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“The Disciple’s Prayer”  
 Luke 11:1-13 Colossians 2:6-15

Paul Harvey told about a 3-year-old boy who went to the grocery store with his mother. Before they entered she had certain instructions for the little tike: "Now you're not going to get any chocolate chip cookies, so don't even ask."

She put him in the child's seat and off they went up and down the aisles. He was doing just fine until they came to the cookie section. Seeing the chocolate chip cookies he said, "Mom, can I have some chocolate chip cookies?" She said, "I told you not even to ask. No."

They continued down the aisles, but in their search for certain items she had to back track and they ended up in the cookie aisle again. "Mom, can I please have some chocolate chip cookies?" She said, "I told you that you can't have any. Now sit down and be quiet."

Finally, they arrived at the checkout. The little boy sensed that the end was in sight, that this might be his last chance. He stood up on the seat and shouted in his loudest voice, "In the name of Jesus, may I have some chocolate chip cookies?" Everyone in the checkout lanes laughed and applauded. Do you think the little boy got his cookies? You bet! The other shoppers moved by his daring pooled their resources. The little boy and his mother left with 23 boxes of chocolate chip cookies. **1**

(That little boy should have come to our Vacation Bible School. We had SOOO many Chocolate Chip Cookies! I gained 4 pounds this week.)

According to a Gallup Poll, 87% of all Americans pray, 50% use prayer for petitions, and 70% claim their prayers are answered. Actually I think that statistic is a little off. (like 30%?) I believe that 100% of prayers are answered. They're just not all answered with a "yes." "No" is also an answer. And of course, a third option is, "not yet ... and maybe "never."

Jim Carrey starred in the movie Bruce Almighty. In the movie Bruce Nolan, met God, played by Morgan Freeman, and God gave Bruce the power to answer all the prayers in Buffalo, New York. He got frustrated with the number of requests and so he set up a computer to help him monitor the requests. When he got burdened with the number of requests he simply typed "yes." and replied to all." Some rejoiced that they had lost 10 pounds on an all ice cream diet. Everyone who played the lottery won and each person that played won \$2.95 and the people started to riot! What would happen if EVERY prayer was answered with a YES?

One day, after listening to Jesus pray, his disciples asked him if he would teach them how to pray. In response Jesus gave them a template that we've come to call, "The Lord's Prayer." However, it's not a prayer that Jesus would have

prayed. (Jesus didn't have any trespasses or sins to forgive!) It's a prayer he taught his disciples to pray. It's really the Disciple's prayer.

Prayer must be more than an emergency magical lamp rubbed in a crisis. Much that passes for prayer is irrational, superstitious, and self-centered, and is therefore unworthy of the pattern of the prayer that Jesus offered to us his disciples.

God is not a cosmic bellhop who hops when we ring the bell and runs our errands or grants our every wish. Yet, one of the amazing things in the model of prayer given to us by Jesus is that he teaches us to pray in the imperative mood! When the disciples ask Jesus to teach them how to pray he gives them a series of imperative commands; and says this is the way to pray! Hallowed be Thy name! Thy Kingdom, come! Thy will be done! Give us bread! Forgive us our sins! Lead us not into but AWAY from temptation!"

What is so surprising is that Jesus does not teach us to pray meekly. These are not, "if it be your will" prayers. These are demands laid before the throne of Grace. These are imperatives. "God! Give us bread-daily bread. Not enough for a month or a lifetime—but bread we'll need for today so we will have to trust you for bread tomorrow!" Note that the request is for daily bread not a jet.

There was another little boy who had such faith in the efficacy of divine intervention that he prayed, "Lord, make me a good boy; and if at first you don't succeed, try, try, again."

That little boy captures the spirit of today's passage. The path to effective praying is learning to pray in line with God's will and desires for our lives. To pray in line with God's will is to pray to become a good boy, not just to receive goodies. The second part of his prayer, "if at first you don't succeed, try, try again," captures the second aspect of Jesus instruction when it comes to prayer—being persistent, persevering in prayer.

*To illustrate, Jesus tells a parable about a man who awakens his friend at midnight with a request for food and is rebuffed. The man continues to bang on the door allowing his friend no sleep until he responds to his request. The friend responds for no other reason than to get rid of the nuisance at his door. Jesus concludes, "Ask, and it will be given you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you."*

*Clearly, Jesus does not present prayer as a relationship that has God on the other end of a vending machine that dispenses what we want when we pull a knob. But neither does he portray our heavenly Father as a puppeteer pulling our strings to make us dance, offering only the appearance of free choice. (We are not God's EP3:20!)*

*That's why when Jesus was asked to teach his disciples to pray he taught them to state their needs, to dare to dream big dreams and to take on big challenges and trusting a heavenly Father who knows best to answer.*

I believe 100% of our prayers are answered. I believe that our Vacation Bible School was an answer to prayer. We asked for 20 leaders and got 40. We asked for 50 children and we got 28. One was answered over the top. Another was answered under the goal. But I believe everyone who came was exactly who was supposed to come.

What if we ask smartly and we persevere and still the answer is "no?" Remember, even Jesus got, "No," for an answer when he prayed in the garden of Gethsemane for the cup of suffering to pass from him. There he DID pray, "Nevertheless not my will but Thy will be done." Even though He got no for an answer, he still asked.

The apostle Paul tried three times to ask the Lord to remove what he called "a thorn in his side." Three times he received a "no." After the third "no" he heard God say, "My grace is sufficient for you." Paul moved on. Paul moved on still plagued by that thorn in his side. Though he didn't understand why he was denied relief, he persevered in prayer. He didn't give up praying because his thorn wasn't removed. He accepted that the thorn was a part of God's will for his life. Though he didn't understand why he was denied relief, he persevered. He continued on his mission in spite of being shipwrecked, snake bit, imprisoned and eventually killed for his faith. He didn't give up praying and he didn't give up because his thorn wasn't removed. When he wrote, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me," he wasn't talking about winning the next championship, he was talking about surviving the persecution he received for his faith and succeeding in sharing God's love.

A little five-year-old girl was watching her mother in fascination as she was rubbing cold cream on her face. She said, "Mother, why do you do that?" The mother replied, "To make myself beautiful." Well, to the little girl's amazement, in just a minute the mother began removing the cream with a tissue she had just put on. The girl said, "What's the matter, giving up already?"

I sometimes believe that God looks at our prayer lives and asks the question: "Are you giving up already?" Believe it or not, there are people both inside the church and outside the church who have given up on God. Some people quit going to church because they give up on God. Some people quit praying, they quit financially supporting the church, because they give up on God.

Jesus tells his disciples to Ask, Seek and Knock. Who is he telling to do this? Those who love him and are following him and who would be asking and seeking and knocking for things that Jesus would want. The example he uses is of children asking their father for one fish or one egg not a fishing lodge or a chicken farm.

You will also notice that each one of these verbs calls for more effort than the previous one. "Ask" implies simply making a verbal request. "Seek" involves going beyond talking to actually looking for an answer. "Knock" involves not only asking and seeking, but going to a specific place and knocking on a specific door trying to find a specific answer.

The starting point of prayer is asking. The greatest problem with prayer is not unanswered prayer, but unasked prayer. James 4:2 says, "You have not because you ask not." Asking expresses dependence. When you pray you are acknowledging that you are totally dependent on God. A heart attack can tell a rich person very quickly how dependent he or she is on God. One cancer cell can tell a young bodybuilder how dependent he is on God.

The next step is seeking. There are times that we need to pray even when we do not know what to pray for, or how to pray. Seeking is a deeper level of praying than just asking. When you ask, you know what you are asking for ...but when you are seeking, you're not sure and you're trying to find what it is God is wanting from you, or God is wanting for you. In Romans 8:26-27 the apostle Paul talked about that type of praying when he wrote, "The Spirit also helps us in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us...according to the will of God."

Finally, there's the discipline of knocking. Knocking comes because we have been asking and seeking and are at the door. Why are we to keep asking, and keep seeking, and keep knocking? Jesus says everyone that asks receives. They may not always receive the same thing they are asking for; they may get something better. Jesus says that everyone who seeks, finds. They may not find it at the time they are looking for it, but in God's time they will find it. Jesus says that for everyone who knocks, a door will open. It may not be the door that they thought would open, but it may well be a door to something much better.

May the Lord, teach us to be persistent in prayer, even when we don't get chocolate chip cookies in the name of Jesus. May we be persistent because we want to be in relationship with God. We not only want God to hear us but we want to hear God. May the Lord teach us not only pray, but also to work together to be a part of the answers to the prayers we pray.

None of us needs 23 boxes of Chocolate Chip cookies but we all need daily bread. We all need to not give up on God. May the Lord teach us to keep on asking, seeking and knocking. May the Lord give us what we learned at this year's Vacation Bible School—the ability to "Go Beyond with Faith, with Boldness, with Kindness, with Thankfulness and with Hope as we pray the way Jesus taught his disciples when he taught them the "Disciple's Prayer."

Let us pray. Lord, teach us to pray. We seem to fill every moment of silence with radio or television or noise of some type, because noise helps us to avoid

confronting silence. We are afraid of silence. Your Spirit continually prompts us, seeking to bring our thoughts and actions into focus, and we repeatedly hold back. Perhaps we are afraid of what we will see. Lord, release us from our fears of silence and walk with us there. Open our eyes and bring our thoughts and actions into focus. Lord, teach us to pray and prepare us to receive and accept your answers.

1. Paul Harvey Commentary and News
2. Greatest Passages of The Bible by Robert L. Allen
3. Exegetical Notes by Brian Stoffregen