

A little boy who was praying for a bicycle complained to his mother, "It's no use. Art doesn't listen to me." "Art who?" asked his mother. "Art in heaven," the boy replied. We also have a tendency to give up praying, feeling that "Art" doesn't answer, feeling that either God is not listening or not answering. Or, some of us are so sophisticated we don't ask for bicycles anymore. We don't bring specific requests to God.

Some folks feel that it is improper to ask; that only those with a naive faith or an illiterate faith ask God anymore. They act as if those who live in the Silicon Valley, surrounded by high technology, saturated with a scientific understanding of life, are somehow above that sort of thing. Many persons in our community can respond to the practice of meditation where one seeks to get in touch with and in tune with the universe, but they have a difficult time understanding and accepting the practice of petitionary prayer. They have ceased to pray because of their sophisticated theology.

Some folks are hesitant to ask anything of God because they feel they are being presumptuous. They feel they are too insignificant in the universe to bother God. Out of a low self-image, they feel they are not worthy. Some folks feel comfortable praying for good health, but are uncomfortable praying for the healing of a heart, or lung, or a problem.

Some folks cop-out and hide behind the prayer: "Thy will be done." They feel that the ultimate prayer is the prayer of surrender to the will of God; therefore, why ask? Why identify need? Why be presumptuous about my wants or desires? God already knows my needs, they say, so why ask? This attitude is a fatalistic attitude: "whatever will be will be." But, your life is not all planned. Nor is God's will automatically accomplished. God rarely gets his way. For God's will to be done requires your utmost cooperation.

When Jesus prayed, "Thy will be done," it followed a long, personal struggle with the inevitability of his death. Jesus' prayer was very specific. He prayed, "Don't let me die! I don't want to die. Let this cup pass from me." After Jesus worked through his struggle, after he faced his death and dealt with his feelings about his death, then he prayed the prayer of surrender, "Nevertheless, not my will, but thine be done." Jesus did not hide behind the prayer so he would not have to deal with his needs, feelings and despair. On the contrary, he took them to God in prayer and then prayed, "Thy will be done."

Some folks are hesitant to ask because they are afraid of being rejected. It hurts to have someone you love turn you down. Remember how you worked up courage to ask her for that first date? Remember how nervous you were and how you expected the worst? "Go out with you? Are you kidding?" Or, worse yet, no answer at all. "Sorry I asked" is the stance of many of us. We would rather not ask than be rejected. Like the young man who asked his young lady, "If I proposed, would you say yes?" She was equally cautious, "If you knew I'd say yes, would you propose?"

Jesus taught his disciples to Go For It! He taught them to take the risk of rejection, be courageous and ask. Jesus taught them to be honest and open with God about their needs. Jesus taught his disciples to deal with their lives, confront their needs, and ask. Jesus told them to ask God for daily

bread, for food day by day. He told them to ask for forgiveness, to be kept from temptations and hard testing. Jesus told them to ask and keep on asking. He gave an example of friends dropping in and you discover you have nothing to feed them. So you go next door at midnight, knock on the door, and call out that you need to borrow some bread. The neighbor answers, "Hey, it's after midnight. My kids are asleep. We're all asleep." But, you keep on knocking and asking so the neighbor will loan you bread, if not for the sake of friendship and neighborliness, at least to keep you quiet!

Jesus taught that prayer is specific, persistent asking. God will hear and respond, at the least, to keep you quiet. Jesus said, "Ask, and you will receive; seek, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened to you." In other words, Go For It! And, when you pray, be specific and be persistent.

Be specific. An auto salesman in Chicago had wants that far exceeded his income. He began to gamble in order to strike it rich and be able to buy all he wanted. But, he lost all his money, his car and his house. His wife left him and in desperation, he started drinking. Soon he found himself on skid row opening his last bottle. Suddenly, there was a puff of smoke and a genie came out of the bottle. The genie said, "I have come to grant you one wish." The salesman quickly responded, "If I can have one wish, I would like a foreign car agency." There was a flash of light and when he opened his eyes, he was standing in his new show room--a Chrysler Plymouth dealership in downtown Tokyo. When you ask for a foreign car dealership, be specific!

We all need to be clear, specific and focused. How clear are your goals? How specific are your objectives? Or, are they so general they are unattainable, so vague they provide no sense of direction? The lead article in the current issue of the New Outlook reminds us that we as a church are in the process of setting goals. We are creating our future. The future is not inevitable, nor is it predetermined. We can create the future of this church, as you can create your future. The temptation in the process of goal setting is to be so general that nothing specific happens. I've been through these exercises before, and too often they have just been exercises with very little accomplished. But, in those instances in my previous churches where change occurred, new directions were seen, and steps taken, we had been specific in our goals. It is far more effective to pray, "Lord, make me more patient with Mr. X." than to pray, "Lord, help me to love everybody." To love everybody is to love nobody. It is far more effective for our church to have the specific goal to hire a full-time Director of Program Development than it is to have the general goal to improve the educational ministry of our church. By the way, a Director of Program Development has been hired and she will begin her ministry with us on August 1. Look for the article in the New Outlook this week.

Be specific. We can usually learn from children. Children generally have a fresh perspective, even on prayer. A kindergarten Sunday School class was having animal crackers for a treat and the teacher asked Joey to pray. In typical five-year old fashion, Joey prayed a thorough, serious prayer, "Dear God, thank you for my mommy, my daddy, my brother, my sister. Thank you for my teacher. And, God, thank you for the animal crackers.." Then he paused and the other children began to squirm. Finally, he slowly raised his head and in a very low whisper, asked the teacher, "Are we going to have anything to drink?" Those of us who rush through our prayers, or pray ritually without

meaning, or pray general innocuous prayers, can learn from Joey that when you pray, be specific. Clarify your goals, be clear, and Go For It!

Be persistent. Keep asking. Keep knocking on the door. Keep pleading. Don't give up. Go For It! Here we need a new image of prayer and of the God to whom we are praying. Jesus taught that God is not indifferent to us, like the neighbor who answers just to keep us quiet, but God is like a father or mother who wants the very best for the children. Persistent prayer is not needed to change God's mind, or to get his attention, but persistent prayer is necessary in order for us to cooperate with God. Specific, focused, directed, persistent prayer is the act of cooperating with God, aligning ourselves with God's presence, uniting our energy--our spirit--with the spirit we call God, the spirit of love, healing and wholeness.

All life is interrelated. Plant life, animal life, human life, mind, body are all interrelated and affect one another. What we think and feel affects the behavior of our cells. Experiments with cancer patients show that cells do better when people image them doing better. Likewise, the condition of our body has a great effect upon our moods and attitudes. Furthermore, our thoughts and feelings affect the cells in other bodies and even in plants. Experiments show the relationship between your energy and plants. Prayer for plants results in healthier plants. Why? Because all life is interrelated.

Petitionary prayer is the aligning of ourselves with God's presence. Intercessory prayer is the uniting of our energy with God's energy to effect a change in someone else. Specific prayer focuses the energy on the object of the prayer. Many of the writings on healing emphasize the need for specific prayer. Pray with the image of the healed part of the body in mind. Don't just pray a general prayer for health, but pray for a healed stomach or heart or attitude.

Prayer is a very powerful force. The last time I preached on prayer, someone said to me after the service, "Do you realize that several times a day, millions of Iranians pray for the destruction of the United States?" He went on, "According to your idea of prayer, those negative prayers can affect us." Yes, I believe that negative prayers--called curses in the Bible--can have a negative effect on others as positive prayers--called blessings in the Bible--can have a positive effect on others. Therefore, we are urged in the Bible to pray for protection. We are told to put on the armor of God. And we are told to pray for our enemies, for love is a much stronger force than hate. That is why we are also urged to pray without ceasing. Be persistent. Pray without ceasing. Keep yourself in the presence of God, in the spirit of God, so that you may be protected, healed, and may be used as a channel of blessing to others.

Prayer is a cooperative effort with God, an effort that will succeed, for Jesus promised, "Ask and you will receive; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you." Be clear about your goals. Be specific. Be persistent. Go For It!

GO FOR IT!
LUKE 11:1-13

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PALO ALTO, CALIFORNIA

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PRAYER BY GLENN FULLER

O Lord, Parent and Creator, you have called us to worship you, to teach your Word, and to express your Word through drama and dance, through music and art, through speaking and listening.

Open our eyes to see, our ears to listen, and our hearts to understand.

Evoke from us ever new expressions of your gifts to express worship and truth and love as co-creators with you, O God.