

The Great Reversal - Teach Us How to Pray
NH – March 20, 2022
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Luke 11: 1-11 NLT

Opening: Richard Foster, Spiritual Formation author, writes, in his book on prayer:

“The truth of the matter is, we all come to prayer with a tangled mass of motives – altruistic and selfish, merciful and hateful, loving and bitter....this side of eternity we will never unravel the good from the bad, the pure from the impure.

But what I have come to see is that God is big enough to receive us with all our mixture. We do not have to be bright, or pure, or filled with faith, or anything.

This is what grace means, and not only are we saved by grace, we live by it ... And we pray by it.” I don’t know about you, but that frees me up a bit to once again hear another sermon on prayer.

In today’s passage, Jesus’ disciples say to him, “teach us to pray.” They are traveling with Jesus, on what John calls their road trip to Jerusalem. The disciples were the age of teenagers. In raising my own two sons some of our best conversations happened on road trips to and from activities. Granted this was before they had smart phones; those road trips, short or long, provided the time and space to hear what they were thinking and processing. This first century road trip – no cell phones and taken by foot provided that time as well. Jesus, often

pressed by the crowds, the demands of ministry, the challenge of religious bullies, had more time to hear their questions. _____ is going to come and read today's passage. At the end she/he will say This is the Word of the Lord and we will respond: Thanks be to God.

Public Reading:

Luke 11: 1-11 NLT

Once Jesus was in a certain place praying. As he finished, one of his disciples came to him and said, "Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples."

² Jesus said, "This is how you should pray:^[a]

"Father, may your name be kept holy.

May your Kingdom come soon.

³ Give us each day the food we need,^[b]

⁴ and forgive us our sins,

as we forgive those who sin against us.

And don't let us yield to temptation.^[c]"

⁵ Then, teaching them more about prayer, he used this story: "Suppose you went to a friend's house at midnight, wanting to borrow three loaves of bread. You say to him, ⁶ 'A friend of mine has just arrived for a visit, and I have nothing for him to eat.' ⁷ And suppose he calls out from his bedroom, 'Don't bother me. The door is locked for the night, and my family and I are all in bed. I can't help you.' ⁸ But I tell you this—though he won't do it for friendship's sake, if you keep knocking long enough, he will get up and give you whatever you need because of your shameless persistence.^[d]

⁹ "And so I tell you, keep on asking, and you will receive what you ask for. Keep on seeking, and you will find. Keep on knocking, and the door will be opened to you. ¹⁰ For everyone who asks, receives. Everyone who seeks, finds. And to everyone who knocks, the door will be opened.

¹¹ "You fathers—if your children ask^[e] for a fish, do you give them a snake instead? ¹² Or if they ask for an egg, do you give them a scorpion? Of course not! ¹³ So if you sinful

people know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him.”

Prayer is Personal and Relational

One of my favorite feel good movies is *You've Got Mail* with Tom Hanks and Meg Ryan. Tom Hanks plays Joe Fox whose family owns a big box book store gobbling up every little privately owned store in its path - such as, the “Just Around the Corner” book store owned by Meg Ryan’s character, Kathleen Kelly. The two meet over email, in a chat room, where everyone is anonymous. He finds out who she is but she doesn’t know who he is. He begins to give her business advice and makes the statement from the God Father – It’s not personal, it’s business. She reacts: Of course it’s personal, it is personal to me. It matters to me. What is it if it isn’t personal? One of Jesus’ lesson’s about prayer is that it is personal. If it matters to us it matters to God. We sometimes keep prayer at a distance, tucked away into the box in our brain or heart labeled religion. But Jesus reveals this wonderful truth that to God prayer is personal. Eugene Petersen writes, “Jesus is our primary revelation that God is personal, extravagantly personal. When we deal with God, we are not dealing with a spiritual principle, a religious idea, an ethical cause, or a mystical feeling. We are dealing personally with Jesus, who is dealing personally with us. We can say with Kathleen Kelly, if Jesus isn’t personal what is he, who is he? Jesus had a living body and soul, he ate bread and fish,

drank water and wine. He spoke and listened, he had a personal name as common by the way, in his culture as Bob and Amy are to us. He wept, got angry, he touched people and received touch. He was at home in his body and with his family and he is at home with our body and families. We don't have to pretend to be religious, or stand apart from our bodily needs or our messy families - Jesus' family doubted his sanity at times.

Why do you suppose after 3 years of being with Jesus, seeing the miracles, the exhaustion, the laughter, the joy, the tears, after 3 years of being on this wild ride the one thing they ask Jesus is to teach them to pray? They don't ask for a course on theology. They don't ask for a course in strategic planning for bringing in the kingdom, nor do they petition for a course on ethics and better behavior. Eugene Peterson writes, "Somehow they have come to the realization that following Jesus does not mean imitating what he does nor repeating what he says. It means cultivating a relationship with God...They want to work out of the God-personal, God-relational, God love-fueled center they see Jesus living from. They recognize for Jesus prayer isn't religion, it is personal.

Framework for Prayer:

Jesus begins with a short frame work of what we call the Lord's prayer – ask that the Father reveal himself to the world and set things right (hallowed be thy name

thy kingdom come), ask God to meet your daily, physical needs – {give us bread every day – make provision for us) Keep us forgiven and forgiving (what we receive from God is to flow through us to others, isn't it?) and protect us from ourselves and from the evil one. (yes, we have a very real enemy and sometimes we are our own worst enemy.) While this prayer has served the world well since it came out of the mouth of Jesus, it really wasn't offered a rote prayer, but a framework to build on. To help connect with it as a framework to build with, I offer you the example from pastor and author Brian Zahnd, from his book *Water to Wine*. Hopefully an usher handed it to you earlier, if not grab one on your way out today. (*Jess has already made this, it is not a surprise to her*) Your assignment for the week, I'm giving it to you early, is to write your own expanded version, make it personal to our times and to your own life. If it is something you would like to share email me a copy.

Literary Tool at work here - compare/contrast:

Jesus continues his teaching with a parable, an explanation and an illustration. He employs a teaching or literary tool called compare and contrast. He looks at something very familiar to us, first human friendship and hospitality in the parable and in then parenting in the illustration to help us understand something about the God we pray to.

We see this tool used often in the Bible. The Proverbs are filled with simple compare and contrasts: “Whoever belittles his neighbor lacks sense, but a man of understanding remains silent.” Proverbs 11:12, Anxiety in a man’s heart weighs him down, but a good word makes him glad. 12:25. From the Sermon on the Mount: “Look at the lilies of the field and how they grow. They don’t work or make their clothing, yet Solomon in all his glory was not dressed as beautifully as they are.” We might refer to as simple comparisons and the parables a bit more complex, sometimes Jesus had to explain their meaning to the disciples.

Parable – The Reluctant Friend

Here in Luke 11 Jesus says, suppose you go to a friend’s house at midnight wanting to borrow bread. Unexpected company has shown up at your house and, you are caught with nothing to offer your guest. (For this to make sense to us, we have to Remember Jesus is speaking to a culture that values hospitality above practically everything else) He continues, You pound on your friend’s door explaining your desperate need and the friend says what? “Go away! Don’t bother me. We are all asleep.” Maybe today it would be like getting a phone call at midnight discovering there was an emergency with one of your kids, you run out to the garage and find you have a flat tire with no tools to change it quickly. You run next door to your neighbor/friend bang on the door explaining your

situation – now What kind of friend would say “go away”? Steve and Judi if I pounded on your door some night explaining a rather desperate situation you would get up and help me – I know you would. Many of you would – Gary and Becky, Stuart and Jo, Jerry and Susan, you would help me out because you know me, we have a friendship – I’m not a stranger to you. Jesus continues the parable, even if this friend won’t help you for friendship’s sake, if you keep at it long enough, he is going to get up because you are persistent. *What are we supposed to learn* about prayer from this parable? That we are a bother to God, an inconvenience? That if we bug God long enough he will get out of bed reluctantly and help us? No. Jesus is setting up the first example of compare and contrast. The disciples, having observed Jesus, know that God is not like the reluctant friend in the parable, but rather a friend who sticks closer than a brother, a friend who is an ever present help in time of trouble. Those are OT lessons from their faith but they have seen it lived out up close and personal in their relationship with Jesus.

The tool of compare and contrast at this stage in the teaching is implied, and as yet incomplete. Is persistence in prayer one of the lessons? Sure it is. Jesus tells them, ask, seek, and knock – you will be heard, you will find, the door will be opened. The tense for all three verbs is present imperative which means to ask

and keep on asking, seek, and keep on seeking, knock and keep on. I don't know about you but if I asked, and knocked at a friend's door who made it clear they really didn't want to help me, I would never go to their house again. Some in this room have stopped knocking because we see God as the reluctant friend who considers us an inconvenience. If we pull the parable out of the full teaching, that can happen. Let's keep going because

Life Illustration: Fallible parents still give good gifts to our children

Jesus brings the comparison contrast he is making into clear focus with his last illustration. He starts with a rhetorical question – What father among you, what mother among you, if your child asks you for a fish will provide a snake, or asks for an egg, would give this child of yours a scorpion? None of you! So if you sinful people, some translations use the word, evil, if you evil people know how to give good gifts to your children.....how much more so, your heavenly Father. The reluctant friend still gives what is needed, the fallible parent chooses good gifts rather than bad – and God's character and attitude are in direct contrast to both. This is not a teaching on what human attitude gets God attention – as if God won't pay attention unless we harass him. No the parable and the illustration is a contrast between the reluctant man inside the house and the God who invites us in, between fallible fathers and our infallible God.

Conclusion: Prayer

While these stories hit their mark contrasting God to fair-weather friends and fallible parents, that he is not like either, for some of us we are left with questions. God may at times appear as the non-complying friend, too tired or preoccupied to answer our knock. Or maybe you even feel like you asked for the egg, the fish, the everyday provision and received a snake, a scorpion – you lost your job, your spouse left, you didn't get the medical report you prayed for.

In Matthew's version of this same teaching, he writes, if you being evil know how to give good gifts to your children how much more will your heavenly father give good gifts to those who ask him!

Luke on the other hand finishes the sentence with: "how much more will your heavenly father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him." That feels like a curve ball. Holy Spirit? Who is talking about the Holy Spirit? We've been talking about prayer, personal needs, we've talked about asking, seeking, knocking, we've talked about fish and snakes, eggs and scorpions. Come on Luke – we kind of like Matthew's good gifts language better! I wonder if God provided 4 gospels so we could choose which one we like best? No? Ok, probably not – so what is Luke doing bringing the Holy Spirit into the mix?

In the OT when God was giving out good gifts, parcels of prime land when dividing the promised land among the tribes of Israel, saying, “ok the tribe of Benjamin will get this portion of Land, Judah’s tribe this beautiful piece here, Zebulan over here in this nice, fertile plane, Joseph, your sons and daughters will be delighted along this river, and so on handing out their incredible inheritance, their good gifts in this new land. Last but not least, to the Tribe of Levites, the holy priests, the one’s closest to God doing his work, God turned to them and said, Levites, you will not receive any land, for I will be your inheritance. He said to Abraham: I will be your portion; your very great reward. Could this Holy Spirit reference be something similar? Land is a helpful thing to own, good gifts are great, but are they any comparison to the gift of God in our lives? Jesus instructs us to ask for good gifts to meet our needs, makes clear in many passages that God is the giver of good gifts, but they are limited. All the things we pray so desperately for will come to an end – our homes, our jobs, our bodily life on earth. The promise of God, the promise of the Holy Spirit is on a whole different plane of provision. The Spirit will be with us when we are in need or when we have plenty. When we are filled with joy or devastated by loss. Psalm 34 tells us God is close to the broken-hearted, he rescues those whose spirits are crushed. Some of you know that when we bury our babies, or our beloved spouse, it is not our beautiful house that

comforts us, it is not our bank account that brings us peace. It is a personal relationship with the God of eternity, who loves us beyond reason, beyond compare, the friend who sticks closer than a brother, that matters in life's hardest moments. It is a promise of relationship that will not end. It is the promise to all of us the presence of the living God. In the OT the promise was just to the priests. But Jesus came, lived, died, was resurrected and ascended into heaven that we all might have the greatest gift – that of the Holy Spirit, the presence of God, the only one who meets us personally and provides what nothing else can provide. We will not always get the particular thing we desperately want – the healing, the job, the restored relationship, but we always, always get God when we ask. Jesus says ask and don't stop, seek the face of God and you will find, knock and the door will be flung open for you. Prayer is personal and relational. If it matters to you, it matters to God. But we are so limited in knowing the big picture of this earthly saga – Jesus paints the picture of a father, of a friend we can trust to have this world's best interest, our best interest at the deepest places of his heart.

The Lord's Table:

Perhaps there is nothing that makes more clear how personal and relational God is, than watching the Son first laying down all that is his in heaven, and then laying

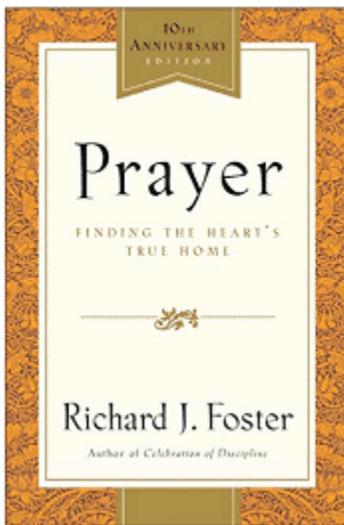
down all that is his on earth, in order to give to us all the best of life and existence now and for eternity. On the night Jesus was betrayed.....

Worship

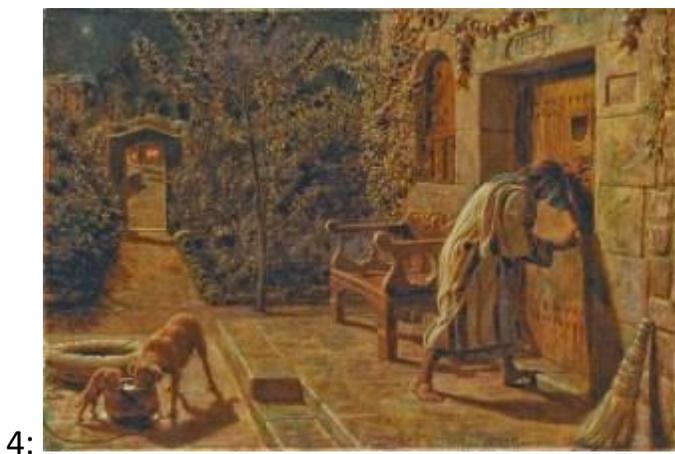
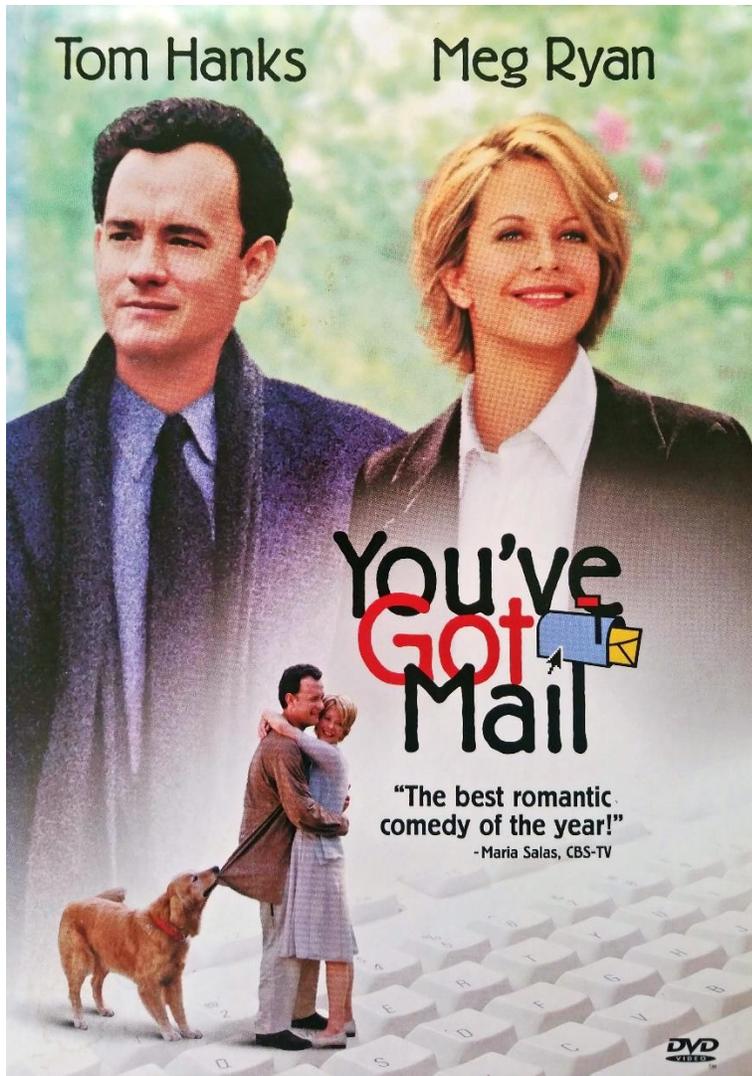
Benediction

To take this message into your week, to remember that prayer is personal and relational, use the prayer bookmark as a framework of your own.

Slide One: Book – Prayer (Richard Foster)



2: You've Got Mail



Or



5.

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(can we use? If not something else showing our delight in giving our kids gifts.)