE OF A CHRISTIAN. *I don't see how anyone can make it as a Christian without a deep and rich prayer life. Sometimes we will pray out of a sense of deep need. Other times we will be so filled with joy we will be driven to our knees in thanksgiving. And then there will be times when we will be ashamed of some action or some thought, and we will pray, "God have mercy on me." But to be a Christian is to pray.*

Not only are we to pray, we are to persist in our prayer life even if it seems that God is not listening. When Jesus talks about the man who comes knocking boldly on the door at midnight asking a friend for a favor, ***I believe he's saying that God honors persistence in prayer.***

Tom Long, professor of preaching at Emory University's Candler School of Theology, tells a wonderful story along these lines. A friend of Long's, who is a pastor, received a disturbing telephone call one day in his church office. A part-time staff member in the church, who had been out in his neighborhood walking his dog, had been mugged, stabbed in the heart and rushed to the hospital. He was now in intensive care with virtually no prospect for survival. When the word spread among the church staff, his friend said, they gathered spontaneously to pray. Standing around the communion table, each person prayed. They prayed sincere prayers, but these prayers were mostly polite and mild petitions, prayers that spoke of comfort and hope and changed hearts, but prayers that had already faced the hard facts of almost certain death.

Then the custodian prayed. His friend reported that it was the most athletic prayer he had ever witnessed. The custodian wrestled with God, shouted at God, anguished with God. His finger jabbed the air and his body shook. ***"You've got to save him! You just can't let him die!"*** this custodian practically screamed at God. ***"You've done it many times, Lord! You've done it for others, you've done it for me, now I am begging you to do it again! Do it for him! Save him, Lord!"***

"It was as if he grabbed God by the lapels," said Long's friend, "and refused to turn God loose until God came with healing wings. When we heard that prayer, we just knew that God would indeed come to heal. In the face of that desperate cry for help, God would have been ashamed not to save the man's life." **And so, says Tom Long, it happened. The man was healed.**

That janitor took Jesus seriously when he said to pray boldly. Whether God was really moved by his particular style of praying is above my pay grade to answer. But I do know this the person who refuses to pray, for whatever reason, is missing out on life's most powerful resource. Some of us may feel we're too sophisticated to pray. Others may feel they've seen too much tragedy in life to feel prayer does much good. **O friend, keep praying. You need to spend time with God each day. You need to voice to God the deepest desires of your heart. What have you got to lose? Start today setting aside some time each day for communion with God. Pray silently, or raise the rafters like that janitor. But pray. You are a follower of Jesus.** Jesus prayed. There are all kinds of reasons why he could have skipped prayer. But he never did. To be a Christian is to pray.

The second thing we need to see through this PRAYER Jesus taught us to pray is... PRAYER DOES WORK!! ***"Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened."***

Jesus is not saying that everything we ask for will be given to us. **He's saying to us, however, that every prayer is heard. Every prayer is answered in some unseen way.**

A small congregation in the foothills of the Great Smoky Mountains built a new sanctuary on a piece of land willed to them by a church member. When they were ready to move into the building, the building inspector told them they needed more parking spaces and they could not move in until this was solved. Unfortunately, the church was land locked, with a mountain on one side, and a highway on the other. The situation seemed hopeless. The next Sunday, the pastor invited his congregation to a "mountain moving experience." Twenty-four of their members gathered in prayer that night. When they were done, the pastor promised, in an act of extreme faith, that they would celebrate their opening

the next Sunday as planned. The next morning the pastor had a visitor. It was the construction foreman from a project in the next county. He was there to ask the pastor and his congregation for permission to use the side of their mountain as fill dirt. The construction company was in desperate need of the dirt. The company was willing to purchase the dirt, to move it to their site, and even to pave the area which they cleared. The construction company got its dirt. The church got its parking spaces and opened on schedule.

Sometimes it happens like that. **You ask and you receive exactly what you asked for.** Most of us can think of times God answered our prayers in a wondrous way. Sometimes, however, things do not work out quite that neatly.

Some of you CAN PROBABLY REMEMBER A PRAY OR TWO WHEN GOD DID NOT GIVE YOU WHAT YOU ASKED FOR...WHEN HE DID NOT ANSWER YOUR REQUEST FOR A “LOVED ONES” NEED. No, He doesn’t always give us everything we want, everything we think we need. HOWEVER... he always listens!!!

The third thing we need to take away from today’s reading is: WE NEED TO LEARN TO TRUST GOD NO MATTER WHAT!!! Christ’s teachings are best understood by the conclusion to this passage, verses 11-13. *“Which of you fathers,” says the master, “if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!”*

Jesus is saying to us, trust God. If we want only the best for our children, how much more does God want only the best for God’s children? God loves you. God is only interested in your best good, and even though we may not always see God’s hand at work answering our prayers, some day we will see that God was with us all the time. In the meantime, like the man pounding on the friend’s door after midnight, we need to keep praying and keep trusting.

Dr. Norman Vincent Peale once told a story about a young man named James C. McCormick who was stricken years ago with the terrible disease of polio. **This was before the arrival of the Salk vaccine.** Young James was totally paralyzed, totally helpless, and in great pain. He could not move; he could not swallow; he could not breathe; he had to stay in an iron lung. He wanted to die. He even prayed, “Lord, I’m so helpless that I can’t take my own life. Please take it for me.”

But God chose to ignore that prayer. Then he prayed, ***“If I can’t die, please take away this awful pain.”*** The doctors gave him drugs to ease the pain, but he was becoming dangerously dependent on them. So, he prayed, ***“Lord, please take away this craving for drugs.”*** Gradually, the craving left him. Then he prayed, ***“Please let me be able to swallow again. Let them take this tube out of my throat and these needles out of my arms. If I can just drink a little water, I’ll try not to ask for any more favors.”***

And he became able to swallow, but he was not able to stop asking God for favors. So, he prayed, ***“Lord, let me be able to breathe a little bit on my own. Let me be able to get out of this iron lung just for a little while.”*** And this, too, came to pass. After a while he prayed again, ***“Heavenly Father, I’m so grateful for all Your favors. Can I ask just one more? Let me be able to leave this bed just for an hour, get into a wheelchair, and see the world that lies outside this room.”***

This request, too, was granted. Then James McCormick asked to be given strength enough in his arms to move the wheelchair himself. And after that, he asked for the ability and the stamina to walk on crutches. And finally, after a 20-year struggle, James McCormick could walk with two canes, and he was able to marry and have children and lead a close-to-normal life. **James had his prayers answered.** Not according to his timetable. Not in exactly the way he would have chosen. But, in retrospect, he has no doubt that God heard his prayers and God answered.

The message is: KEEP PRAYING AND KEEP TRUSTING!! YES... Life can be very cruel, but we have an Ally, a Friend, who never forgets us nor forsakes us. SO, do not hesitate to pound on heaven’s door. But do not lose hope, even if things do not turn out as you had hoped. **God has not forgotten you.** Some day you will see God’s plan in all its fullness and you will understand that God’s plan was for your BEST GOOD. If you know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more does God know how to give gifts to God’s children? **THAT IS THE PROMISE & GOD ALWAYS KEEPS GOD’S PROMISES!! Amen.**