

Treasures of the Transformed Life # 2

Drawing Water (Prayer)

Luke 11:1-13

10 23 2011 Sam Jones Memorial UMC

Media: <i>Bruce Almighty</i>	Begin: 59:47	“Prayers, prayers, prayers”
	End: 1:02:38	“Now everybody’s happy”

Scripture: Luke 11:1-13

The ABCs of Prayer

A little girl was saying her bedtime prayers. Her parents listened with curiosity as she began, “Dear God . . .” and then reverently recited the **ABCs**. After finishing with XYZ, she concluded with a loud “Amen!”

Her mother asked, “Sweetheart, why did you pray the ABCs?”

The girl replied, “I didn’t know what to pray for tonight, so I decided to give God the letters and let him make up the words!”

At times, I can relate to the child’s approach. We all know that prayer is a vital part of Christian discipleship. The Bible testifies about the power of individual and communal prayer. We pledge to support the church with our “*prayers, presence, gifts, service, and witness.*” However, we often don’t know how to pray. Reciting the alphabet so that God can make up the words sounds appealing on occasion.

John Wesley listed prayer as a “*means of grace*” which enables us to grow spiritually. We realize that prayer is good for us. We *should* pray daily. We *ought* to pray fervently. However, Christians often neglect this divine gift.

Each month a cell phone bill includes a **usage report**. It details how much time we spent on the phone. What would our prayer usage report look like? How much time have we spent in prayer during the past week, month, and year?

Today we continue our *Treasures of the Transformed Life* worship series. Last week we began with an overview entitled *Priming the Pump*. Today’s sermon is *Drawing Water*. We are exploring the vital nature of **prayer** in the Christian life. The sermon outline addresses the six questions any rookie reporter learns in journalism class:

- Who
- When
- Why
- What
- Where
- How

Who?

Let’s begin by asking, “**Who prays?**” My response may surprise you: EVERYBODY prays! Religious, agnostic, and atheist alike engage in some sort of prayer. In his book, *Everyday Prayers*, William Barclay writes: “*Prayer is not an acquired art, it is an instinct.*” It occurs as naturally as breathing.

We are spiritual creatures, and something *within* our souls reaches out to something *beyond* our souls. Prayer is inspired by a beautiful sunrise, the birth of a baby, trials and tribulations, the loss of a loved one, mortal illness Every religion since the dawn of time has incorporated some form of prayer into its beliefs.

However, Christians put a name and face to the God who hears our prayers. We serve the Lord God Almighty, the Creator of the heavens and the earth, the God of Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebecca, Jacob, Rachel, and Leah. The Lord is most fully revealed in Jesus Christ in whom the fullness of the deity dwelt bodily. The Holy Spirit continues to sustain and perfect us.

All of God's people are called to prayer. When Jesus instructed the disciples about this subject, he began by saying, "*When you pray*" The Lord simply assumed that Christians are a people of prayer.

Philippians 4:6 summarizes the Holy Spirit's call to prayer: "*Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.*" James 4:8 promises: "*Come near to God, and he will come near to you.*" We are called and challenged to be a people of ardent, regular prayer.

What?

The next question is, "**What is prayer?**" There are rich ways to answer this question both theologically and scripturally. However, the most basic response is quite simple: prayer is **communication** with God.

The Lord God Almighty, the Creator of the heavens and the earth, the Redeemer of the World, and the Sustainer of Creation passionately pursues a vital relationship with his people. God wants to spend quality time in quantity amounts with you and me.

In Isaiah 49:16, the Lord declares: "*I have written your names on the palms of my hands.*" Our picture is on God's refrigerator! Prayer invites us into communication and communion with the One who loves us first and loves us best.

In part, prayer is **talking to God**. Silent or spoken, kneeling or standing, eyes open or closed, leisurely or hastily, in sorrow or joy, we share with God the entirety of our lives; and I do mean everything. The Psalms are both songs and prayers. The Psalmist expresses the gamut of human experience and emotion: joy, sorrow, anger, fear, love, hatred, jealousy, doubt, faith, dread, and more.

Effective communication, however, is a two way street. In prayer, we both speak AND **listen**. In Psalms 46:10, the Lord commands: "*Be still, and know that I am God.*" This runs contrary to our hurried lifestyles. We rush into prayer, present God with a set of demands, and then hurry away. We become like people who dominate a conversation, talking and not listening, speaking and not hearing.

Imagine having an hour audience with God. Would you spend more time talking or listening?? Who has more to say—God or you? In prayer, we need to share with God the entirety of our lives; but we also need to learn to listen in still and reverent silence.

When/Where?

Let's combine the next two questions together: **“When and where should we pray?”** Turn the question around for an answer: “When and where shouldn't we pray?”

Ephesians 6:18 says: *“And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for the saints.”* 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 reminds us: *“Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.”*

We are called to pray at **all times and places**, in season and out of season, regardless of situation and circumstance. Awaking in the morning. Preparing for the day. Driving to work or school. Watching the news. Making decisions. Facing trials. Overcoming temptations. Hearing a siren. Spontaneous, flash prayers of praise, confession, thanksgiving, and intercession. God has designed our world and lives to constantly gain our attention and call us to pray.

However, there is a subtle danger in assigning prayer to all times and places. This can become no time and no place. Prayer becomes such a diffused activity that it slips from our lives without notice.

We do need to pray at all times and places; however, we also need to set aside **specific times and places** for prayer. Talking with God is not one activity that we multitask with others. We need to create particular times in our daily schedules to spend only with God. Then we need to guard those times zealously.

Specific times can include: awaking in the morning, getting ready for the day, driving in the car, mealtime, going to sleep at night, etc.

Bertram Pollock served as the British Bishop of Norwich. His wife wrote her memoirs about their life together. Each day Pollock would close his study door for a specified time of prayer. If someone attempted to contact him during this time, he would respond: *“I have an appointment with God.”* (Ibid, Barclay, p. 20)

Why?

1) Who, what, when, where, and why—**“Why should we pray?”** The first part of the answer is simple: **God commands it.** In the Old and New Testaments, the people of God are called to prayer.

2) The second reason is that prayer draws us **closer to God.** Communication is the key to any relationship. Prayer invites us into a conversation with our Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer. When we spend time with God, then we become more like God.

Dr. John Ed Mathison wrote: *“Every time you pray you deepen your relationship with God.”* (*Treasures of the Transformed Life*, p. 64) Meditate on this statement. Every time you pray—short or long, spontaneous or planned, shallow or deep, individual or corporate—we deepen our relationship with God. How many activities in life have that sort of eternal guarantee?

3) Thirdly, spending time in prayer makes us sensitive to **God's will** for our lives and world. In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus' example taught us that ALL prayer occurs with the conditional statement, *“Your will be done.”*

We often hear the statement, *“Prayer changes things;”* however, prayer also changes the person who prays. We often don't know how to pray wisely. We are like little children asking for something that might not be good for us. Or we don't understand

God's timing in the lives of ourselves and our loved ones. So we pray the best we can and always conclude, "Your will be done."

William McGill said: "The value of consistent prayer is not that God will hear us but that we will hear God." (Mathison, p. 82)

4) The fourth reason we pray is that it opens our lives to the Holy Spirit's power. "Prayer is the power behind our Christian walk." (Mathison, p. 100) If we are living weak and powerless lives, the chances are very good that we are neglecting to pray.

How?

The sixth question is, "**How do we pray?**" Although prayer is instinctive and intuitive, it is also a discipline that we can learn and cultivate in our lives. There is no standard, "right" way to pray; however, there are models that can help us pray.

This is not a new question. The disciples came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, teach us to pray." In response, Christ taught them what we now know as *The Lord's Prayer*. This is a wonderful model of prayer for both individual and communal worship.

Last winter our worship series was entitled *The Heart of Worship*, and we explored the acronym of **ACTS** for worship and prayer. ACTS stands for:

- A Adoration
- C Confession
- T Thanksgiving
- S Supplication

Someone recently shared with me another acronym that makes this model a bit more kid friendly. It is **PATH**. PATH stands for:

- P Praise
- A Apology
- T Thanksgiving
- H Help

1) **ACTS**: the **A** stands for **adoration**. Adoration is praising God for who God is—pure praise with no other motivation or agenda. True adoration focuses upon the Lord alone. Adoration is the glorification of God—and our ultimate desire is to enjoy dwelling in God's presence forever. At its best, prayer gives us "a foretaste of glory divine" as we adore and praise our Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer.

Praise spans the emotional and spiritual spectrum. Sometimes we adore God with high energy and volume; other times we praise God quietly and reflectively. Adoration occurs in worship in a rich diversity of ways.

2) **ACTS**: The **C** stands for **Confession**. At its root, confession means the acknowledgement and admission of sin. Confession is NOT informing God about some secret sin. The Lord already knows! Instead, confession is agreeing with God about the sin in our lives. The Holy Spirit convicts and convinces us of our sin.

Confession is the first movement of repentance that leads to accepting God's **forgiveness** in our lives. Hear the rest of the 1 John passage: "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." (1 John 1:9).

3) **ACTS:** The **T** stands for **Thanksgiving**. Thanksgiving is a vital part of personal prayer and public worship. It is essential to Christian discipleship. An attitude of gratitude nurtures faith; an attitude of ingratitude causes faith to wither and die. The apostle **Paul** encouraged Christian disciples to cultivate a spirit of thanksgiving:

So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thanksgiving. (Colossians 2:6-7)

C. S. Lewis said that joy is “*the serious business of heaven.*” Even in the most somber and sacred of worship services, there is an undercurrent of thanksgiving and praise. We gather today to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ who lived, died, and rose again so that we might enjoy life, abundant life, and everlasting life. If that doesn’t put a smile on your face, then I don’t know what will!

4) **ACTS:** The **S** stands for **Supplication**. The final act of prayer is bringing our needs to God. Synonyms for supplication include plea, petition, request, and entreaty. We ask our Heavenly Father to intercede on his children’s behalf.

Philippians 4:6 instructs us: “*Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.*” The Bible repeatedly portrays God as our Heavenly Father who wants to bless his children. So why do we so often live in spiritual want?

The answer is painfully simple: we don’t receive because we do not ask. James 4:2 states this basic truth: “*You do not have because you do not ask God.*” When we bring our needs before God, we do not come to a God who is indifferent to our plight, who cares nothing for our needs, or who measures out grace by the ounce. Instead, we come confidently in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. We pray with importunity, persistence, shamelessness, and boldness!

We claim Christ’s words today: “*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 seeks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened.*” (Luke 11:9-10)

Conclusion

In *Treasures of the Transformed Life*, Dr. Mathison says prayer is the living water that sustains our soul. We often suffer from **spiritual dehydration**. He writes:

The way we connect to God and soak up that living water is through prayer. What he expects of our lives is that we’re willing to be lined up with what he wants us to be. He’ll provide the streams of water in direction, encouragement, discipline, and love. Then, if we’re willing to be firmly planted, we’ll grow. (p. 59)

Dr. Mathison uses the example of a **bonsai** tree. Bonsai is an ancient Japanese art of cultivating miniature versions of shrubs and trees. A gardener takes an ordinary seed or plant and carefully trims its roots and branches so that it never outgrows a small pot.

Take the California **redwood** for example. The evergreen tree can live over 1,800 years. It is one of the largest trees in the world, growing up to 380 feet high with a diameter of 26 feet. However, this same giant tree can also be grown as a bonsai plant that fits in a pot and sits on a desk.

How the tree grows depends upon how it is planted and cultivated. Only trees with roots that grow deep into the ground can fulfill their full potential. (p. 59)

Prayer grants us deep roots and a firm foundation. For a people suffering from spiritual dehydration, prayer taps into the source of God's living water. It refreshes and sustains our souls, refreshing and recreating our lives.

Those are the ABCs of prayer. When we ask, "*Lord, teach us to pray,*" God provides both the letters and the words. Amen.