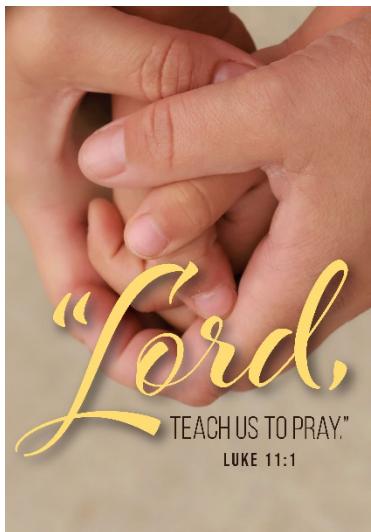


I WILL PRAY FOR YOU! CLICHÉ OR INTIMACY



Of all the negative things I learned and experienced this past year, one constant and ever-renewed blessing was the intentional time spent in prayer on behalf of others. There was never a shortage of petitions to lift up to the throne room of God but I never returned from my time in prayer without my heart swelling with joy trusting in God's perfect will and answer. The Prophet Jeremiah writes, *"Then you will call upon Me and come and pray to Me, and I will hear you. You will seek Me and find Me when you seek Me with all your heart"* Jeremiah 29: 12-13.

At my first parish in Illinois, I spent some time serving as a hospital chaplain. I never spent two days in a row on the same floor – one day dealing with those facing a battle with cancer and the next with the parents of a newborn child. When the time came for my first evaluation, I was confident that was a huge success. I could talk for

hours with anyone in the hospital on a variety of topics – religion, sports, weather, or even politics – and walk away from the conversation thinking that I had made a difference. But my supervisor put his hand on my shoulder and escorted me into a room with a patient. He simply said, "Watch for the difference from what you have been doing and what I will share with this patient." He engaged the woman with the same gift of conversation that I had shown but then he asked her, "What is the one thing I can pray for you today?" She opened up sharing her heart with my supervisor. You could just see the intimacy that they were sharing as she entrusted him with her heart and he lifted it up to God in prayer.

I was given a lesson in humility – but far greater – I was given a lesson in the power and intimacy of prayer. I put this new found lesson to work in my own family with my wife and two sons. We started the practice of asking each other during our devotion time, "What is one thing I can pray for you?" Now I must admit, there were times when my boys would jerk my chain by saying something like, "Pray that my father will learn when 15 minutes is up when he preaches." But most of the time my family learned two things: God is interested in every minute detail of our lives and God answers every prayer.

One of the most intimate gifts I could share with my family was to lift up their petitions to God trusting solely in Him. They had entrusted with me what was most heavily weighing on their hearts. But then to ask my wife about her petition and how God had answered my prayer for her. To stay in connection with my children by seeking to know how God was interacting with the petition I had lifted up on their behalf. We had the blessing as a family of daily sharing the intimacy of what was on our hearts and rejoicing in watching for and acknowledging God's gracious answer to our prayers. To this day, I challenge couples in pre-marital care to try this exercise with one another for one week to see if it isn't the most intimate time they share as a couple. In 27 years, no couple has ever returned from this challenge without confessing the new found intimacy of prayer and the joy of seeing God's hand in the course of their daily lives.

Paul Harvey told about a 3-year-old boy who went to the grocery store with his mother. Before they entered she had certain instructions for the little tike: "Now you're not going to get any chocolate chip

cookies, so don't even ask." She put him in the child's seat and off they went up and down the aisles. He was doing just fine until they came to the cookie section. Seeing the chocolate chip cookies he said, "Mom, can I have some chocolate chip cookies?" She said, "I told you not even to ask. Now you're not going to get any at all." They continued down the aisles, but in their search for certain items she had to back track and they ended up in the cookie aisle again. "Mom, can I please have some chocolate chip cookies?" She said, "I told you that you can't have any. Now sit down and be quiet." Finally, they arrived at the checkout. The little boy sensed that the end was in sight, that this might be his last chance. He stood up on the seat and shouted in his loudest voice, "In the name of Jesus, may I have some chocolate chip cookies?" Everyone in the checkout lanes laughed and applauded. Do you think the little boy got his cookies? You bet! The other shoppers moved by his persistence pooled their resources. The little boy and his mother left the store that day with 23 boxes of chocolate chip cookies.

When it comes to evangelism, the power of prayer is evident in every aspect – seeking the Holy Spirit to guide, bless and direct your conversation with believers and non-believers, for the power of God's Word to have its effect and for the creation of a relationship, especially with an unbeliever, so that you have additional opportunities to share the Gospel. In the L.A.S.S.I.E approach of the Every One His Witness tool, praying is often mentioned under the last acronym, Encourage. But L.A.S.S.I.E. is not a series of sequential steps, but a way to share the Gospel through Listening, Asking, Seeking, Sharing, Inviting and Encouraging – in whatever order they may arise.

Consider this challenge to start simple: Take your congregation's prayer list, call one or two or more from that list. Let them know you are praying for them but you wanted to know, "What is one thing I can pray for you?" Then call them back and see how God answered their prayer. Ask your church leaders, our District leaders or our English District Bishop the same question and see how God answered the prayer you lifted up for them. At my former congregation, we had a prayer shawl ministry that reminded the recipient that they were surrounded with intentional prayer. We would ask them for their specific prayers to enhance this ministry. Just as evangelism is a life-style, so too, you will find out the joys of the Gospel which is relational and intimate with the world God loves.

We have called this time of the pandemic – un-precedented, a year like none other – but it is also an awesome time to intentionally ask a co-worker, a neighbor, even a complete stranger, "**What is one thing I can pray for you?**" Ask the Holy Spirit to lead you to someone in need of prayer. Most everyone is willing to have some help – and it opens the door for you to listen, ask and listen some more, seek to find a place of connection and then share the Gospel truth, "*The Lord is my Helper*" *Hebrews 13:6*.

Please don't let the phrase, "I will pray for you" turn into a polite, Christian cliché in your life. Let it become your most sacred privilege and joy to storm the throne room of God on behalf of others, especially unbelievers, all because the Holy Spirit has led you to ask the intimate question, "**What is one thing I can pray for you?**" and then do it. You and the one you prayed for will see God's mighty hand at work. For the unbeliever, they may see for the first time the real difference found in the believer – a redeemed sinner who trusts in God alone for salvation along with every other good gift under heaven. "*Cast all your anxiety (cares) on Him for He cares for you*" *1 Peter 5: 7*.