

July 24, 2022

IT ISN'T THAT DIFFICULT.

Luke 11: 1-13

Who are the people that you find it comfortable, relaxing, uplifting, and easy, to talk to? We all need such people in our lives.

The more connected we are to someone, the easier it is for us to talk with that person about things that really matter to us: our feelings, our needs, our frustrations, our fears, our joys, and our aspirations.

Safe, accepting, and supportive relationships, lead to free, open, and honest conversations. And we don't engage in such conversations out of a sense of duty or as an act of discipline, such conversations are a natural outworking and expression of our relationships.

That, in essence, is what praying is about.

Praying plays an important and central part in our lives as Christians – as people of faith. Prayer is that response and offering that is most frequently requested, most readily offered, and quite often genuinely appreciated.

Yet so many find praying uninspiring and difficult. It is so often neglected - seen as tedious, and uncomfortable. Often reduced to a duty that we fulfil with little enthusiasm and a discipline that we struggle to maintain with little joy - another thing to add to our already busy lives. Sometimes it is even viewed as an activity that we resort to only when we run out of options.

Many of us struggle with praying, and so did the disciples of Jesus. Hence when they observed the frequency and ease with which he prayed and the joy and confidence that he derived from praying; they wanted that experience too. So they asked Jesus “Lord, teach us to pray”.

And Jesus said, “This is how you should pray:

Father, hallowed be your name.

Your kingdom come.

³ *Give us each day our daily bread.*

⁴ *And forgive us our sins,
for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us.
And do not bring us to the time of trial.’*

I am not going to examine each phrase of this prayer, rather I want to draw our attention to the very first word in the prayer: “Father”. Jesus said, “When you pray say: Father ...”

Praying involves different elements; two of the primary ones are the “who” and the “what”. Who you are praying to, and what you are praying for.

And when it comes to praying, the “who” matters more than the “what”.

When we pray, we tend to be more caught up in and bogged down by the “what”. Not only what we are asking for, but also how we express it. “What am I going to say, I don’t have the right words.” It may come as a surprise to know that when we pray the words are not all that important.

Here is what Jesus had to say about that.

7 ‘When you are praying, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do; for they think that they will be heard because of their many words.⁸ Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.’ (Matthew 6: 7-8)

Praying is not about informing God about something of which God would otherwise be unaware. It is not about convincing God about the legitimacy of our request. It is not about persuading a reluctant God to act. If praying was about any of that, then our words certainly would matter.

If it was about informing God, then we would need to be clear and precise in our communication, hence our words would matter.

If it was about persuading or convincing God to act, then we would need to make out a credible case, hence our words would matter.

But praying is not about that, praying is rooted in our relationship with God, and it is a natural outworking and expression of that relationship.

That is why Jesus says “When you pray, say: Father ...” What makes praying effective, is the fact that we are engaging with someone with whom we are in a loving relationship – someone who knows us and who cares. Prayer requires an appreciation for and an embrace of our relationship with God. For it is the relationship we share that validates the requests that we make. It is the relationship that makes possible the approach.

We can go to God because we are God’s children. (Our children come to us because we are their parents). God hears our prayers not because we express them eloquently and persuasively, but because of the relationship we share with God. And when we pray we are acknowledging, embracing, and giving voice to that relationship.

When we pray, we are entering into a safe space that God provides, where we can release our fears and worries, our anger, and our frustrations. A space where we can admit to our needs and our vulnerabilities; where we can express our joys and our gratitude. A place from which we can arise knowing and feeling that we are not alone, that we have been heard, that we are loved, accepted, and supported; even if our circumstances do not change.

Whenever Jesus prayed, he always addressed God as Father, because he knew that the basis of his prayers was the fact that he shared a relationship that is safe, supportive, and accepting.

As Jesus went on to explain to the disciples, *“Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for a fish, will give a snake instead of a fish? ¹²Or if the child asks for an egg, will give a scorpion? ¹³If 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!” (Luke 11: 11-13)*

The Holy Spirit – that which enables and empowers, guides and comforts.

So when you pray, don't get bogged down with words, instead, step into the relationship; for that, more than anything else, is what praying calls us unto - an embrace by God that comforts, strengthens and reassures.

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