

Learning to Take Time to Pray

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Lord, Teach Us to Pray

Luke 11:1-13

It seems like over these last several months I keep repeating the same things to you as I've done more traveling than normal. Marlene and I recently got done doing a few conferences in England. Over the last couple of weeks we were in London and Manchester doing several conferences on renewal and evangelism. Just a brief report for those of you who are interested. I know that we certainly felt sustained by many of your prayers, so I feel obligated to share with you a little bit. Especially those of you who prayed for us and asked God's blessing on the meetings.

The conferences were actually some of the best that I've ever done. One of the things that is really remarkable about the church in England, at least as I have gotten to see God's activity over the last ten years in the U.K., is that while the church remains fairly small, about 8 or 9% of the public goes to church each week. What part of the church that does go is really alive? The church is activated. Those who are attending have been greatly impacted by the force of renewal work. We are seeing more and more people called into world missions. Some of you know that the U.K. was the engine of missionary activity in the 19th century. There is something about the English, their adventurous spirit, once they get renewed and activated they take the message all over the world. That's what is happening.

We saw great signs of God's power. Somebody asked me, "How come these things are always happening when you go elsewhere. How come we're not seeing more of God's power here?" I think there really is something to the old definition of an expert. An expert is someone who lives more than 50 miles away. It seems that there is a higher level of expectation when somebody comes in from the outside than when we see the same person over and over again.

In addition, I really believe that we don't take enough time here to allow God to do all that God wants to do. You know the conferences I've been participating in are conferences that last three or four days. And we have the opportunity to minister to people in various sessions for an hour or an hour and a half after the meetings are over. Now, week-by-week when we allow people to come forward here, God really begins to touch folks. I get an opportunity to watch it from the stage every week. But the Holy Spirit engages about 30 - 40% of the folks who come up. They begin to show signs of God's presence on them and with them. But because of schedules and so on, after 10 minutes we have to say, "God bless you! Have a great week!" There is nothing wrong with that in that we do have schedules to keep, and the kids have to be picked up so we don't have vast quantities of time to stay at church.

But when we can take more than five or ten minutes, whether it is at our monthly healing services, or in kinship groups, or occasional conferences or

renewal services that we would do here, I really believe that we will see many of the things that I get to see in other settings.

Why do we get to see more away from here? Well, there is something to being an expert. There is something to people's faith and expectation after they have worshipped for 40 minutes and when they are in a conference setting. There is something, however, to just setting aside time to be with God and to watch God work.

That is what I want to talk about today - setting aside time to watch God work. I have been doing a series on prayer. In recent weeks we were looking at the Lord's Prayer. Today we come to the section on the petitions that begin, "Give us this day our daily bread."

But this series on prayer really is not going to go anywhere; it is not going to bear any fruit, unless it results in concrete behavioral change in many of our lives that we actually listen to the teaching and take time to pray.

The point of my teaching each week is not to have you at the end say, "that was good. That was funny. That was entertaining." I appreciate your encouragements. I am very grateful for those of you who drop me notes. I am most grateful for those notes and comments, which tell me that as a result of something that you are hearing from God's word, you are changing. The point of the word of God and the preached messages is to cause us to change, to get us to do something that we otherwise were not doing, or to stop doing something, to work something in our will so that we choose to occupy ourselves differently than we otherwise would have.

I know that the great enemy of prayer is our busyness. We simply are not convinced that it makes sense for us to reorder our priorities so that we take time daily to pray. What with the demands of work, and the hectic nature of our family lives, and our own activism, many of us, even those of us who have been Christians for many years, need to work some concrete behavioral changes in our lives so that we take time to pray – more than the one minute shoot up prayer or the thanks before a meal. See I think God will fill whatever sized container we present him with. If we give him a thimble, he'll fill that. If we give him a bucket, he'll fill that. If we give him a 500-gallon drum, he'll fill that.

And as I said at the outset, even in my recent experience at these conferences, what I've seen is that when we make time for God, when we take time to allow Him to work, I get to see extraordinary things happen. I have called today's talk, "Learning to take time to pray." If you have a Bible I want you to open to Luke Chapter 11.

One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he finished, one of his disciples said to him, "*Lord, Teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples.*" He said to them, "*When you pray, say: 'Father, hallowed be you name, your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread. Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us. and lead us not into temptation.'*"

Then he said to them, "*Suppose one of you has a friend, and he goes to him at midnight and says, 'Friend, lend me three loaves of bread, because a friend of mine on a journey has come to me, and I have nothing to set before him.'*"

"Then the one inside answers, 'Don't bother me. The door is already locked, and my children are with me in bed. I can't get up and give you anything.' I tell you, though he will not get up and give him the bread because he is his friend, yet because of the man's persistence he will get up and give him as much as he needs.

"So I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened.

"Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"

The series title that I have been using is taken from Luke 11:1 where the disciples come to Jesus and say, "Lord, teach us to pray." Teach us to pray. And what Jesus does in these 13 verses is he gives the disciples lessons in prayer. Andrew Murray, a great South African pastor, wrote a book a number of years ago called, *With Christ In the School of Prayer*. Many people have talked about Christ taking us through various lessons in prayer or used the model of the schoolroom, moving us from grade school to middle school to high school to college to graduate school in our progress in prayer.

It seems to me that one of the lessons that Christ wants us to learn is that it makes sense to take time with God in prayer. Now we have been going through the Lord's Prayer and what we have here in Luke is an abbreviated summary or version of the Lord's Prayer. Several weeks ago we covered the first three petitions, 'Our Father, in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in Heaven.' And we learned that Jesus wants us in prayer to begin with God, to lift up our eyes and focus on God. We now turn our attention to these last three petitions, 'Give us this day our daily bread, forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from the evil one!

Now these three petitions - give us this day our daily bread, forgive us, and lead us not into temptation but deliver us from the evil one - these three petitions cover the whole of our lives. Our daily bread speaks to us about the needs of our body. Forgiving us speaks to us about the needs of our emotions, our souls. Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one, speaks to us about our spirits, our spiritual needs. What Jesus is communicating to us is that prayer covers our whole person - body, soul and spirit. Prayer not only covers our whole person, but it covers all of our times, present, past and future. Think about this with me. We pray, 'Give us this day our daily bread.' In other words, 'God help me in this moment, at the present.'

And then our thoughts turn to the past and past failures and past problems. After we say, 'God, help me with the present', we say, 'God, cleanse me from the past.' That is why we pray, 'Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.' Deal not only with my present Lord, but also with my past.

And then our thoughts turn, 'Well, what about the future? And all the problems that await me in the future? All the traps? All my fears?' And so we pray, "And Lord, lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one."

So prayer covers our whole being - body, soul, and spirit- and it covers all of our times, as the Psalmist said, "Our times are in your hand." It covers present, past and future. Why is it that we don't take time to pray? Because I don't think that we Christians have learned to pray about everything and we are to pray all the time. There is a dualism that has been in the church almost from the beginning, which says to us that if you are going to pray to God that you mainly concentrate on spiritual matters. Pray about revival and pray about spiritual gifts, and evangelism, but matters of the body, physical matters, our daily bread, which primarily speaks to us about the needs of our body. We are not convinced that we should take mundane physical matters to God. I am so glad that Jesus starts the petitions regarding ourselves with something physical, bread, not something regarding our spirits.

Now I think that our daily bread can be extended to cover all that is necessary to sustain life beyond our physical body, to cover all that is necessary, but at the very least it covers what is physical. I believe we will take time to pray when we realize that we ought to pray about illnesses. We ought to pray for a baby, if we want to have a baby. To pray for a spouse if we want to get married. To pray about bodily habits that we struggle with, habits of smoking, and drinking, and sexuality. To pray about weight loss and exercise.

Many of us don't take time to pray because prayer is always thought of as things dealing with spiritual matters. Jesus says pray for your daily bread and all of your time. Not only this, but daily bread speaks to me about praying about the little things of life. Consider the order of this prayer because it really is remarkable. You know after we get done focusing on God and His kingdom, praying these lofty prayers about God's name, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven, after we get done with these lofty thoughts Jesus immediately brings us back to earth with the most mundane of needs and says, "Oh yeah, don't forget to pray, 'give us this day our daily bread.'" You know what that communicates to me? That God is not only concerned with the high and lofty things, but with the little things of life. Isaiah 57: 15 says, *"This is what the high and lofty One says, he who lives forever, whose name is holy: 'I dwell, or I live, in a high and holy place, but also with him who is contrite and lowly in spirit'."*

God does care about the huge things, revival, national policy, the upcoming election, but he cares about the little things as well, lost keys, parking places, and of job pressures. There's an old joke that reminds me of our relationship with God. A husband walks around like some strutting peacock saying, "You know I'm the head of my family! I make all the BIG decisions in my household. I decide what our family policy is going to be on ozone depletion and what the view of our family is going to be regarding Bosnia and how the family is going to approach the federal budget deficit. My wife takes care of the little things like where we are going to spend our money, where we live, and what we do in the evenings and how we are going to raise our kids. I take care of the big things she

takes care of the little things.” I think sometimes we treat God like the husband in that joke. Yeah, God takes care of the big things, the things that are irrelevant. Things that don’t affect our lives. And we go ahead without prayer about all the little things. Everything physical, our money, all of our relationships and even our bills. We need to learn to pray about our whole lives body, soul, and spirit. And we need to learn to pray about the little things of life.

One more thought here before I move on. I said a bit earlier that our times are in the hands of God. These three petitions concern present, past and future. When you get a handle on your time being in the hands of God, I believe it will help you to not be frustrated during those times when you are forced to wait.

It seems to me like a lot of my life is spent waiting. Waiting on line in a grocery store, waiting in a traffic jam, waiting for somebody in an appointment, waiting in a doctor’s office. How many of you are frustrated at times when you are forced to wait? How ‘bout if we just committed ourselves to pray whenever we are in the position of waiting?

You know, day-by-day, you may have six or seven times when you are just waiting. You’re standing in the checkout line – the woman in front of you has just run up a bill of \$184, and she realizes that she only has \$11.50 in her wallet, and now she’s trying to decide which items to return to the shelf. We can seethe, we can mutter under our breath, we can sink into self-pity and say, “Why do I always have to pick this line and this woman?” Or we can say my times are in your hands, Lord – present, past and future. And I want to take this moment to redirect my heart to you. In those waiting times, pray for divine appointments. If you’ve got something for me Lord, right now, right here, I’m available. Somebody you want me to talk to? Something you want me to see? Some lesson you want me to learn? I’m available – I’m here.

We need to learn the lesson about praying about everything and praying about the little things, and if we want to learn to take time with God, we need to learn to pray daily. Jesus says “give us this day our daily bread.”

We struggle with setting aside time with God. One of the things that I really believe trips us up is the thought that we are to pray daily. We must learn the lesson of setting time aside daily to pray. Now why does Jesus call us to ask God for our daily bread – this day’s supply of bread? Well, I believe that God wants us to live in daily dependence on Him -- to require us to go to Him day after day about a matter. This frustrates us doesn’t it? We want not a loaf of bread – we want God to provide us with a dump truck of bread.

If it was up to us, we would change the prayer from “give us this day our daily bread” to “give us this day the Wonder Bread Factory – Give us this day some mechanism that will churn out thousands and thousands of loaves of bread at our convenience so that we wouldn’t have to regularly, repeatedly go to you God or wait for you to open your hand to meet this need – Give us the Wonder Bread Factory Lord! And back it up with a few large insurance policies so that if our factory burns down, we can rebuild it quickly again without your assistance.”

In your heart of hearts, isn’t that what you really want for yourself? The Wonder Bread Factory, rather than little bits of grace in the moment? Many of us are frustrated by the daily-ness of our persistent needs. Why must I go to you

God over and over, day by day? Especially those of us who are struggling to overcome life-controlling habits. Why must it be, in the words of A.A. “one day at time”? Why doesn’t God just dump the whole provision of grace and get me over this problem once and for all. Daily bread? -- I want at least a year’s supply, or ten year’s supply. This 24-hour period doesn’t seem like enough.

Let me share with you why God requires us to go to Him daily. Why he doesn’t give us the Wonder Bread Factory. Because if the truth be known, if the Lord gave me the Wonder Bread Factory, or gave it to you, He probably wouldn’t hear from us for a very long time. I’m convinced that I am driven to God and you are driven to God by our persistent sense of weakness and need. It is this continual sense of “Oh God, I can’t do what you are asking me to do. I can’t handle this – I’m not sufficient for this healing. I’m not as strong as this habit. Lord, there is too much month left at the end of my money. (You know that one right – too much month left at the end of your money?). Why do you think God allows the pressures to continue in your life and makes you come to Him daily? Because almighty God is interested in you. We think that our persistent weakness is an indication that God doesn’t care about us. It’s absolutely the reverse. God allows us to have a dime’s worth of spirituality and then calls us to million dollar tasks to drive us into relationship with Himself! God allows the pressures to mount, God allows us to meet with inconvenient people at inconvenient times who say inconvenient things, so that we might draw near to Him daily.

Weakness in my life is a grace, a gift. Because without my weaknesses, I don’t know that I really would take time to be with God just to be with Him. I would rather it was otherwise, I would rather that I would wake up in the middle of the night and just want to fellowship with God. It’s my desperation that drives me to Him. We need to learn to pray daily. You know that there is picture in the Old Testament that I think is very helpful – I’m not going to have you turn there, but in Exodus 16, God provided the children of Israel as they went through the desert with manna just for the day. Children of Israel, just like us, wanted to hoard up the bread so that they wouldn’t have to go back and gather it the next day – they wanted to hoard up a week’s supply -- get the Wonder Bread Factory so they wouldn’t have to look to God tomorrow. What occurred was the manna rotted - got maggots in it.

Just one more thought. For those of us who struggle with what sense does it make to pray for our daily bread when we do have a year’s supply of bread. You know in the West, there are very few of us that are on the edge of existence. There are very few of us who have such desperate needs that we need to ask God, you know, give us a loaf of bread, otherwise we’ll starve. And at times, it is hard to get in touch with our needs. At times it is difficult to see our desperation. What sense does it make to pray for daily bread for those of us who have a nice looking house, and two cars, and health insurance and life insurance, and mortgage insurance, and disability insurance, and unemployment insurance and social security and an IRA and a 401-K plan, and other pension plans? How do we make sense of this?

Well I do believe that there is something to the notion of praying for our daily bread. We don't just pray for "my" daily bread – that's not we take time to pray – it's not just "God give me "my" daily bread – just me and my wife and my kid makes three." It's not "just us four, no more, Acts 2:4 for our house Lord." "My clothes, my kids, my car, my life, my business." We pray "our" daily bread. And I do believe that this prayer is a call for those of us who have more to get linked up with those of us who have less. I believe that this prayer is a prayer for the strong to get hooked up with the weak. So we can begin to pray this sincerely! Some of us need to develop relationships with people at our food pantry. Some of us need to develop relationships with people who are chronically ill. Some of us need to develop relationships with missionaries or someone through our AIDS ministry. We are not talking about writing a check – it's an easy matter to learn the discipline to tithing. Once you have that down, it's automatic, it's easy. I know for some of you it is hard right now – but once you've nailed that, it's easy. It's another matter to invest yourself personally, relationally so that you feel the desperation of somebody else who doesn't have very much. That you are praying with all your heart "Give us this day OUR daily bread," and you don't mean just yours, but you mean this other person's. You are really burdened about their needs, and their baby, and their healing, and their food.

When we learn to take time to pray, when we learn not to resent the daily-ness of our needs – but see it as the gift of God, a gift that keeps us in dependence on Him, in relationship to Him. I believe that we will take time to pray when we see that God is our friend – not our accuser or a reluctant stranger. Jesus tells this little story to speak to us about the character of God in His desire to reveal himself to us as a friend. In verse 5, *"He says suppose one of you has a friend and he goes to him at midnight and says friend, lend me three loaves of bread because a friend of mine on a journey has come to me and I have nothing to set before him."* The one inside answers *"don't bother me, the door is already locked, and my children are with me in bed. I can't get up and give you anything."* I tell though he will not get up and give him the bread, yet because of the man's boldness (some of us say because of the man's persistence – some would say because of his shamelessness) he will get up and give him as much as he needs.

Now, let's retrace this parable and apply it to us learning to take time to pray. The story concerns a man who goes to a friend at night asking for several loaves of bread on the behalf of another friend. The reason that he arrives at midnight is because he has had a surprise visitor come to his house at night. This would have made a lot of sense in the ancient Near East since many people traveled at night to avoid the heat of the desert sun. It was not an unusual thing for somebody to drop by in the middle of the night. And ancient Near Eastern rules of hospitality required that no matter when someone came over, you were to feed them and to care for them and provide for them. It was a shocking lack of hospitality to not offer a guest something to eat. Apparently this poor host was surprised by the friend dropping in on him and had to quickly run out to a neighbor and ask for some help. Jesus pictures a house that he goes to where like all other ancient Near-Eastern houses it was probably one room. They used

to eat in the back of the house – maybe on a table back there some sort of oven. And in the front of the house, the people slept – parents and children – on mats that were laid out on the floor. Often they would bring in their cattle – cows, goats – to protect their cattle from wild animals or theft. And all of these people and animals would be bedded down. And the door would be bolted shut. Jesus pictures a man repeatedly knocking on the door, who waits for an answer and thinks, “well my neighbor probably didn’t hear me – I probably ought to knock louder.” The neighbor inside of course doesn’t want the family roused – the kids up and crying the animals getting up and mooing. He tries to shoo his neighbor away, but the neighbor keeps knocking, and finally, he grants him his request.

Now there is some debate about the neighbor’s motive for granting the request. It turns on the meaning of word in verse 8 whether it is the man’s persistence – the Greek word could possibly be translated persistence – it likely means shamelessness. And then depending on how you translate the verse, it is either the shamelessness of the man who is knocking, that he is just so bold about it, so unabashed, or the shamelessness of the man inside, which is more the case, that is the man inside was much more concerned about his reputation in the community. He was concerned that he would gain a reputation in the community as being a stingy man – you never turned away someone who was asking for bread, especially a neighbor. So Jesus was teaching in this parable that the friend inside the house, to save his reputation, gives his neighbor what he is asking. Let me share with the wrong interpretation of this parable. The wrong interpretation of this parable is God is like the sleepy neighbor in his house, bedded down for the night. He is reluctant to wake up from his sleep and reluctant to give you what you need. But if you keep banging on the door, you will eventually overcome God’s reluctance to give you your request.

Why don’t we take time to pray? Because in our heart of hearts we believe that God is reluctant to give us what we want. We don’t feel like we have the energy or the faith to pry the request out of the clinched fist of God, or the energy to rouse God from His sleep. The point of Jesus’ parable can be first of all understood as you see this word “friend” appear several times in the text. Suppose one of you has a friend (verse 5) who says, “friend, lend me three loaves” -- a “friend” of mine has come. And in verse 8, because he is his “friend”. Jesus is telling us that in prayer, you are not approaching a sleepy, reluctant neighbor, who has the door locked. You are approaching a friend. This is one of my favorite images of Christ when I pray. I take walks to pray and I picture myself talking with a close friend, someone who accepts me, whose company I enjoy. There are three friends in this story – the friend in need, the friend who prays, and the friend who has the bread. And when we pray, we are approaching a friend who has the bread. In this story, and also in a similar story in Luke 18, the story of the unjust judge, who is repeatedly petitioned by a widow, Jesus is attempting to draw a contrast between the attitude of somebody who won’t give, but finally gives in and our Father in heaven, your friend who you always have access to, to whom the door is never locked, who is always available to you at your time of need.

You say why, ultimately, does God meet our needs? While Jesus is showing a sharp contrast between the sleepy neighbor and our available friend in heaven, there is a point of overlap, a point of similarity. God meets our need because He is a friend, and because like that neighbor in the house, He wants to preserve His reputation.

We went over this several weeks ago when we learned about the petition "Hallowed be thy name." God cares about His reputation. He wants to be known to you, and He wants to reveal Himself to others as somebody who cares, as somebody who loves, as somebody who's generous, who keeps his promises, who tells the truth. If God says that He will supply us with our daily bread, He will! If God says in His Word that he will supply us with all of our needs according to His riches in Christ Jesus, He will meet all of our needs! If God says that we can cast all of our cares upon Him, He means that we can cast all of our cares upon Him.

So He works to preserve His character, and He is not only willing to give us what we need, He's not only our friend, but He's able. This neighbor in the house has bread. The reason why the one man went to that neighbor is because he knew he didn't have bread, but his neighbor did. The reason why you should go to God is because God has bread in His cupboards and you and I need bread. He has holiness, and we need holiness. He has power to heal, and we need to get healed. He has the ability to reconcile relationships, and we have broken relationships. We will take more time to pray when we know that God is a friend who is able to meet our needs.

There is one last matter that we need to consider if we are going to take time to pray, and that is the issue of the Biblical call to persist in prayer. Jesus says to us in verse 9 to ask and it will be given, seek and you will find, knock and the door will be opened. Literally, He says ask, and keep on asking; seek and keep on seeking; knock and keep on knocking. Now I hope that you have gotten the point that the reason that God calls us to persist in prayer, to go to Him again and again, is not to overcome His reluctance to give us something. We go to God again and again, daily, daily, daily, one day at a time, moment by moment, not to persuade God to do something that He is unwilling to do, not to overcome His resistance.

I have already tried to establish in the portion on daily prayer that God wants fellowship with us. On your outlines, I have a little rhyme that pastors have used for some time in teaching on prayer. Bill Hybels, the Willow Creek pastor, put in his book (that I would strongly recommend along with Ol Halsby's book that many of you have picked up at the bookstore), Bill Hybels has a book that we are carrying in the bookstore called *Too Busy Not to Pray*. The rhyme goes this way: If the request is wrong, God says no. If you are wrong, God says grow. If the timing is wrong, God says slow. If the request is right, you are right, and the timing is right, God says go.

Why are we called to persist in prayer? Because often, we are asking for the wrong thing, and it is not evident to us as we are praying for something that this would actually be bad for us. We are asking, "Oh God, Oh God, give me this particular job." In the moment, it appears to us very cruel of God to have our

mailbox filled with rejection letters. We say if God answered prayer, He surely would have given me a particular job I just interviewed for. Here I have been persisting in prayer, and God did not open up the job that I wanted Him to give.

I went through that for five months. Shortly after law school, I was fired from a law firm that I was working for, and they put out the word around town that I was somebody that shouldn't be hired. And even though I did well in law school, and there were other things that might have inclined law firms to hire me, I was meeting with a very odd kind of response from various law firms. My mailbox was daily filled with rejection letters. I was doing everything I could to get a job, and I was praying. And I honestly took the counsel of people who said, "your job is to get a job." I was out there 40 hours a week, going around looking for work. And there was no work, and more and more rejections, and I got so discouraged, and I thought, "God, you are just not answering my prayers." The fact is that God had something better for me, I didn't know my request was wrong. I thought I knew what was best for me. And certainly during that period of time, He was breaking me of my love of money and my love of success. He was teaching me about the fact that my daily bread really did come from Him.

You know I want to say a word to those of you who have been successful your whole lives. There really was in my life a misunderstanding of the fact that God was the one that was providing for me. I just grew up having a lot of success – in school, and with friends, even in the view of my parents and my teachers, I enjoyed success. And while I would have said that God was my provider, the one who gave me money and gave me work, I did not know that at a deep level, at an intimate level, until I could not find work.

I believe that sometimes God causes us to persist and to have to wait on getting answers to prayers not only because our request is wrong – but perhaps because we are wrong. Husbands, wives, do you think that perhaps if you have been praying for a change in your spouse for many years, and nothing is happening, that perhaps the Lord might want to deal with something in you? Is there something in you that might need to die? Could it be that God wants to cause something in you to die? It could be as simple as making an idol out of your spouse. Or a character trait that needs to change in you. Perhaps it is your judgment or unforgiveness or controlling attitude or nagging. I just wonder when we are not getting answers and yet we are persisting in prayer, if there isn't another possibility other than God's reluctance to give us what we seek.

Of course, sometimes God is simply saying "Not yet." "Slow down!" "Now is not the time." "The calling isn't ripe yet; you're not ready." And we certainly understand that, we who are parents. You know when your child says, "Gee mom, it's November 15th, and can't I open up at least two of my Christmas presents?" We say "Not yet." When your daughter comes in and says, "Look, I'm nine years old, why can't I date already?" Parents, you ought to be saying "Not yet!" "Well, after all, I am 12 and all of my other friends are watching R-rated movies," – "No, not yet – not at your age!" "Can I place another hole in my body?" -- "No, not yet – when you are off on your own, you'll have that opportunity to make all kinds of holes in your body, but not here, not now, not yet!"

There is at bottom, though, a call in the Bible to keep asking, keep seeking, and keep knocking. As God desires to work in us a deeper fellowship with Him – a change in our own lives, a trust in His provision, waiting on His timing. You know the answer is always sweeter and more precious when we've waited and prayed over it repeatedly. I want you to hear this one truth, and that is that the Bible never says what many evangelicals say that it says, "Just make your requests once to God, and then thank Him and don't bring up the issue again." I'm so grateful for the stream of witnesses that have gone before us who kept praying about a matter. Some of you are in the Kingdom of God today because a Grandmother, or a Mother, or a friend kept praying for you. While you were hard, they kept praying that God would rescue you. Others of you have had habits broken in your life – addictions by continual prayer. Others of you have had people faithfully pray you through illnesses, or for your children.

Let me share a word, by the way, about "soaking prayer." There's a frequent critique about healing ministry in which people say "Well, you know, you never see in the Bible Jesus praying for people more than once – if healing was real today, you ought to be able to do it just like Jesus – instantly. You know this business that you are going to go back and pray over and over – that's not Biblical. Where do we see that?" It is possible to see it in Jesus praying for a blind man twice in Mark Chapter 8. Whatever you make of that – those two prayers – Jesus prayed for somebody more than once.

But my understanding of why we engage in what we call "soaking prayer" in the Vineyard, where we pray for somebody about an illness – let's say a chronic condition such as arthritis or blindness, cancer, scoliosis – why we pray more than once and why Jesus didn't is simply rooted in the fact that Jesus had more of the life of God in Him than we do! Why did Jesus pray once and it worked and I pray once and a person doesn't get instantly healed? It isn't hard for me to figure out! Jesus worked in high anointing and high faith, and I work in low anointing and low faith. And frankly, I'm not really troubled by that, except to have it inspire to me that I have to keep on praying.

It is interesting to me that certain Christians have no problem with the notion that evangelism is a process – everybody that we talk to and talk with about Jesus doesn't instantly get converted – we have a clear understanding that evangelism takes place in a person over a period of time. Sometimes we are the first link in the chain, sometimes we are the middle link, and sometimes we get the joy of being the last link. We know that different people sow; different people water, and different people reap. But there seems to be an anti-supernatural bias that says the same thing couldn't be true in healing. Let me share with you it is true! There are times that you will initiate the process of healing, other people will carry it along, and still others will see the person get healed. And I believe that if God is doing something when you pray for healing, if He comes, and the person gets a little bit of relief, or there is a little bit of change, that should be a strong encouragement to go back again and get prayer or be the pray-er.

In fact, in your bulletins, on those sign-up sheets, we are taking sign-ups for those of you who would be interested in getting involved in being in soaking prayer. Some of you love to pray for the sick. And it occasionally is the case that

you will see someone instantly changed. But our experience here at the Vineyard is that a lot of things are just a matter of soaking a person in prayer. And if I could use a crude illustration of the healing of cancer, sometimes healing comes by repeated doses of prayer therapy. Just like we have to repeat doses of radiation, there will be repeated doses of prayer therapy as God comes and comes and comes in our low anointing and our low wattage and our low power, but He comes. He comes and gradually brings healing.

Why does it make sense to take time with God? My final reason is because He is your Father. Not only your friend, as in the parable, but your Father wants to give you what you ask for. You know there are few things more exciting than answers to prayer. Here we are, creatures on earth asking King Almighty God for various things and then to see God work – it's positively addicting. You pray, God answers. Let's pray