

St. Bartholomew's Anglican Church in the Town of Tonawanda, N.Y

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ - Associate Rector Scripture: Ephesians 4:17-25

“When God's People Pray”

Have you ever heard someone proclaim –

- “I prayed and God didn't listen!” or
- “I prayed and prayed and it's not working.”
 - You may even hear them say:
- “Why doesn't it work the way I want it to?” or
- “Why doesn't God give me the answer I want, and need?”

They may have gotten frustrated because they really never took the time to learn how to pray.

I hope that they are not nearly as frustrated as the man who angrily brought his new chain saw back to the hardware store. He stormed through the door and flung his saw right onto the counter. This brand new saw was bent and beat up, with much of the paint chipped away and the teeth were at all different angles. He shouted to the man behind the counter “I've been using this all day and I haven't cut even a handful of firewood!” The clerk, trying to be helpful, took a chance and yanked hard one time on the rip cord. Sure enough, after some gasps, coughs, and chugs, the motor started to roar. The red faced customer sheepishly shouted “So, that's what that string was for!” If only he had looked at the instructions – or better yet – if he had asked someone how to do it. Instead of learning how to do something – we muddle through and end up like the guy with the chain saw.

How blessed the apostles were in having the most perfect example before them, our Lord Jesus Christ, and they wanted to imitate Him and to know just how to do what He did. I am sure they tried to “pick His brain” over the course of the three years that they were together. They had been witnesses to Jesus' healing of the terminally sick, casting out legions of demons, raising the dead, and exhibiting an awesome authority over the forces of nature. As far as we know – none of the Apostles ever asked Jesus to teach them how to preach, run a youth group, do a Bible study, how to do personal or marital counseling, or even how to perform miracles; all Scripture tells us that all they wanted to know was **“how do you pray like that?”** Each of the Apostles were eyewitnesses to the remarkable strength and intimacy that Jesus alone knew with His heavenly Father. It is important to note that the Apostles weren't strangers to prayer. They had been praying all of their lives. They prayed all day long; at fixed intervals and then before and after every meal. The average Jew during the time of Jesus prayed about three to four hours a day! What they wanted to know; what they asked Jesus to teach them was to experience the intimate communion that Jesus had with God, the Father; to experience a personal relationship with the Creator of the Universe.

The Gospels from **Luke 11:1-13** and **Matthew 6:5-13** – clearly shows how Jesus answered them. His words have become for us what we call The Lord's Prayer – (some have nicknamed it the “Our Father”) and should be the foundation of our own prayers.

So, I have just got to ask you:

- **What is your goal when you pray? Why do you do it – what do you expect?**
 - **Is your goal to have God grant your request?**
 - **Is your goal giving God your wish list?**

If the answers to the last two clarifying questions are yes, and yes, then I have got some bad news for you! You see, God does not exist so that He can give us what we want. God knows our hearts. God knows our needs even better than we do! Instead, I would like to suggest to you that prayer is seeking to spend time with the Father, in conversation with, and more importantly - in listening to His response to us. Remember the words that Jesus spoke in Matthew 6:32-33 *“Your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. “But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added to you.”*”

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We should not be praying to inform God, but to enjoy true personal intimacy with Him, to spend time listening to what He has to say to us. When we read the Holy Word – we need to stop and reflect on what we have read – and give God a chance to direct us. Call it “holy listening” if you will. Some of us are so busy trying to tell God what we want and what we need – that we don’t stop to see if He has an answer for us.

Trying to set aside time each day is tough, right? I know there’s that important phone call, or that letter, or that meeting, that TV show that you’ve just got to watch – or maybe you’re running to the soccer, hockey, football, or baseball game. There is always something going on that keeps you from spending some time with God. Imagine if you will:

- A football team that never practices (*I don’t think they will be too successful!*)
- An orchestra or band that never tunes its instruments (*I wouldn’t pay to hear them!*)
- An expectant farmer who never plants any seed (*no sow – no reap!*)
- A salesperson who never gets off his... chair and calls or goes out to meet clients
- An artist who never buys any paint

I have got to tell you: **To never do something is the absolute worst way to ever get better at it!** If we are to have a relationship – any relationship, like a marriage, – it takes work – it takes hard work – but the reward is great, indeed! With prayer, the precious reward is being in the glorious presence of the Father. This reward is reserved for those who seek His heart and His will – not His attention!

My brothers and sisters in Christ, remarkable things happen when we spend time with God – when God’s people pray – people are healed, people are transformed, lives are changed. I could go on and on – telling you my thoughts on why we should pray – but I believe that it is far more important for me to share with you God’s point of view regarding prayer.

God has spoken to us through His Holy Word to encourage us and to instruct us regarding prayer:
1 Timothy 2:1-2 *“First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for everyone, for kings and all who are in high positions, so that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and dignity.”*

Ephesians 6:18 *“Pray in the Spirit at all times in every prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert and always persevere in supplication for all the saints.”*

Matthew 26:41 Jesus said: *“Stay awake and pray that you may not come into the time of trial; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.”*

1 Thessalonians 5:17 *“Pray without ceasing”*

1 Peter 2:5 *“Let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.”*

Ephesians 1:4-5 *“Just as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love. He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will”*

Proverbs 15:8 *“The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the LORD, but the prayer of the upright is his delight.”*

Hebrews 4:16 *“Let us therefore approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”*

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Let me tell you – that as you spend time talking with the Father, listening and reading through His Word --- your prayers will begin to reflect the heart, mind and Word of the Lord. God's Word is the same yesterday, today and forever! God will meet you right where you are - using the amount of knowledge you have.

Ask God to give you a verse that applies to the situation that you are praying for – and pray it. For example --- you might pray all of Colossians 1 by replacing the word you with your name or the names of loved ones - family or friends.

God Himself said that His Word will not return to Him empty: **Isaiah 55:11** *“it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and succeed in the thing for which I sent it.”*

I ask you to not pray the Word of God for the sake of religious activity –instead, pray it based on Faith, believing that you are in agreement with God's will for the circumstance.

Remember you have an enemy. Ephesians tells us that *“our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.”* (**Ephesians 6:12**) You are called to do spiritual warfare through prayer over Satan's strongholds until you win! The enemy usually attacks us in our greatest area of strength. In our areas of weakness we are more apt to call upon the Lord and rely upon Him. In our areas of strength, however, we usually rely on our own self and often find that we burn out from fighting our battles alone. Make no mistake about it - every area of your life is subject to enemy attack, so you must fight on your knees before you can stand on your mission field.

Knowing that God is on your side will help you enter into the rest He offers. Give Jesus your problems: **1 Peter 5:7** *“Cast all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you.”*

Matthew 6:25-26 Jesus reminded us *“Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?”*

Psalm 55:22 *“Cast your burden on the LORD, and he will sustain you; he will never permit the righteous to be moved.”*

Ephesians 4:21-24 *“Lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.”*

And so, my dear friends: Stop striving on your own and partner with God. He loves you and longs to share His heart with you. He has called you, to rest in His love as you come away with Him in prayer. Will you say yes to His invitation today?

We have an opportunity for you to join with us in prayer ministry – and I have invited Tracey Callari – to come and share with us today. Many of you know Tracey as working with Deacon Reitz in leading the youth of St. Bart's, but God has been working through Tracey and a group of others in beginning a bold and wonderful ministry here at St. Bartholomew's – bringing prayer to the forefront.

~~~~Tracey Callari addresses the congregation:~~~~

*Good (evening) everyone! We have all just heard a wonderful message from Father Commins about the power and necessity of prayer in our everyday lives. I am here (this evening) to tell you about a wonderful prayer event that will be taking place right here at St. Bart's in just 2 weeks. The event is called 24-7 and it is a prayer movement that has been sweeping across the globe for the past 10 years. It is simply gathering in one place and praying 24 hours a day, 7 days a week for a set amount of*

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*time. In this special place of prayer, people pray continuously for a closer relationship with the Lord, for guidance and direction through the Holy Spirit, intercession for others, all the while giving praise and glory to our Savior. This type of uninterrupted prayer and worship is nothing new; it has taken place at various times throughout history with amazing results. To name a few, the 1859 Revival of Ulster in Northern Ireland started with a Friday night prayer meeting and ended 4 months later with 100,000 people committing to Christ. The 1903 Azusa Street Prayer Room in Los Angeles held non-stop prayer that lasted for 3 years and birthed a number of missionaries that went forth and proclaimed the truth of Jesus across our country. And then there was the great Moravian Mission Movement where for more than one hundred years, beginning on August 26, 1727 people prayed without ceasing and sparked a worldwide missionary movement. The Moravians sent out more missionaries than all Protestants and Anglicans had sent out in the previous two centuries. These are but a few of the many prayer events that have taken place throughout history and that's not even mentioning unceasing prayer that took place throughout Biblical times. The point is, prayer is a necessary part of the Christian life and God commands us to do it. Prayer brings us closer to God, closer to the plan He has for our lives and closer to our brothers and sisters in Christ so that we can truly become one body, able to do God's work in a bold and beautiful way.*

*So what are we asking of you? We are asking you to come to the prayer room for one hour and spend some time with the Lord. Yes, we do now have a prayer room, upstairs in the corner of our church building. A group of people have been creating this room over the past several weeks and look forward to its completion for the start of our 24-7 event. In this room you will find a variety of things to pray for, being able to move about the room as you are lead by the Holy Spirit. You will be able to explore different avenues of praying, such as writing, through music, through artwork, immersing yourself in silence, or raising your voice to our Lord. You can sit, you can stand, you can lay face down before the cross. It will be your choice on how to pray in this room and it will be your choice on what to pray about, because this room will be yours for one hour. Just you and the Holy Spirit engaging in some one-on-one time, uninterrupted by phone calls, household chores, kids, spouses, you name it. Whatever pulls you away from prayer at home will not be present in this room.*

*It is time for us to seek what the Lord will have us do with this wonderful new place of worship. It is time to come together as a body and seek what each of our roles should be in our church. It is time to just come before the Lord in obedience and seek the will He has for our lives. Let's show Him that we mean business, let's show Him that we are capable of lifting up our prayers to Him for a continuous 168 hours. Let's come along side our brothers and sisters of Christ around the world who will be praying at the same time we are, which includes over 50 other churches. Give an hour of your time and see how the Lord speaks to you.*

*A sign-up sheet will be located in the great hall. Our prayer week begins Sunday, August 16<sup>th</sup> at 10 a.m. It is important that every hour is filled and that someone is present in the prayer room at all times. More details will be given out next week in the bulletin. For now, please commit to at least one hour and may our wonderful God continue to bless each and every one of us. Thank You.*

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Fr. Commins continues:

All of the clergy of St. Bartholomew's believes very strongly in the power and the promise of prayer – and we are committed to this prayer ministry. Each one of us is going to sign up for at least one hour in the prayer room – and we invite you to do the same. Remember the words of our Lord Jesus, on the night before He died – speaking to Peter and then all of the remaining Apostles: “Simon, are you asleep? Could you not keep watch for one hour? Keep watching and praying that you may not come into temptation; the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.”

(Mar 14:37-38) Can YOU not keep watch for one hour?