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Bush Hill Presbyterian Church  
Alexandria, VA 22310  
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Hosea 1:2–10  
Luke 11:1–13

## PRAYER Q&A

I did not grow up saying *The Lord's Prayer*, at least not regularly in church. Sure, like most baby boomers in the south, we said the "Our Father..." prayer in a huddle before football games; and depending on what grade I was in, we even said it every day in school after the *Pledge of Allegiance*. It's interesting that I probably learned to repeat the words of the most intimate religious liturgies from the stern voice of a school principal over the scratchy speaker in a public school classroom. The significance of this fact is that just like you, I probably never asked the hard questions about *The Lord's Prayer*. I just learned it without understanding its importance.

What do we think has happened when we ask for a person to be cured of a disease, and they die anyway? What do we really believe when we pray for a deep relationship with another person, and yet we remain alone and hurting? What do we think is happening when we pray for a new church building to become a reality, and year after year we wait? You pick the "for instance," and ably today's teaching from Luke, how does it play out in your faith?

Too often we know the easy answers, the answers which are less than biblical. If I ask, seek, and knock, and then nothing happens, I must be doing it wrong. Ever come up short and blame the *how* or *why* or *when* of your prayer? Or my least favorite: God must be upset with me or in need of something or someone I love.

Go ahead. If we all haven't, we should go ahead and say it out loud: *Why doesn't God do what we ask?* I will admit, I don't answer the question without asking, "Is that the point of what Jesus is teaching—of what *The Lord's Prayer* teaches?"

Two things – two truths – two fresh understandings: *The Lord's Prayer* is more about to whom we pray and less about how we pray. To be sure, the parable which follows *The Lord's Prayer* in Luke is about *how*, but *The Lord's Prayer* itself is about *who*. To whom we are praying? A loving Father who wants us to pray, an all powerful heavenly Parent.

This inviting God is all about relationships. This Kingdom God is all about intimacy, and about daily attention to details and forgiveness and reconciliation. This living Lord wants to walk with us through dangerous, risky endeavors.

Victoria Rebeck, a contributor to the magazine, *The Church Ministry*, writes "Praying The Lord's Prayer with an open heart is an act of humble discipleship. The Lord's Prayer is powerful and even dangerous ..." Praying the Lord's Prayer will compromise the sense of security we fumble to maintain within our own power."

So prayer is first about who and then it is about how honest and genuine we are willing to be with God. How much are we willing to be in love with God? This approach to prayer is completely different than trying to get things from God.

Do we hear Jesus? “My Father, whose name is too holy to speak and whose countenance is too terrible to behold, invites us to make known all our needs honestly.” What kind of relationship would it be if we couldn’t be honest with one another?

The disciples wanted an explanation of how. Instead, Jesus answers, “To whom are we praying? And what kind of relationship do we need? A completely intimate relationship—a relationship where nothing is hidden, nothing is avoided out of shame. That’s the only *how* I see in these passages.

Shamelessly ask. Not ask and keep on asking, but ask with confidence. Shamelessly, like a child of a capable and loving parent!

In the book *Traveling Movies*, Ann Lemont describes the only two prayers we need are some version of “Help me! Help me! Help me!” and “Thank you! Thank you! Thank you!”

Amen.