

Looking Upward: With God is the Impossible, Possible?

Psalm 61, Matthew 7:7-11

Luke 1:37 NRSV

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7 "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. 8 For everyone who asks, receives. Everyone who seeks, finds. And to everyone who knocks, the door will be opened.

9 "You parents—if your children ask for a loaf of bread, do you give them a stone instead? 10 Or if they ask for a fish, do you give them a snake? Of course not! 11 So if you sinful people 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 1:37 NRSV

³⁷ For nothing will be impossible with God."

PRAY.

How many of you pray regularly? How many of you believe God hears/answers prayer?

A few years ago, a Dutch artist Johan van der Dong decided God needed a telephone number. So, he arranged for God to have cell phone number, in order to demonstrate that God was "available anywhere and anytime."

"In the past you would go to a church to say a prayer," Johan said in an interview, "and now [this is an] opportunity to just make a phone call and say your prayer in a modern way."

It seems a lot of people appreciate the opportunity Johan has afforded them with his "divine hotline." Within one week, over 1,000 people left God a message.

On one hand, it's encouraging that over 1,000 people made the effort to connect to God in the first week the line was available. On the other hand, you have to wonder how people will feel once the "connection" is made.

You see, when you call the number Johan has set up for God, this is what you will hear: "This is the voice of God. I am not able to speak to you at the moment, but please leave a message."

That doesn't exactly convey the idea of a God who is "available anywhere and anytime," does it? (Reuters, "Leave God a message at his Dutch answering service," www.reuters.com (3-2-09))

I think at one time or another, all of us have wished for a direct, hot-line to God: not only one where we can make our requests known, but where we would receive a direct, answer in real time. Right? How many of you would sign up for that? God-on-speed-dial? Why not?

Sounds good, but prayer does not work like that, at least in my experience.

In fact, it seems to me that Jesus is encouraging us –his disciples then and now- to be persistent in prayer. The correct translation of the verbs are as present participles, that is, it means an ongoing action in the present:

"Keep on asking...Keep on seeking...Keep on knocking."

Prayer is, more precisely, about a growing and ongoing relationship with a living God. In other words, prayer is a process, more than a transaction. Prayer is *not* submitting a request to a celestial Santa Claus, or the equivalent of placing an online order with Amazon, knowing it will be delivered to one's door within 48 hours, more or less!

Imagine falling in love...the desire of the lovers is to be in constant communication...to express their love for one another, and to serve or meet the desires of the loved one.

In a similar way, prayer is a daring dialogue with the One who loves us more than we can imagine. And if we return that love, we also want to express our love; we want to please our loved One, and serve our Beloved.

God's word to us is a great place to begin to "listen" and to hear God's desires for us. God's will *is not* a great mystery but is clearly revealed in the pages of this book! However if we don't read it, it is rather like setting out on a journey without first studying the map, and knowing our destination, etc.

In the metaphor Jesus uses of a human parent-child relationship, it is obvious that even as flawed people, as parents we want the best for our children (no matter their age or ours!) No parent, if asked for bread, would give our child a stone!

Just recently our almost two year old grandson discovered popsicles. Caden loves popsicles! And, he's learned to ask for them, so politely! And so persistently! But every parent (and grandparent) knows that too many popsicles, or popsicles served at the wrong time can ruin an appetite for more nourishing food. Is it hard to say "NO?" Sometimes it is! But we make the hard choice because we know better than an almost two year old.

Jesus assures us...*"How much more"* then does God our heavenly father want to give us what we need and ask for! The point? God is exceedingly generous and desires to give good gifts to all of God's children/believers.

Let it be said that God is ***not*** a reluctant giver who must be coerced and cajoled into giving us what we want and need. Quite the contrary! So why does Jesus put these three imperatives together, which seem to reinforce action on our part: Keep on asking...Keep on seeking...Keep on knocking?

(Ah, so glad you asked!)

As noted a moment ago, not every occasion is one in which a parent should grant the child's wish. You and I trust that as parents we know when to say YES and when to say NO. Not every request is one which is age appropriate. Not every request is made with all the information necessary on the part of the child, but we as adults can see the pitfalls.

While an earthly parent has limited resources, God has limitless resources from which to draw and grant one's request. However, God knows better

than we, and may respond in different ways to our asking /seeking/knocking.

How are we to ask? According to God's will. Where is that revealed? In the pages of scripture. To ask for one's supporters to give sacrificially so that I might have a 54 million dollar jet (when I already have several) is NOT to ask according to God's will! In a reversal of how prayer usually works, at least in my experience and according to my understanding of what Jesus taught...Jesse Duplantis posted a video "... to his website last week,[in which] he asked his followers for help funding the aircraft, *noting that God told him he should have a jet -- but not pay for it.*

Let me suggest here that God will not instruct us to do something that is not in accordance with God's revealed will in the Word. While purchasing a personal jet is beyond the scope of scripture, it would seem to me that God would be better honored if one is going to spend 54 Million dollars, that it be spent on housing the homeless, feeding the hungry, and finding a cure to cancer or better treatments for mental illness! Those items line up much more with the values of God's Kingdom that Jesus describes in the Sermon on the Mount.

Duplantis says the three-engine plane would allow his ministry to fly "anywhere in the world in one stop," reducing fuel costs while maintaining a global reach.

(<https://www.cbsnews.com/news/jesse-duplantis-evangelist-private-jet-jesus-wouldnt-be-riding-donkey-2018-05-29/>)

Is it any wonder that people are skeptical at best, and cynical and unbelieving at worst, if this is the way Christian leaders behave? It's my understanding that he already has three personal jets but they require refueling more often!

When it comes to the Autopsy of a Deceased Church, the whole point of prayer is that some churches miss the point!

Prayer becomes perfunctory, mere book ends to meetings (i.e., prayer is said at the beginning and the end); Prayer is said for those in need, but rather routinely. When we pray prayers of healing, do we really expect that God will heal?

Is prayer like breathing for us as the body of Christ?

Is it essential to our daily life and our corporate life?

Corrie Ten Boom asked it this way: "Is prayer your spare tire or your steering wheel?" Do we pray daily for guidance trusting that God will indeed show us the way, and give us the words to say? OR is prayer our last resort, only when things start going sideways and we become aware that we are not in control. Do we use prayer the way we would call 911—in emergencies only? I hope we don't...

However, to put a finer point on it: How often and when do we pray together not only for CPC but for our community? And when we pray, do we really expect God to show up? Do we expect God to answer/respond? I wonder.

Prayer was **not** incidental to the life of the New Testament Church. We read in Acts of the devotion of the disciples "to the apostles' teaching, to fellowship (koinonia), to the breaking of bread, and to prayers." (Acts 2:42)

The word translated "devotion" means "with intensity and deliberation". The implication is that *they had a fervent, intense, passion for prayer. They had no doubt that God was listening and responding. A failure to pray was tantamount to a failure to breathe. (p. 67, T Rainer)*

I once walked with a dear lady through her final days of life, as she was dying of emphysema. It was excruciating to sit by her side. Even with an oxygen tank by her side, she struggled for each and every breath! (Meanwhile, her husband would simply go outside to continue his smoking!)

When my friend Laura breathed her last, she died. When we as a church pray less and less, pray with less focus, less passion, less intensity, this could be a warning sign that we'd best pay attention to!

Friends, I wonder...If we truly believed that God is listening, would our prayers change? Would the content, frequency, or intensity of our prayers change? Would we keep on asking, seeking, and knocking?

If Calvary is going to *not simply survive, but thrive* as a church for another 5 years or more, let alone 125 years—we need to take this seriously!

Please be praying daily for Cindy and me as your pastors, for our elders and deacons, and for one another. Together we need to be asking God for an external focus of ministry in Enumclaw. The elders have begun seeking out leaders in our community and knocking on their doors. We are asking them about the trends they are observing and the needs that are out there, as well as how CPC might address them.

Then we need to prayerfully consider not only the needs, but who we are as a people. What gifts and inclinations has God given us? What needs are we

suited to meet? We cannot do it all, but we can make a difference, as God guides us. And yes, the needs can be overwhelming.

Perhaps you've heard of the boy walking on the beach. An overnight storm had washed ashore countless starfish. When the tide receded, leaving them stranded, exposed, out of the water. A young boy was picking them up one at a time, and tossing them out into the surf. An observant grownup said to him: "Son, there are so many that are stranded here! There is no way that you'll be able to make a difference, the odds are overwhelming."

As the boy picked up yet another and tossed it out into the surf, he replied: "I made a difference for *that* one!"

Look around this morning. We are not alone, we are in this together. Furthermore, God, the infinite creator—sustainer—redeemer—is ready and willing to listen to our prayers...to guide and direct us...to empower us to make that difference for women, men, children and youth, in our community...IF we will passionately engage together in asking...seeking, and knocking.

I'm going to give you a homework assignment: Pray the prayer of commitment that is printed in the bulletin, each and every day this week. Ask God to guide and direct each one of us at CPC –individually and corporately—first, toward deeper times of prayer, and then, toward new and specific are(s) of service in and to this community, that will make a life-changing difference to the lives that are touched.

Stay tuned for opportunities for us to discuss and pray together about CPC's future!

Let us pray...