

The man, in his 80s, was anxious and freighted. His wife was hospitalized. Her surgery went well but the recovery was taking much longer than anticipated and thus so was their separation. As we sat together, I asked if prayer gave him strength? Followed by could we say a prayer together? He replied, I have never been very good at prayer and implicit in his statement was that he did not know how to pray or that his prayers would be answered. His responses caught me by surprise as I would categorize him as a man of faith. His response reminded me how many people, representing all walks of life, struggle with prayer. Don't misunderstand; we all struggle with prayer at periods in our lives. Some refer to this as dry prayer or the dark night of the soul. It can be a deeply distressing time and the words I offer are persistent at your prayers and find a prayer partner.

As a hospital chaplain I offer spoken prayers numerous instances each day. I also say silent prayers multiple times as I ask for God's guidance and give thanks for God's mercy and grace. Working in spiritual care departments at two suburban hospitals I encounter the diversity of humanity. Among a wide of range of people, the most common question I receive as minister and chaplain concerns prayer: I don't know how to pray, I am not good at prayer, what is the formula for prayer, do prayers work and why aren't my prayers being answered.

"Lord, teach us to pray". Throughout Luke and especially in today's scripture, we are invited to see a bigger picture, to see the context in which the prayer occurs. We should remember that the request of the disciple, after all, is not "Teach us a prayer," but is instead, "Teach us to pray," and there is a difference. The prayer in today's scripture serves as an affirmation of the worldview Jesus teaches, if we ask, seek, and knock, we will surely receive and find, and the door will be opened which makes possible the prayer's fulfilment through The Holy Spirit.

“Lord teach us to pray”. The beginning of our Gospel passage is a request that each of us deeply understands. We want to know how to pray. We want to have a deep and abiding prayer life that connects us with God and makes our lives richer and fuller. We want to find a way to make our prayers more meaningful and more worthy. Many people think there is a specific formula and they don't get it right so that is why they perceive their prayers are not being answered. Prayer is not complicated, we humans at times make it more difficult than it should and thus we avoid praying. As always, we can rely upon Jesus to provide guidance. In this Luke passage Jesus answers this fundamental question of the life of faith - how to pray – by giving us the Lord's Prayer as a way to remember the essence of praying to God. There are only 4 things to remember. When you pray say, **hallowed be your name**, translated into today's language this means praise and thank God. **Give us our daily bread**. Bread is the substance of life thus we pray for help through our daily life be it guidance and assistance in a relationship, in our health or other areas weighing on our soul. **Forgive us our sins** – is simply that – forgive us our bad behavior, nasty thoughts and other transgressions. **Forgive everyone indebted to me** – let us be generous to others in thought, word and action. Praise God, name your daily struggle, seek forgiveness and ask for guidance and strength in being generous to others. It is as easy as that. Simply put prayer is having an intimate conversation with God, opening our hearts and being honest. It is praising God, asking for help and forgiveness and being generous to those we encounter. There is no right or wrong way, no correct formula, time of day, posture or location. Some of my best conversation with God occur in the car on the way to the hospital. Prayer is an intimate conversation and relationship with God. **As with any relationship we have to work at it and put time into it**. God does not need our prayers; we do. God does not have to be invited into our lives; we just have to open our eyes to the always presence of God. Jesus teaches us to

look for God's will in all things and to make ourselves open to that will. We don't pray to change God's mind. We pray to know it and to change our own hearts and minds to live in harmony with God.

“Lord teach us to pray”. The prayer that Jesus taught us to pray has nothing to do with knowing the right words, or the correct posture or location. Prayer is a mystery and as such prayer is about our faith journey and is really more about persistence. Jesus continues in this passage by reminding us to keep asking, keep seeking, and keep knocking, to persist in our relationship with God. Jesus knows that God is already in motion, that God has already answered every prayer, and that God has already opened every door that needs to be opened and is standing at the threshold inviting us to enter through prayer. Persistence in prayer is hard for us in our “quick” culture where speed and efficiency are everything, where we press a button and stuff gets delivered to your door. Prayer is not quick. Prayer is not efficient. Communion with God isn't won in fifteen seconds.

In the middle of our morning passage is the parable of the friend. This friend, who is asked for 3 loaves of bread, at midnight no less, says don't bother me for the door has been locked and my children are with me in bed. The parable encourages us, if we have something to ask of God, we need to ask boldly. Humility in prayer should not lead us to hold back with reserved and measured requests. “The friend,” is persistent and this is what Jesus' parable proposes as the sort of prayer we ought to offer: ceaseless, demanding, forceful. The man in the parable who responds to his persistent friend does so not out of friendship but “because of his persistence he will get up and give him whatever he needs.” We are not friends who annoy God, but persistence in prayer must become our practice. Persistence indicates that we know to petition God without ceasing because only God can meet our deepest needs. This

persistence also reflects our struggle with prayer. It is about keeping at it, trusting, just doing it and not being too polite. The one who persists in prayer knows God through the Holy Spirit will attend to our needs. God wants to hear from us, God wants to hear from you, for when we are asking for all the things we need from God, it means we desire the gift of God's goodness above all else. The working of prayer through the Holy Spirit is a mystery and the answer is provided on God's timeline not ours. Many times, the working of prayers is hard to understand, and this is where our faith comes into play, along with our prayer partners and our faith communities that support us in our journey. There are many things I do not understand about prayer, there are two things however I believe passionately. God wants us to pray. More than that, God wants us to ask for anything. Our petitions to God, Jesus say, should be bold, audacious, honest and persistent.

A few months ago, a chaplain colleague and prayer partner reached out to me for guidance. For a year she had been carrying around a hurt, a pain deep in her soul regarding a person she use to work with. She wanted to move past the pain which would allow for a continued relationship with this person. As our conversation was drawing to a close, I asked to pray with her. My parting words to her were to continue to pray on the issue. Just this past week I received a note from my chaplain colleague and prayer partner and to quote "my prayers have been answered. The nugget of bitterness in my heart is gone and it a wonderful freeing experience." Her prayer was answered after months of persistent praying. My chaplain colleague can attest that it was in persistence in which her prayers were answered.

"Lord teach us to pray". F.B. Meyer, the author of the great little book, *The Secret of Guidance* said, "The great tragedy of life is not unanswered prayer, but un-offered prayer." One of my most difficult encounters is when someone tells me they have stopped praying as previous

prayers have not been answered or that God has ignored their prayers. I truly believe that God answers all prayers on God's timeline. I have also learned that when prayers are answered it is usually not how we envision. Jesus invites EVERYONE to ask, search, and knock. No one is left out here—he offers the invitation to you, me, and all people. The implication of his offer here is that HE DOES ANSWER EVERYONE who asks, searches, and knocks. The answer may be: 'yes,' 'no,' 'wait,' or perhaps even 'you're asking for the wrong things; you're searching in the wrong places; you're knocking on the wrong doors.' Such answers are all necessary and the best for us at the time; given the nature of the prayers we pray and the circumstances in which we pray them. This is why Jesus instructs us to be persistent in praying – keep asking, don't stop searching continue with your knocking and trust in God's gracious care.

“Lord teach us to pray.” We are not merely called to pray; we are called to a life of prayerfulness, a life in which every breath we take and every move we make is attuned to the breath and movement of God that is already a part of us. And in that way, prayer comes with responsibility. As we enter that realm of God, we, too, are called to be a part of creating a world of justice and peace, of forgiveness, of providing bread for the hungry, and a shunning of those things that temptingly pull us away from where we're called to. As I suggested to the man of 80 years and my chaplain colleague, praise God, name your daily struggle, ask for forgiveness and for strength in being generous to others. And know that

God protects

God provides comfort

God forgives us

God hears our prayers