

Hillcrest Congregational Church, UCC
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The Lord's Prayer and a Relationship with God
Luke 11:1-13

Please pray with me. Please join me in prayer. Please be in an attitude of prayer. Please open your self to the Divine. Please look within. Ask and you shall receive. Knock and it shall be opened. Search and you will find. God is still speaking, please listen.

There are so many ways we can say it. So many ways we can do it. Prayer is listening. Prayer is dreaming. Prayer is talking out loud. Prayer is singing. Prayer is crying and moaning and wailing. Prayer is speaking in unison. Prayer is meditation. Prayer is written and repetitive. Prayer is spontaneous and from the heart.

What did you think or hear in our two contemporary parable illustrations? The first was the Lord's Prayer in Aramaic. That was different, first because it was sung. But we have all probably heard the Lord's prayer sung before. But today it was in another language.

The disciples asked Jesus to teach them to pray, like John taught his disciples. These were good Jewish people. They knew how to pray. So why did they ask Jesus to teach them to pray? In Jesus' time there were other teachers and groups that followed those teachers. They each had their own sayings or prayers.

The disciples wanted Jesus to teach them a prayer that would especially identify them as his disciples. But, it is not clear that Jesus gave them a prayer per say. In one translation, Jesus says, when you pray, pray like this: he doesn't give them a prayer. He gives them direction about how to pray.

Jesus spoke and taught in the Aramaic language. Like the other Semitic languages (Hebrew and Arabic), Aramaic is a very poetic language and translating it into English is complicated. Complicated because the language has so many layers of meaning. Here is one example of what Jesus might have said when he told them, "when you pray, pray like this":

O thou from whom comes the breath of life, you are present in all realms of vibration and light. Let your light/sound be experienced in my own 'holy of holies,' the part of me that is at home, at peace, and cannot be violated. Let your ideals and counsel rule, let the possibilities of the Cosmos come to pass through us. Let your will be experienced in this material place as it is everywhere in the universe.

Give us wisdom and understanding, and help us share the physical blessings to meet everyone's needs. Loose the mistakes binding us, as we release the strands we hold of other's faults. Let us experience the same freedom from our mistakes and impressions that we allow others to experience. Do not let surface things

delude us. Help us remember that there is more to life than the busy-ness in which we can become lost; free us from what holds us back from our true purpose.

For to You, in You, belongs the ruling ideals and principles, the life force to accomplish them and the song that adds glory to all, from each gathering to the next. I affirm this with trust, faith and truth, with my whole being.

So when we pray, do the words we say, think, or use matter?

In the second illustration, you heard someone wrestle with the words they were saying. Learning not to take the words for granted, but to really understand their meaning and practical application in our lives. And the illustration had another point.

There were two people involved. It was about relationship between God and the person praying. It was about the person finding out that God was listening and that God did not want rote repetition or duty. God wants relationship and companionship.

So when we pray, does it matter whether we pray out loud, or say certain words, or do it sitting or standing or kneeling? No. What matters is that we are talking and listening and seeking a relationship with God. That is what Jesus did and tried to get across to his disciples, creating, building and being open to a relationship with God. And in order to have a relationship with anyone, but especially God, we have to understand who God is, we have to get to know God,

not as we want God to be, but as God is. We have to open and ready to have our concept of God, and our selves, changed and transformed by our relationship with God.

When I was a child, my sister died when my mother was giving birth to her. As you can imagine we were all very sad, especially my mother. I prayed every night with my parents and brother. “Now I lay me down to sleep...” and the prayer ended with, “God bless daddy, God bless mommy, God bless Billy and sister in heaven, and God, please give me another sister.

I had the faith of a child. I believed that if I asked God enough times and hard enough, and if I was very good, God would give me what I wanted and what I thought would make my mother happy. God was out there, and every once and a while, God would come and give me what I asked for. It was a Santa Claus kind of God. And you know what, God soon granted my wish and my sister Kathy came along.

Now there are people who believe that if you just pray hard and long enough, or if you get enough people to pray, you will get what you ask for. There is a whole health, wealth, prosperity theology built around this. After all, Jesus told us, “Ask and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you...”

But what if you ask and it isn't given? What if you search and cannot find? What if you knock and no doors open? Does it mean that you haven't prayed hard enough? or that you haven't been good enough? No, it is a whole different thing entirely.

Listen again to what Jesus said: "Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you... the heavenly Father [will] give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!" And that is what Jesus encourages us to ask for, to be open to, and to receive: the Spirit in our lives, the companionship of our soul, God's presence in our hardest trials and our moments of deepest sorrow and in our rejoicing and celebration, a joy so profound that it goes far beyond any happiness we can imagine, a relationship with the Divine. That is what is our center. That is what prayer is all about.

Let us pray. With every breath, with every action, with every thought, in every way, in every place, all the time. For it brings us into relationship with God and with all that is God's. I affirm this with trust, faith and truth, with my whole being. Amen.

Note: Translation is compiled from Neil Douglas-Klotz' book Dancing with the Aramaic Jesus: The Lord's Prayer, Instruction Booklet, Peace Works, Center for the Dances of Universal Peace, 1989.