

Introduction

I don't have children but I do have six God children, who are a joy and a delight. One of things I love is the special relationship with a Godchild. I am not a parent, grand parent or aunt to them but I am a special person who is on their side who cares for them, who loves to see them happy and who prays for them regularly

When they were younger, one of them in particular, had a trust that I would care for her and provide. I well remember many occasions when she would simply tell me what she wanted and wait expectantly for my response. She had faith that I wouldn't ignore her perceived need and that if I could I would provide. Such trust was very humbling and at times challenging. But it was also a spur to me to do my best for her. Jesus tells us that we can trust God to provide for us and that we need to bring our requests to him trusting that he will hear and respond

When I first became a Christian in my mid- teens I was so excited by my faith and the difference that knowing Jesus had made to my life that I started to pray for my family to become Christians as well. I have prayed for that every day since. After ten years my father made a Christian commitment - and I was astonished! I was speechless with surprise; Which made me ask myself some questions about my attitude to prayer and why I bothered to do it.

Here I was faithfully and regularly praying for something - and yet when that prayer was answered, even after some time, I was astonished. If I didn't really expect God to answer me, why had I prayed so regularly? If I hadn't expected him to answer me why had I prayed at all? What were my reasons for praying and what were my expectations of the God who tells us he wants to communicate with us and wants us to ask him for the things we need?

I had to radically assess my prayer life and to think very hard about the answers to those questions..... and came to the conclusion that the main reason why I didn't experience

Colossians 2:6-15**Luke 11:1-13**

powerful answers to my prayer was because I did it expecting so little. Our Gospel passage contains some of Jesus' most important teaching on prayer and it was studying this passage that radically altered my expectations of God and also altered the results of my prayer life. As my attitude to prayer changed I began to see God working powerfully in response to my needs and my requests.

So what does it teach us about prayer?

Prayer is an act of dependence

When we pray we are putting our concerns and needs in God's hands and asking for his help and guidance. It is an act of dependence and trust. We are expressing the fact that we believe that God not only has the ability to respond but that he can also be depended on to respond with our best interests in mind and to give us what we need.

Prayer is primarily about relationship

This dependence springs out of our relationship with our Heavenly father. When the disciples asked Jesus how they should pray he gave them a pattern to follow and then gave them some teaching about their attitudes and expectations as they pray. The first part of the pattern focuses our attention upon who exactly we are praying to. "Our Father in heaven"

We are praying to a loving heavenly father, who because he is our father knows us intimately, and understands our deepest needs. Because he is our heavenly father he can be trusted to supply those needs and to care for us. Unlike our earthly fathers we know that he loves us perfectly and is entirely trustworthy. Because he is our heavenly father he has the power to supply our needs, he is not just willing to care for us he is also entirely able, he has the power and the resources to respond - whatever our requests may be.

The quality of our prayer – persistent

It is precisely because we are praying to a loving father that Jesus encourages us to pray persistently. He wants us to be

Colossians 2:6-15**Luke 11:1-13**

bold in the way we come to God. You need to be bold to knock on somebody's door in the middle of the night to ask for bread for a visitor. But it is this confident expectancy that Jesus wants us to have as we come in prayer to our heavenly father. Most of us in the situation Jesus describes, even honour bound to provide for our visitor's need, as you would be in eastern hospitality, might hesitate in approaching a neighbour for help. We might think it too much to ask, and hesitate to disturb them. Yet Jesus says that it is precisely that quality of confident persistence which will produce results.

So let's think more deeply about these three things

An act of dependence

How often when we have a need do we hesitate to bring it to God, either because we don't want to bother him with our small needs, or because we doubt his willingness and ability to answer the door to us, and respond.

I have already mentioned my God daughter. She has two sisters and a brother, and in a large family, it is important that she has somebody special to whom she is special, who will listen to her concerns respond specially to her needs. She has always known exactly how to get her own way with me and it stems partly from a total faith that I have her best interest at heart and an astonishing certainty that I will be able to do what she wants. (I used to dread the day when I may have had to let her down) but when she led me to a certain dress in a shop, or came to me with something that needed fixing, and said "Angie this is exactly what I need" my heart melted and I found myself doing what I could to respond. The confident assurance of a child usually gets results from those they ask for help and it is this attitude that Jesus tells us we need to have when we come to God in prayer. A complete dependence and trust in someone who is known and loved.

It's all about relationship

When we come to God we are coming to him as our loving heavenly father, who has created us, understands us perfectly and provides for our deepest needs. He is a loving Father. He

Colossians 2:6-15**Luke 11:1-13**

loves us so much he sent his son to die for us so that we could have a close relationship with him. He is a powerful father, who created the world by his very word and who has power over life and death – so we can trust him to deliver. He is a holy Father who calls us to be holy as well.

We must be persistent – not afraid to keep asking

Jesus encourages us to be cheeky in prayer and he makes us a promise: Ask and you will receive, seek and you will find, knock and the door will be opened to you. What exactly does he mean by this because we all know that when we pray we do not receive everything that we ask for - though it amazes me the things that God has given me when I've prayed, amazing spiritual answers, but also solidly practical things like a bicycle, a car, an all-expenses paid holiday. But other things I have asked for - like good health, have not as yet entirely been granted. So what does Jesus mean by this promise?

We need to go back to the pattern he gives us for praying to understand this promise fully. As we have focused on who we are praying to we then are told to pray two things: first that God's name will be honoured and secondly that his kingdom will be established here on earth and his will be done. In everything we pray these two things have to be a consideration. God's name is holy, he is a mighty awesome God and when we pray in his name and, that is on his behalf, we need to ask will this thing I am asking for result in God's name being honoured? Will this request bring honour to God?

The second guideline we need to follow is to that we should be praying for the establishment of God's kingdom here on earth. Will this prayer further God's rule in my life, in our church, in this village? Will this prayer enable God to be obeyed and his will to be done? In some ways this is an easy prayer to pray because we know that it is what God wants as well. But in other ways it can be a very difficult prayer because God's will may not necessarily be what we want and when we pray it we

Colossians 2:6-15**Luke 11:1-13**

may be putting ourselves in a position where we need to bend to God's will

If we bear these things in mind we can be sure that when we ask we will receive, when we seek we will find and when we knock it will be opened, because this is basically about deeper relationship with God. He is encouraging us to look for him and his will and to knock on the door that opens to a deeper relationship with him.

This is clear because the most important part of the whole passage comes towards the end. Where Jesus is giving the example of how even our earthly fathers know how to give us good things when we ask for them.

They will not give us snakes or scorpions that harm us and in the same way our loving heavenly father when we ask will give us really good things. "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"

God knows what we need

Sometimes even seemingly mercenary prayers bring honour to God because he is the father who cares for his children and when we trust him he will provide for all our needs. He gave me a car because I had given up a good job and a steady income to train for the ministry and because I was ill I needed transport. God knew that and he wanted to teach me that I could trust him to provide for me in every circumstance. So when I came to him and said, "Lord what I really need is a car" he listened and gave me a Ford Cortina. If I'd come saying that what I really needed was a Ferrari the response might have been different. We must bring our needs to God and leave the answer to him.

We might not always find asking for God's will to be done easy – he might give us things we are not sure we want. . - One of my closest friends said to me once I'm not praying very much at the moment because I am afraid that if I talk to God he may

Colossians 2:6-15**Luke 11:1-13**

ask me to become a vicar's wifeand I don't want to. (Her husband was thinking about being ordained) When we pray the way Jesus tells us to we need to be willing to listen to God and to respond to his demands of us.

Ask, Seek, Knock. God has all his resources at our disposal and he promises us that when we ask him he will fill us with his Spirit to renew us, to strengthen us, to enable us to obey him and to serve him, to provide for us spiritually and materially. Will we have the courage to pray as he asks us to and more than that will we expect him to respond?