

“You Asked For It – Prayer”

Luke 11:1-13

My grandfather would never believe this! My phone – we call it a smart phone. My grandfather would never believe – he could never understand all that it is capable of. My grandfather was born in 1898. You know – no, I guess you don’t. Let me remind you:

- The Spanish-American war was on, lasting 109 days
- The first American made car was sold
- The first Pepsi-Cola was sold
- Norman Vincent Peale and C.S. Lewis were born
- 5 years before the Wright brothers first flight
- And there were only 45 states (OK, NM, AZ, AK, HI)

Just in my lifetime alone the advance of communication technology has been astounding. As a boy, I can remember phones with an operator that listened in and party lines with neighbors that listened in. I remember a distinct combination of rings to identify a call for you and phone numbers that began with a word prefix.

I remember the rotary dial phones that were slowly replaced by touch tone phones. I remember no longer needing the 20 foot phone cord because we went to a cordless phone. And then I remember my first mobile phone plugged into my car cigarette lighter with a magnetic antenna attached to the roof or the trunk of the car.

These mobile phones became known as cell phones. In many third world nations they are skipping past installing regular phone lines and going right to cell phones because the technology has become so easily accessible and affordable. I remember being in Ethiopia a few years ago on a mission trip and offering my cell phone to Chelsea Jahn who had been there for a number of weeks and had not talked to her parents in a while. My cell phone was set up to make and receive international calls so Chelsea used it to call home from Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

Today this is called a smart phone. It is a smart phone that even not so technologically smart people can use. I can make or receive calls anywhere in the world. I can send and receive text messages. I can send and receive e-mails with attachments that I can download. I can surf the internet checking all of my favorite websites. It has my schedule that I sync with the calendar on my computer. It has all of the contact on my computer with all of the information for each. It can be used as a calculator. I can download games to play. This particular phone doesn't but my last phone included a camera that was also capable of taking videos. This phone has a media player for all of my favorite music and videos and pictures. It has a place for a memory card that can hold gigabytes of music and movies. It has maps of the world and I can add a GPS feature so that I will always know exactly where I am, identifying my longitude and latitude and altitude. And, I use it as my alarm each morning.

Those of you my age and older may be somewhat impressed. Some are in awe and some are even fearful of the technology. But ... many of the young adults here heard me run through the capabilities of my smart phone and they yawn and say, "So what's your point?" They are not at all impressed. They grew up with cell phones. It's all they have ever known. Many today have never known the world of party lines and rotary dial phones.

There are great advantages with today's communication technology. We have easier than ever contact with family and friends. I happen to have Verizon cell phone service which means that I have free phone calls to anyone else using Verizon. I can make phone calls, send text messages, even send and receive e-mails all day long. Ellen and I don't have a regular phone line at our house just to save on budget. We use only our cell phones.

These smart phones are just amazing. I can reach any of my friends at any time. I've got all of their phone numbers right here. Why I think I'm going to make a phone call right now to see if my friend remembered to turn off his cell phone before church!

You see, in spite of all of these technological advances there are some disadvantages too. One is forgetting to turn off your phone and having it ring at an awkward time. But there are other disadvantages too. Like dead zones – those locations with no coverage where calls get dropped.

Don't you hate it when that happens? And batteries ... why can't they make a phone with batteries that can last a week? And then there is the cell phone battery charger ... have you ever gone on a trip and forgotten to take your charger with you only to have your battery go dead and totally lose all use of your phone?

I think we all have to agree that there are some awesome communication possibilities offered by today's technology. Imagine trying to explain this to my grandfather born in 1898!

As awesome as this technology is, it doesn't at all compare to the possibilities of communication available to each of us with God Himself. God has no dead zones; He can hear us at any time from anywhere. When we talk with God there are no cords or batteries or chargers required; we can have a heart to heart connection from anywhere at any time for as long as we would like. And with God we don't have to keep track of minutes; we have unlimited calling. And with unlimited calling, God's circuits are never overloaded. As amazing as it sounds, we can all call at once and get through immediately. This amazing communication that each of us can have with God, with:

- Unlimited minutes
- Any time access
- From anywhere
- With no dead zones anywhere in the world
- No batteries or chargers required

... This is what we call prayer.

God invites us to talk with Him at any time as often as we would like for as long as we would like.

Have you ever stopped to ask yourself who the people are that you enjoy praying with – and why? I have had some friends that I prayed with that seemed to bring me right into the presence of God. It was as if they had a level of communication and understanding with God that I hadn't yet reached. How many of us wouldn't like to know how to have a better prayer life? Most of

us would. Let's go to the Word of God. What does the Bible say to us about prayer? Luke 11:1-13 (Read)

I love the portrait painted for us in Vs 1. It is a portrait of watching Jesus pray. One day – it is as if the writer can specifically remember this day. It stands out in his memory. One day Jesus was praying – I wonder if the disciples ever had a door prize as the multitudes came to the water front or the hill side to listen to Jesus teach? No, I am sure they didn't. But if they wanted to imagine if one of the door prizes was a chance to pray with Jesus – to be with Jesus as He talked with His heavenly Father. Imagine if the disciples had their camp auction or maybe their youth auction and one of the prizes was a chance to be with Jesus as He prayed. How cool would that be? Let's keep looking at Vs 1.

One day Jesus was praying in a certain place – they woke up, probably at dawn, and Jesus had already left. Jesus must have gotten up while it was still dark. He knew the day might be long and full – full of adventures and interruptions – so Jesus wanted to be ready. He went away by Himself to a quiet place to pray. But the disciples knew where to find Him. It seems that Jesus had a certain place that was a favorite for Him. A favorite certain place where Jesus liked to go to spend time in prayer with His heavenly Father. What is your favorite place? Perhaps a room in your house? Or a place in your yard or patio? Or a favorite place out in creation? Or perhaps as you make the drive to and from work each day? Where ever, it is your favorite place to pray and talk with God. Jesus went to this certain place so often that the disciples knew where they would find him.

One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When He finished – when the disciples found Jesus He was still praying. There must have been something powerful about that moment. Listening in as Jesus talked with His heavenly Father. I love watching a parent and child that have a healthy and open relationship. I love watching the way they lovingly and openly talk to one another. They hear one another. They trust one another. Their communication has a depth to it that many of us long for in our closest relationships. The disciples didn't dare interrupt Jesus as he was praying. Not out of fear I think, but out of reverence and even awe as they listened to Him pray.

When He finished, one of His disciples said to Him – they had a leader among them. But the one who asked might not have been the leader in that moment because of his great personality and ability to influence others. The one who spoke up became their leader in that moment simply because he may have been the one who was the most desperate to learn to pray. He may have been so hungry for God that he no longer cared what his friends might think. He was compelled to ask. Friends, that’s leadership. It isn’t only the person with the magnetic and charismatic personality. It is often the one who is so hungry and desperate that they want to be more like Jesus and they care less and less about what others may think as they come to Jesus and ask for His help. We need more of these kinds of leaders here at Deer Flat and in our world.

When He finished, one of His disciples said to him, “Lord”. They addressed Jesus with respect. They called Him “Lord”. Lord is a title of honor. It is a greeting that a servant would give to a master as they met. It was an acknowledgement that one is greeting another who has power and possession over their very life. And this was the title so often given to Jesus – “Lord”.

When He finished, one of His disciples said to him, “Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples”. The disciples had seen the followers or students of John the Baptist. John the Baptist was discipling them – teaching them how to be more like Jesus. And as a part of that discipleship, John the Baptist was teaching them to pray. The disciples of Jesus were perhaps envious of the students of John the Baptist. And they were certainly envious of Jesus Himself as they listened to Jesus pray. And so they asked, “Lord, teach us to pray”.

Friends, I am asking if that could be our prayer for this morning. If we could together unite our hearts and share together this prayer, “Lord, teach us to pray”.

As we continue to look at this chapter, I think it must have brought great joy to Jesus to have His disciples ask such a question. I imagine that Jesus was overjoyed to have this teaching moment present itself. Imagine a parent’s pride when a child observes a father or mother that demonstrates the passion of their heart and the strength of their character and the child says to

them, “Mom (or Dad) can you teach me how to do that?” Any good parent would joyfully engage with their child in creating a teaching moment.

How did Jesus teach us to pray? Jesus began to teach them by giving them specific words to pray. We call it the Lord’s Prayer. Some of us have studied this prayer many times. This morning I will not spend a great deal of time breaking it down in this message. But what I do want to do is to invite us to pray these words. Now, some of us have prayed these words so many times we can almost mouth the words and not realize what it is we are praying. I have asked that we put these words on the screen so that we can pray through them. Let’s pray together and out loud.

Now I want to invite you to pray through this prayer once again – this time silently and slowly as you consider the words and their meaning for your life. Remember Who it is that we are in conversation with.

(The Lord’s Prayer)

In Vs 5-8 Jesus continues the teaching moment by telling a story. It is about a friend in need. It is midnight. Your neighbor, also a friend, knocks on your door and says that one of their friends has just arrived and she has nothing to give them to eat. Your friend and neighbor asks if you can share some bread for them to give to their unexpected guest. You say, “Do you realize what time it is? Be quiet or you are going to wake up my kids and my husband and you know you don’t want to see that happen! Go away and leave me alone until morning.”

But your friend doesn’t leave. They just keep knocking and asking for your help. Listen to what Jesus says in Vs 8: “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 boldness (or more accurately his *persistence*) he will get up and give him as much as he needs”.

I wonder if the disciples were somewhat confused. Was Jesus only telling them how to offend their neighbor in the middle of the night? Jesus gave them an application in Vs 9 – 10: “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.”

There are a few specifics that I want each of us to notice here. First, In Vs 8 and Vs 9 Jesus begins by saying “I tell you” or “So I say to you”. Jesus isn’t just telling a story now. He is speaking truth directly to the disciples – to us – and He wants us to listen carefully.

Second, Jesus teaches us to ask. How many times do we frustrate family or friends because we assume that they know what we are thinking? Good communication is measured in part by our willingness to simply and clearly ask for what it is we want or need from another. Jesus said this is also true in our relationship with God. While it is true that God knows what we need and what we are thinking, God wants to hear us ask Him. There is something about our willingness to humble ourselves before God and admit that we need His help.

Third, Jesus teaches us to seek. Ladies ... some of us as men suffer from a malady called “can’t find it when it is right in front of our eyes”. I have lost count of the times when I have asked Ellen where to find something. I go to the drawer that she says it is in. I open it and look through it – sometimes twice – and call out to Ellen that it isn’t there. You know what happens next. Ellen walks over, opens the drawer and immediately picks up and hands it to me. How does that happen? Sometimes I think we do the same thing with God. God uses the word “seek”. To seek is more than a casual glance. It means to look with a strong desire – almost a craving. When we look for God with that kind of desire we will find Him.

And fourth, Jesus teaches us to knock. I think that sometimes as Christians we think that it is God’s responsibility to open every door for us. That all we should have to do is sit back and wait without any responsibility or initiative and leave all of the work to God. But that is not what Jesus is teaching us. Jesus says if you are not sure, don’t just sit back passively. Step up and knock on the door. Do you have a choice to make? Jesus says that we should step into the moment and start knocking on doors to see what one He may open. If we need Jesus to open a door then we need to step up and be willing to at least knock.

In Vs 11-12 Jesus tells one more story. Jesus – the master story teller. This story is about a parent and a child. Jesus speaks to parents. If a child comes to a parent and asks for some food would we give our child a snake instead? Or a scorpion? Jesus is using the absurdly obvious to make a point. When a child is hungry and asks for something to eat, we don't give them a snake or scorpion. We don't give them something that is dangerous to their health.

Listen to what Jesus says in Vs 13: “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?”

Jesus makes a comparison between us as parents and God as our heavenly Father. Even though we have evil in our hearts that we need God to cleanse and transform, we still want to give good gifts to our children. And if in spite of all of our limitations we want to give good gifts to our children when they are in need, how much more does God want to give good gifts to us when we come to Him with our needs.

As I prayed over this message this week, I kept coming back to these three words in Vs 13 – “How much more ... ?” How much more does our Father in heaven want to give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him? How much more does the Father in heaven want to give us?

It's like a child negotiating a weekly allowance from their parent. The parent wants to give them a \$1.00 but the child insists on taking only \$0.50. Or imagine applying for a job and as you are being hired your new employer wants to negotiate your salary. They tell you that the range is \$9 to \$11 an hour but you settle for \$7.50. What's up with that?

Imagine that God longs to pour Himself into our lives but we settle for a one hour a week awkward encounter. Imagine that God wants to continually fill us with His Holy Spirit and we settle for talking about how much we enjoy what His Holy Spirit may be doing in the lives of those around us. God doesn't want us to live off of the blessing of the pioneers who birthed the Deer Flat Church. God doesn't want us to live off of the blessing that He has poured into others

at different times and in different places. God has a blessing with your name on it – with my name on it. And God wants to give our blessing to us.

So, why doesn't it happen? One of the primary answers to that question has to do with our prayer life. Sometimes our daily prayer life has been called our devotions. You know – the time we take to pull away and get quiet for a few minutes each day so that we can read our Bible and spend some time in prayer. If we are struggling with our devotions, maybe the problem isn't with our devotions but with our devotion. Maybe the problem is our lack of devotion with the heavenly Father.

It happens like this. Each of us wants to take advantage of today's communication technology. We learn that those who share phone service with the same provider get free minutes with anyone else using that same cell phone provider. So we go to work and get our family all set up using the same phone provider. We even work with our closest friends so that we too share the same phone provider. Wow –this means that we have free minutes whenever we phone one another. We can call whenever we want as often as we want and talk as long as we want. Can it get any better than this? But then we sit back and wait for our family and friends to call us and we begin to realize that it isn't happening. We call them, but our calls are not returned. And whenever we do talk it is because we phone them. We wait and wait and wait for them to phone us and the calls just don't come. We begin to take this personally and wonder if there is something missing in our relationship. Maybe our relationship with family and friends isn't what we thought it was. And our hearts are deeply saddened.

Friends, I have just described what I think happens in the heart of God when He sets us up to have unlimited communication with Him at any time as often as we would like for as long as we would like, and then we don't stop to use it to be in conversation with Him. God is in conversation with us, but more often than not it is a one way dialogue. God longs for us to dial His number and He waits and hopes and waits and hopes. And His heart grows sad as He watches us live our lives without taking time for Him.

Now, what should motivate us is not only the sadness of the heart of God when we do not take advantage of His unlimited calling plan. What should concern us is this simple question, these three words of Jesus – “how much more?” How much more of God could I have in my life if I took time to be in conversation with him through prayer? How much more of God’s Holy Spirit would be at work in my life if I took even a few more minutes a day in prayer? How much more like Jesus could I be if I was spending a few more minutes a day off in a quiet place talking with my heavenly Father? How much more healthy and blessed would my family be – my spouse or my children or grandchildren – if I was taking time to get alone with God each day? How much more might God be doing through Deer Flat if we as the Deer Flat family were taking more time to be in prayer with one another that we could be more like Jesus and better help others be more like Jesus?

Wouldn’t it be great to find out what that “How much more ...” might look like in each of our lives? Would you like to find out? Then let’s ask God. Let’s seek after God. Let’s knock on God’s door. Let’s find a certain place where our family and friends know they can find us in prayer each day.

Prayer. It is not too late. We can begin right now. This morning I want us to wait quietly before the Lord and ask Him one question, “How much more ...? How much more would God be doing in our lives, and through our lives, and in our families, and in our church, if we gave even 5 or 10 or 15 more minutes a day in open and sincere communication with our Father in heaven?

As the musicians softly play in the background I want each of us to just bow our heads where we are seated and talk with our Father in heaven. Ask Him to begin describing to us what the “how much more ...?” looks like in each of our lives? And then let’s ask ourselves how much more time we would be willing to give to spend in prayer with God each day to begin exploring that promise of “how much more ...?” that God has in store for each of us and all of us. I want you to write down on your sermon notes or in your worship folder the amount of time that you are going to commit to spend in prayer with God each day – 5 to 10 to 15 minutes a day. For some it may even be an hour a day in prayer. And then I am asking you to find a friend before you leave church this morning and tell them what you have written down. I am asking you to have the

courage to verbalize what it is that you are writing down and promising to God that you want to spend in communication with Him each day.

Imagine ... “how much more ...?” It all begins in prayer. Ask, seek and knock. Our Father in heaven is waiting and listening for our voice. He invites us into His presence.