

## Staying In Contact

Sixth in the series: *Seven Steps to Personal Freedom*

**Text: Luke 11:9-13**

**2/12/12**

### I

For a number of weeks we've been talking about becoming freer people - free to become all that God intends us to be. We talked first about a power that keeps us from being kind of folks we'd like to be and we called it "sin." Not sin as some endless buffet of bad behavior, but sin with a capital "S". Sin the disease that causes us to play God in our lives and to try to play it in the lives of other people. Sin the disease that convinces us we can control what we cannot and should not. Sin the disease that creates pain in our lives and so often makes us a pain in the lives of other people.

The power of Sin can be broken through faith in God as we have know him in Jesus Christ. Many of us have made that decision. And with it we have made another discovery. It is one thing to get free, and it is another thing to remain free. Having made a decision to turn our wills and our lives over to the care of God, spiritually speaking, how do we stay on the wagon? It is one thing to put the glass down, but it is another not to fill it up again. It is one thing to back away from the Twinkies, and it is another to stay away from the Twinkies. It is one thing to turn over our lives to the care of God, and it is entirely another not to take them back again.

Jesus has some advice for people like us who would like to remain free for God and free from playing God. Let's call it call it persistence. If it is the reality of God in Christ that frees our lives then there is nothing more important than the daily pursuit of that reality with our lives.

### II

A number of years ago great Atlanta media mogul Ted Turner was heard to say:

*If I only had a little humility I'd be perfect.*

There's a misunderstanding hidden there. Humility isn't a room addition to the dream house of a full life. It is the house. It is the decision to dethrone ourselves from the center of our lives and other people's lives. Humility is the posture of holding loosely to our will because we have discovered that life is lived better when it is in accordance with God's will.

But good posture isn't formed all at once is it? In our text Jesus has been teaching his disciples at their request how to pray...*Father , hallowed be your name, your Kingdom come.* But it's not enough to pray the prayer or seek the will God once, or every once in a while. So Jesus says let me tell you what prayer, or the pursuit of God's will really looks like.

*Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find, knock and the door will be opened to you.* It sounds easy. But a better translation of the text is “keep asking...keep seeking...keep knocking.” Knowing the will of God for our lives does not happen quickly and rarely happens all at once.

*What does humility do for a person? It keeps you at it, especially if “it” is searching for God’s will in and for your life.* It is asking and seeking and knocking...because it is in the act of asking and seeking and knocking that we stay in contact with God who keeps us free. It’s how we develop the posture of a God centered life.

### III

Humility - all this asking, speaking, and knocking - brings us to step six in our seven steps to personal freedom:

*We sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God, praying only for the knowledge of his will for us and the power to carry that out.*

When it comes to sustaining a life with God there is no substitute for prayer. Having seen Jesus in action the disciples didn’t ask to be instructed on how to feed the hungry or even heal the sick. They ask to be taught to pray.

So how shall we pray if improving our conscious contact with God is our desire? Let me give three practical suggestions:

*Pray with persistence.* The best way to do that is to have a time for prayer, a place for prayer, and means of prayer. God deserves a daily appointment even if we can’t imagine it lasting more than five minutes – put it on the calendar. Morning or evening is your call but be honest; when are you more likely to keep your appointment?

Find a place. We can pray anywhere but people who are serious about prayer usually pray somewhere. The easy chair, the desk, the kitchen table – where can you and God steal some uninterrupted time?

Use something to help. Winging it leads to self-centered prayers. Read a scripture passage, or use a great prayer to guide you in your conscious conversation with God. Consider the prayer of St. Francis:

*Lord, make me an instrument of your peace. Where there is hatred, let me sow love; where there is injury, pardon; where there is doubt, faith; where there is despair, hope; where there is darkness, light; and where there is sadness, joy. O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console; to be understood as to understand; to be loved as to love. For it is in giving that we receive; it is in pardoning that we are pardoned; and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life. Amen*

Most days I use a prayer guide called *Seeking God's Face* that includes a psalm, a scripture reading, suggestions on how to pray for others, and a prayer drawn from the confessions of the church.

*Pray for awareness.* As you go through the day take your prayer with you. Lord as I work today, go to school today, raise my children today, or even sit at home today, where are you and what would you have me do? The folks in A.A. suggest we make a simple request. *Thy will, not my will, be done.* We pray to cultivate the ability to recognize the spiritual nudge of God, and follow the will of God. The goal of prayer is not giving God a piece our mind but gaining a bit of his.

*Pray for the courage to examine your day.* How did it go? Was I attentive to God's will? Is there someone I hurt today for which I need to seek reconciliation and forgiveness? Where was God at work today so that I may give thanks and be glad?

Sometimes we forget that the Lord's Prayer was given to us not so much to teach us what to pray as how to pray. Talk to the Father. Seek God's will. And only after that seek your own. Keep in touch. And as Jesus wants us to see, keep at it.

#### IV

Honestly, this passage ends in the oddest of ways with the oddest of promises. Jesus goes on to say:

*For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened.*

Everyone? Really? Don't we know people who have asked for things and didn't get them? Prayers for healing that never seemed to be answered. Prayers for money that never came. Prayers for a reconciliation that never happened. Perhaps we have made these prayers ourselves. Perhaps Jesus promises a little too much.

But Jesus won't back off. Look, he says, which of you people if your children asked for fish and eggs would serve them snakes and scorpions. You are the epitome of imperfection, but you wouldn't do that. No you would give your children good things! Well then "how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"

"Wait a minute. I didn't ask for the Holy Spirit. I need a job." But if I understand this passage right, God can counted on to give his best. And his best is always himself – Holy Spirit, divine presence, freedom from sin, freedom for God, knowledge of his will and the power to do it.

*Everyone who asks receives...* I wish I knew why everyone who asks doesn't get the job they want, the healing they seek, or the help they need. But this text is bold to say that everyone who asks for the powerful presence of God gets the powerful presence of God. It must be a pretty important presence.

Perhaps underneath all those other legitimate needs we pursue in our lives is the pressing need to know that there is one who cares deeply for my life and has a will for my life. There's a need for conscious contact. There's a divine divot in my soul and in my psyche that nothing fills except the reality of God.

We can pray for many things. But it seems there is no substitute for prayer that cries out to God for nothing less than God. It changes the course of our lives. Do we believe it? Freedom is found not at the end of the laundry list of our needs, but in the humble pursuit of the God in Christ we were born to know.

## V

There's an old prayer credited to the theologian Reinhold Niebuhr that speaks to our deep and lasting need for the real presence of God in our lives:

God, give us grace to accept with serenity  
the things that cannot be changed,  
Courage to change the things  
which should be changed,  
and the Wisdom to distinguish  
the one from the other.  
Living one day at a time,  
Enjoying one moment at a time,  
Accepting hardship as a pathway to peace,  
Taking, as Jesus did,  
This sinful world as it is,  
Not as I would have it,  
Trusting that You will make all things right,  
If I surrender to Your will,  
So that I may be reasonably happy in this life,  
And supremely happy with You forever in the next.  
Amen.