

Importance of Prayer

Sermon by Bob Kuntz

Luke 11:1-4, 9-13; Luke 18:1-8 3-4-07

Last August, I was in the hospital with a high fever. When you lay in that hospital bed, your thinking can be fuzzy. You're worried about stuff – is it cancer, will it hurt? You don't feel like yourself – because of the sickness, drugs, pain. And it's hard to pray.

I was hungry for prayer in the hospital. There wasn't one person who came to visit me that I would have been GLAD that they prayed for me.

This is how I know that Jesus is real, that he rose from the dead: When I was in the hospital, a kind person prayed for me and the peace of God touched me. This is how I know that Christ rose from the dead: I've gone to the altar burdened with guilt and found there the forgiveness of Christ cleansed my heart. This is how I know that Christ rose from the dead: because when we break the bread in communion, a truth from heaven touches me – Jesus is with us, giving us his love and mercy, holding us as his family.

The stained glass window above the altar in this sanctuary has picture of Christ standing at the door of our heart, knocking. He wants to come in, to bring you the great love of God, to pour the joy of heaven into you, to set you free from guilt, sorrow, fear, and death. How would your heart be different if Christ came in today? What burdens would you be freed from if Christ came in today? What people would you forgive if Christ came in today? How would you serve, if Christ came in today?

Beloved, this is prayer – when we open the door to Christ knocking.

My sister, Pat, teaches art at an elementary school. She told me this story. There's a class at our school for kids with severe behavior problems. One fourth grade boy was there because he'd assaulted several kids and teachers. One day in the fall, I was talking with the custodian when that class went by. We talked about that boy and the trouble he caused. The custodian said, 'I pray for that boy.' And I felt ashamed because I'd never thought to pray for him.

Not too long after that, the social worker said that boy needed a job, a responsibility where he could succeed. So they asked if he could become a helper to the custodian – the one who'd been praying for him.

The custodian was afraid. I told her, 'I'll pray for you.' And I did.

That boy turned out to be a great cleaner. He took the job seriously. He found blocks that had been lost under my bookshelves. Every time he did something extra like that, I told him how thankful I was and what a great worker he was.

What I didn't realize is that he was working like that in all the other classrooms. All the teachers were telling him the same thing.

That cleaning job, that custodian's prayers, that help for that boy, changed his life. By fifth grade, he was no longer in the behavior class, he was back in a regular class and doing well.

After she told me this story, my sister said. That custodian was afraid when that boy started working with her. But he didn't hurt her. It wasn't extra work for her. It turned out to be a blessing for her and for him too. And even if it was extra work – if you'd prayed for someone like that and God asked you to pitch in and help – wouldn't it be worth it to do the extra work for the sake of the prize?

Here's some practical tips for prayer.

1. Pray Lord's Prayer every day. Or several times every day. Pray is slowly, thinking about the words, allowing Jesus to speak to your heart through this prayer.
2. Pray quick prayers, "stop for a minute" prayers.
3. Take some Quiet Time for prayer. That's *quiet* time, without TV, radio, I-pods, interruptions, or pressure from the clock. Time when you can be relaxed and listen to God. Time when you can listen to the depths of your soul and pay attention to what is going on in you.
4. Come sit in the sanctuary and pray. This is a holy place. God's peace is here. The touch of God's love is here.
5. Write your prayers down. (Then look at them a week or month later. You will see how God works and touches you through your prayers.)
6. Pray the Psalms. These prayers have the deep cries of our heart. They are prayers that God has prepared for us, so we can put our needs and joys into words.
7. Pray for those who are lost, whose lives are a mess, who need the love and wisdom of Christ.
8. Pray for those you love.
9. If something comes to you in prayer, write it down, tell someone else. This is how we check it out. Sometimes the things we "hear" in prayer are our mind going goofy. But when we tell someone, when we write it down and look at it later, often we can see whether it was something from the zany zone or something from God.

Here's what other churches are doing. Some put up prayer boxes in neighborhood businesses. The sign says, "Leave your prayer requests here and we will pray for you." Some churches have a prayer room that's open 24 hours a day and they let the community know that anyone can come at any time and pray. Some churches have prayer teams that pray for each worship service, that

pray during each worship service. The point is NOT that we follow these churches, but that churches are finding powerful ways to open the door to Christ. We can too.

The **Celebration Church Fellowship, Tacoma, Washington** is a church made up mostly of former convicts and addicts. Their membership promises include:

- commitment to daily Bible reading and prayer;
- minimum giving of a tithe,
- weekly reconciliation with anyone with whom you are unreconciled,
- minimum involvement of 2 hours of Christian service each week.

Celebration Church has raised over \$6,000.00 for alcohol treatment.

Some of the members sensed God's leading to start a home for unwed, pregnant teenagers. A nine-bedroom home in the community went on the market. The house last sold for \$102,000. The church could not afford that. In an act that seemed foolish to some, the church offered \$40,000. The seller counter-offered for \$35,000.

*A logger from a nearby town was dyslexic and could not read anything. The church members laid hands on him and prayed that God would heal him. Most of the members, the pastor admits, forgot about that prayer. But then the man stood in front of the church and read flawlessly from the Bible. (Thom S. Rainer, *Giant Awakenings*, pp. 70-72, edited).*

Beloved, prayer is our calling. It's what we have to offer people. We can't fix their lives. We don't know how to solve their problems. But we can pray for them. Even more importantly, we can pray with them.

It doesn't take years of training to learn to pray. We learn to pray by being in worship, by growing in faith, and most of all, by praying.

How does the world know Jesus loves them? Because we love them. Because we pray for them.

Come, Holy Spirit, come. Lord Jesus, bless all those who come to you, looking to grow in prayer. Let their ears be open to hear you. Inspire their words and fill their prayers with your words. Bless them to know your love for them, and for others. Give them prayers and help them see you at work in those prayers. We ask it through Christ. Amen.