

Children, Wear Your Father Out with Prayer!

A sermon on 1 John 5:13-15

For parents, one of their greatest joys is when their child says his/her first word. Oh, how they praise their child, run and grab the camera to record it so all their friends and relatives can hear. What a wonderful achievement it is for a young child to start speaking.

But then, I'm sure many of your parents would agree, that blessing can sometimes turn into a bit of a curse, because once the child starts talking, it seems they can't stop talking. And what starts out as words and short phrases turn into question after question. I can imagine how children can wear their parents out with their constant talking and questions. I was a child once! And so, the only solution become, "Go ask your mom that question," or "Go bother your father," or even, "Just go outside and play!"

That kind of parent-child relationship we have with God, don't we? We are his children. He is our heavenly Father. And he actually wants to hear us talk. He invites us to come to him anytime, anywhere, with anything we want. He wants you to pray to him. He wants us to wear him out with prayer.

You know, that's the point Jesus was making in our gospel for this morning. Do you recall his parable? The judge of a town had a certain widow who kept coming to him, asking him to give her justice against her enemy. Maybe the judge thought it was a frivolous lawsuit, so he threw the case out. He kept refusing to grant that widow her justice.

But when the widow wouldn't take no for an answer and continued to ask for justice, the judge finally got to the point where he said, "She's going to keep bothering me and annoying me until she wears me out and I rule in her favor." And then he finally gave in to her request.

And Jesus' point? "Will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly." When we approach our Judge, persistently approach our Judge, he listens, and he grants our requests.

Jesus' words line up quite nicely with our verses from 1 John. He writes about us persistently praying as well, "This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us."

Seems pretty reasonable, wouldn't you say? I mean, what do you know about God? God loves us. God has saved us. Our sins are all gone. We can be confident of that. And in our confidence, we can approach God. We ought to approach God. God wants us in confidence to approach him in prayer and ask anything of him because he promises to hear us.

Now, based on those words, can you guess how important prayer is to God...and how important he wants prayer to be to us? I think I've shared with you before how prayer in the life of a Christian is like their spiritual pulse. You can tell if someone is alive by checking their pulse, to see if there's a heartbeat.

So, as a believer, the way to tell how healthy your faith is is to examine the health of your prayer-life, to see if there's a pulse.

So, for this morning, I want you to give yourself an exam. Let's analyze our prayer-lives. How healthy are you? Well, I'll be the first to admit, I need more exercise in that aspect. I need to pray more. How about you?

What keeps you from praying more often, from praying persistently, from wearing God out with prayer? Does it start with your attitude? "God, I don't have time to talk to you." A pastor once told me he set aside an hour a day for praying, and I thought he was crazy, first of all, because how in the world could you find enough fodder to pray about for an hour (how foolish of me to think that), but then, secondly and more importantly, how in the world could you find a whole hour to just spend praying?

Isn't that one of the areas of prayer where you and I fall short? Life is so busy. It's so hectic, and yes, I know it is for you, too. I can't find an hour, let alone five minutes to prayer with God. But it begins with priorities, where does God, where do conversations with God fit in my list of important matters? Sadly, for you and me, not near the top.

Or maybe your attitude is this, "God, I don't think you want to talk with someone like me." Because we recognize how unworthy we are, how, as sinners, we don't deserve to approach his throne of grace and ask anything of him. Or you're so embarrassed, it's been so long since you last talked with your heavenly Father, even if you started today, you'll feel guilty for being away for so long, and so you put it off.

Or maybe your exam shows you do pray, but they're unhealthy prayers. Do you understand what an unhealthy prayer is? Or maybe, what a sinful prayer is? Our verses help us to understand what that would be: "we ask anything according to his will."

What does it mean "according to his will"? It means praying for God-pleasing things, for what God wants for your life, not necessarily for what you want.

Because here's a problem with prayers people tell me they pray sometimes. I've had someone say to me, "My boyfriend and I really love each other, we're committed, we wanted to have sex, we wanted to move in together, so we prayed to God about it." And then they did it. But here's the issue. They prayed to God about it, but they didn't listen to the answer. Because God's response is very clear in his word about call sex and living together before marriage a sin. That's not according to God's will.

That's a selfish, self-serving (not God-serving) prayer. Are your prayers like that? Telling God what you want, trying to manipulate him to give you what you want, even if it may be sinful? Those are unhealthy prayers.

Or maybe your exam shows you were on a healthy diet of prayer, but then it was getting too tough, you were getting frustrated, so you gave up. Does that sound like you? I know I get frustrated at times when it seems my prayers aren't being answered. You start to really question God. Is he listening? Does he care? Did that prayer just fall to the ground, or did it make it to the throne of grace and power? It is

one of the features of life on this earth that we don't get immediate feedback from our prayer communications. It's like calling up God and leaving a message on his answering machine, but is he really checking his messages?

That can really start wearing you down because you keep asking and get nothing in return. Whatever your excuse might be, the results of your exam are less than satisfactory. Our spiritual pulse, our prayer-lives are less than perfectly healthy. They are not good enough. And if nothing is changed, well, you know what the final result will be. No spiritual pulse means spiritually dead.

I would think it safe to say we could use a shot of adrenaline, some confidence, for our prayer life. And John gives it. "This is the CONFIDENCE we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us."

You and I can approach God in prayer with confidence and know he hears and answers. Why are we able to approach God in prayer? Because, as John writes, "You...believe in the name of the Son of God." Or, more specifically, because of the Son of God.

Now, if you were to read the entire book of first John, you would see how much it focuses on the Son of God. It's a wonderful love letter, a letter about God's incredible, unchanging, unconditional, amazing, and we could go on and on describing God's love, summarized by this basic statement, "God is love."

And after writing about this amazing love of God, John begins to end his letter by telling us the purpose of his writing about God's love, "I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life." Sounds a little like what he wrote in his gospel, wouldn't you agree? You know, "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."

This is your confidence. God loves you so much he sent Jesus to live, to die, and to rise. God loves you so much that, even though you're not perfect, Jesus was. God loves you so much that, even though you deserve to die for your sins, Jesus died on your behalf, giving you his perfection. God loves you so much that he's not going to leave you in this world of sin, but just as he raised Jesus from the dead, he will raise you who believe in Jesus from the dead so you will have eternal life.

That's our confidence. And it's in that confidence we pray to God, knowing he hears you. Now, how can you be so sure? I think Martin Luther gives a pretty good answer in his explanation of the Address of the Lord's Prayer: "God tenderly invites us to believe that he is our true Father and that we are his true children, so that we may pray to him as boldly and confidently as dear children ask their dear father."

You see, our relationship with God is a father-son/daughter relationship. A loving parent doesn't church their child away or refuse to listen to them. Even in our normal relationships, when you have a good rapport with someone else and a high level of respect and trust for that person, you're confident to share your struggles, your joys, your pains, your requests.

How much more then with God? With God, you don't have to ask, "Does he hear? Does he want to listen?" Of course does! He is our Father, and he has obligated himself for our well-being. He has

invited us to pray, commanded us to pray, promised rewards when we pray, instructed us how to pray, even scolded us when we forgot to pray. He always listens to his children.

Yes, God wants you to pray. God wants you to pray persistently. He wants to you wear him out with prayer. In our first lesson, Jacob tried to do that. He wrestled with God in prayer for a whole night, and wouldn't stop until God blessed him.

You can do the same. I say you wear God out with your prayers, but that can't happen. Try as hard as you like, but God never tires of hearing from his children. He wants to know when you're happy. He wants to know when you're thankful for what he's done for you. He wants to know when you're burdened by sin. He wants to know when you're sad. He wants to be an integral part of your life. He wants you to approach him in prayer.

And he wants you to know he hears your prayers and he answers your prayer. Look at our last verse, "If we know that he hears us – whatever we ask – we know that we have what we have asked of him."

You see, our reason for praying is not to impose our will on how God is running the world. It is to make our lives better and the lives of one another better. And who knows best what his children need? It would be cruel of God to do anything people wanted, for they would soon hurt themselves and others.

And so, when we pray according to God's will, when our prayers are in line with what God wants, those are the prayers God loves to answer, to give what he knows is best for you and me and every person. He responds. He answers every request that comes from his children. Every answer is weighed according to his gracious plans to bless our lives and manage his world.

Wear your Father out with prayer. You know, it's funny. For earthly parents, that happens. They often tire of their children making request after request after request. But God's different. I'd like to think we would be the ones wearing ourselves out with our prayers to God, not the other way around. But you know, that's what God wants. We can try to wear him out with our prayers; he loves to hear. Even better, he loves to answer. So, stay healthy in your prayer-life. Be persistent with your prayers. And be confident. You are his child. He is our Father. And that means he's listening. Amen.