

Pray With Me

Colossians 2: 6-15

Luke 11: 1-13

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Colossians 2: 6-15

As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.

See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the universe, and not according to Christ. For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, and you have come to fullness in him, who is the head of every ruler and authority. In him also you were circumcised with a spiritual circumcision, by putting off the body of the flesh in the circumcision of Christ; when you were buried with him in baptism, you were also raised with him through faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead. And when you were dead in trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive together with him, when he forgave us all our trespasses, erasing the record that stood against us with its legal demands. He set this aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and made a public example of them, triumphing over them in it.

Luke 11: 1-13

He was praying in a certain place, and after he had finished, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples." He said to them, "When you pray, say: Father, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread. And forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us. And do not bring us to the time of trial." And he said to them, "Suppose one of you has a friend, and you go to him at midnight and say to him, 'Friend, lend me three loaves of bread; for a friend of mine has arrived, and I have nothing to set before him.' And he answers from within, 'Do not bother me; the door has already been locked, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot get up and give you anything.' I tell you, even though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, at least because of his persistence he will get up and give him whatever he needs. "So I say to you, Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. 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!"

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Just what is prayer?

What happens when we pray?

Does God always hear our prayers?

Prayer is as essential and common to our faith life as is the love of God, as Scripture, as worship, justice work, fellowship, care for the poor and the stewardship of creation, yet we can still hear ourselves asking just as the disciples did, “Lord, teach us to pray.”

We certainly know the Lord’s Prayer as every time we gather we pray it together. We know it as a model for prayer as much as a prayer itself, yet our questions abound.

Why does God sometimes not answer our prayers?

How can I pray for God’s will when I don’t know what it will mean for me?

Why do we pray yet nothing changes?

Prayer is not only at the heart of the Christian life, it is also at the heart of a lot of Christian frustration, misunderstanding, and even pain.

Prayer is our conversation with God, it is praise and thanksgiving, confession and petition, meditation and all night contemplation. Prayer can be an urgent plea in earnest and humble awareness of our dependence upon God. Prayer can be a simple grace before a meal or long flowing outpouring of hearts to God. Prayer can be silent. Prayer can be tears.

Yet prayer can feel like the children’s game of ‘Go Fish’—you ask for a particular card and if you are lucky enough to get the match you are happy and your turn continues, but if you don’t get exactly what you wanted you have to pick a card from the deck—a card that still may be good or it may be something else completely different that cannot be used right now.

I prayed urgently and relentlessly in those long, dark, scary hours and then days of unknowing and uncertainty. I prayed in silence and tears, in shaking sobs and in the repetition of “please, please, O God, please.” I prayed in the numbness of the surreal ER and the pediatric ICU. I prayed in the awareness that this was the only thing that I could do for my son. Little by little his body fought the infection and he was healed and whole. My prayers of fear and despair turned to prayers of joy and gratitude.

I prayed hopefully and relentlessly all that week as my Dad waited on test results. He was ill and obviously getting weaker, but there were so many possible and treatable conditions that this could be. I prayed for healing before we knew what he was facing, prayed for medical good news. But it was not to be. Leukemia. Our prayers were not answered.

Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened.

We have all been there—anyone who has ever prayed--praying to not come to a time of trial, asking, searching and knocking that the door to our hopes and dreams and wishes and all good things would be opened wide for us.

We don’t know, can’t know, why some prayers are answered and others are not answered—at least in the way in which we want them to be. However we do have many bad cliches and terrible platitudes that try to explain why:

“You didn’t have enough faith.”

“You prayed for the wrong thing.”

“You didn’t pray hard enough.”

“God never gives us more than we can handle.”

“There is a reason for everything.”

While well intentioned these offer little or no comfort and twist God into a deity focused not on beloved humanity but on the precise measurement of our trust, or a specific word count to our prayers. They act as the very things Paul had cautioned against in his letter to the Colossians, “See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deceit, according to

human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the universe, and not according to Christ.” We are to continue to live into Christ, to be steadfast in our faith come what may.

We don’t know why our persistent prayers for our needs and the needs of others are sometimes answered by, “No,” although we do know that while God is all powerful, God is not the only power in our world. We don’t know why asking, seeking and knocking do not always mean that the door will be opened and we will receive all that is our heart’s content, but we do know that the very One who taught his disciples, taught us, how to pray prayed through his own sweat and tears and blood in the Garden of Gethsemane, “Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me, yet not my will but yours be done,” and he was crucified the next day. Jesus prayed, knowing that God would not answer all his prayers as he wished, yet that did not stop him from asking.

We cannot truly know just how or why prayer works but we can follow our baptism into the Body of Christ, the One in whom the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, and whose prayer life was integral to who he was and is still teaching us how to pray.

“When you pray, say: Father, hallowed be your name.

Our prayers begin by remembering that we have a relationship with God who loves us as a divine parent all day, every day. Prayer is not just to change or impact a particular situation as a way to get something from God. God is holy and so we approach in love and reverence, praying for what honors God’s holiness in our faithful living.

Your kingdom come.

Our prayers are to manifest God’s good news mindful that has gifts that God wants to give. God’s kingdom comes from God’s will being done.

Give us each day our daily bread.

Our prayers can even be for the small things, simple things, as well as all that is needed for life, and are to be without excess. We are dependent upon God to nourish and sustain us.

And forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us.

We ask for God’s grace and mercy when we have been wrong and offer that grace and mercy to those who have offended us.

And do not bring us to the time of trial.”

We ask God to keep us away from personal and painful challenges, false beliefs, haughty pride and wrong behaviors as temptations can cripple or destroy us.

Lord, teach us to pray. Amen.

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“Prayer is not asking. Prayer is putting oneself in the hands of God, at His disposition, and listening to His voice in the depth of our hearts.”

— Mother Teresa