

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the one who teaches us to pray, Jesus Christ our Lord, amen.

Lord, teach us to pray... Earlier this year I was asked and agreed to pray for and represent our Military members and first responders at the National Day of Prayer service in Greenville. I immediately kicked myself, wondering how I would get through it. I worried and pondered, I prayed. I studied other people's prayers. After a week or so of total anxiety, I decided I should just put ink to paper and began to write down the first words that popped into my head. I tried not to think about what I should say and allow the Holy Spirit to lead me. I wish I could report back to you that my prayer was the clear stand out of all the prayers that were offered that day, but I'm afraid it was more or less average. I received a few "thank you's" and compliments, but I would say my prayer was adequate at best. I used to feel guilty about my under performance in the prayer department until I looked at Jesus' disciples. By the time of our Gospel lesson for today they had been following Jesus for quite a while. Even after all that time sitting at the feet of the very Son of God, they still had to specifically ask to be taught how to pray. They wanted a prayer template they could memorize and recite in the good times and the bad; a prayer that would set them apart as Christ Followers just as the disciples of John the Baptist had their own unique prayer that set them apart. They wanted a go to prayer they could say when they couldn't think of the proper or

appropriate words themselves. How much like them I am! ... I know there are people who are tremendously gifted in prayer and I know others who struggle like me. If you're among those gifted in praying, then I ask you to pray for me and for this congregation and for the entire world. Use your gift to pray constantly. Give thanks, praise God, make intercessions for those who are sick, or in need, pray for everyone and everything.

If you're more like me and have a bit more difficulty getting the words out and then after the "amen" wonder if God even heard you or even cares about your problems, then listen up. The rest of this sermon is for you... Have you ever wondered why you should even try to pray? I mean Jesus said God knows what we need even before we ask. If God already knows, then why do we have to put our needs and wants into words anyway? Add to that the fact that many times I've prayed and prayed for someone who was sick and they just got sicker and some even die. When that happens, I really question the effectiveness of my prayer... How I'd love to have the connection to God Abraham had. Imagine bargaining with God for the lives of an entire city and actually changing God's mind! Wow, that's a powerful prayer! If I got that kind of response when I pray, I'd never question how or why, I'd "just do it," as Nike says in their ads... Sadly, we don't always get the answers we want and sometimes get no answer at all, why persist in doing it at all? I can think of one very good reason to keep on praying. God

commands it! It's not like playing the slot machines at the casinos where you put your money in and keep pulling on the one-armed bandit until you hit the jackpot. We're not enticed to pray until the odds of winning are in your favor. We pray because we are obedient to that command. I looked up in the Bible and we're commanded, encouraged, or taught to pray over 120 times. I think God's trying to get our attention. We pray in order to be in relationship with our creator. We pray to help us articulate our problem in language we can understand. Sometimes I know something isn't right, but I'm not sure how to put a label on it. When I pray about it, I'm able to identify the issue. Only after I put a name on the problem can God begin the process of healing what is broken. It's like being an alcoholic. Unless an alcoholic can admit they have a problem they can't get better. That's the same with us. We live in such a state of sin until we acknowledge our true nature and ask for healing and forgiveness we'll continue to live in darkness.

Still, the problem I and so many other people have with prayer is that we pray without ceasing as commanded and we expect God to then act without ceasing. When that doesn't seem to happen, we wonder if God even heard our prayer. If God heard, then He either couldn't do what we asked or chooses not to. In either case that faulty logic leads a person to conclude our faith wasn't strong enough or we worship a very ineffective God... When we pray expecting God's immediate response our prayers turn into what I call "Gimme Prayers." Lord,

gimme a healing for my friend. Lord gimme a better job with more money. Lord gimme an A on the exam, even though I partied last night instead of studying. The list of gimmies goes on and on... I try to remember to thank God and praise God, but I think most of us move pretty quickly to the gimme part of our prayers...

Luther reminded we offer our concerns to God not because we expect an immediate answer, but rather because we are following God's command to pray. In other words, the one in charge of prayer is God, not us. The reason we pray is not for us to make God give us something or do something for us. Rather, we pray to follow God's command which is given to us to strengthen our relationship with God. Prayer isn't about us convincing God to give us what we need or want, or convincing God to see things from our perspective. It's about God helping us to see things from God's perspective. When we pray, we openly confess our faith, belief, and trust in the Lord God Almighty. In doing so we become the people God wants us to be. We become those who reach out to those affected by violence, oppression, or poverty. We become those who God sends out to heal a broken world.

I remember when I first started volunteering with Helping Hands Ministry in downtown Dayton. Helping Hands was a response to a news story on TV about the plight of the homeless in Dayton who survived under the train trestle bridge near Ludlow Street. The founder of Helping Hands, who I can no longer recall his

name, saw the news broadcast and asked his wife why God would allow such human suffering in the middle of a very severe winter. She turned to him and asked, “What are you going to do about it?” The two packed up every spare blanket they had in the house, found some extra winter coats, and made large amounts of coffee and hot chocolate. From that beginning, more and more people got involved. By the time I got involved some 16 or so years ago there was about 50 or more people who brought hot meals and served the homeless every week



under this train trestle bridge in downtown Dayton (Slide). My guess is we fed over 150 people including

women with small children. When the city tried to close down the Helping Hands we moved into Saint John’s Lutheran Church on Ludlow St, in Dayton. The ministry was also picked up by the First English Lutheran Church in Dayton, whose members feed the homeless every Sunday morning and offer them a special worship service. Both downtown churches were reinvigorated with new energy for mission and it all started with a simple prayer asking, “why God...”

Today, as all the scripture readings are about prayer, it’s our honor to be praying for God to provide a miraculous healing for Lia Powers. Lia, as far as I’m concerned, God already performed the greatest miracle of all by naming and claiming you as God’s own, by washing you with the precious blood of God’s only Son, Jesus Christ, and instilling in you faith and trust in His promise of eternal life.

God has provided for you and we who follow Jesus continue to put our trust in His saving power. Saint Paul said to those following Christ in the Church in Rome, “<sup>7</sup> We do not live to ourselves, and we do not die to ourselves. <sup>8</sup> If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord; so then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's. (Rom. 14:7-8) Lia, you belong to the Lord and the Lord only wants the best for you. The Lord will care for you and you can trust in that...

As for me and my prayer life, I'm already stressing about next year's National Day of Prayer because they asked me to return and pray for the military and first responders again. May we all learn pray unceasingly and never give up or get burned out in our prayers. May we pray, not expecting God to react like a trained puppy, but pray because we are obedient to God's command. When we pray, may God change us into the people God can use to heal what's broken and to bring God's Kingdom a little bit closer to reality. As Luther said, God's Kingdom will come with or without our prayer, but let us pray that God's Kingdom will come to us that we might get to be a part in bringing God's Kingdom here on earth. Amen.