

## Good News From Doctor Luke 12

### A Father who speaks

Luke 11:1-13

Seen in a Taipeh newspaper: **'The persistence of a young formosan who 700 love letters to his girlfriend proposing marriage has brought results. She is to marry the postman who delivered them.'**

Spending time with Jesus says Luke will lead us to love Him more and loving Him will mean we want to spend more time with Him. Prayer is often presented as a religious duty, which we find hard and taxing. It easily becomes a pressure when people tell us that we ought to pray. It is noticeable that books on prayer don't sell in great numbers. When Jesus talked about prayer, though, He wasn't talking about religious activity but about a *relationship*. All that the people of His day knew about prayer was what they observed in the Pharisees. They saw it as an activity that you had to endure and work at, certainly not enjoy. But then Jesus entered the scene and He was totally different.

There is only one time in the NT when the Disciples ask Jesus to teach them something. They had obviously watched his life, they had seen the miracles, and they had noticed the authority and the wonderful way He spoke. Again and again, they must have asked themselves what the secret of this life was. The thing that obviously struck them was that He kept disappearing every so often to spend time with father. He seemed to have this permanent and natural relationship with God which they must have envied and wanted for themselves.

So when they said: O Lord teach us how to pray, Jesus gave them a surprising answer. He began by saying, 'Pray like this. Our Father in Heaven....' In other words he was saying that if you want to learn how to pray it has got to come out of a relationship, and when you understand the relationship you will know how to pray. When you see that God is your Father you begin to grasp the whole essence of prayer. It is not a technique, method or system, but is merely a product of a relationship.

In fact it has 2 parts to it as it includes both being and saying. One part involves just enjoying the company of God and the other involves talking to Him and listening: both of these are natural parts of any good relationship. In fact, interestingly enough, one of the characteristics of a close relationship is that two people can be together without talking and not feel embarrassed. There seems to be a prevailing feeling that if you are going to pray you have actually got to say something or maybe God will go off and do something else!! (but that's a lie of the enemy)

One of the things that flows naturally out of my relationship with Lorna and my daughters Megan and Lydia is that we want to spend time together and talk about all sorts of things. We have never read books about how to do it. We have never been instructed by anybody else on it. We just seem to do it naturally. In fact, the more time we spend together the closer we become and the greater the understanding we have of each other.

It would be strange if one day I said to them in a funny voice: ***"Because we have such a special relationship I believe that our times together must reflect how special it is. In order to make them really meaningful we shall only talk together once a week. We will meet in the Garden Shed on Wednesday afternoons between the hours of 4pm and 6pm! Now because this relationship is extra special we won't talk in ordinary English but in Latin."***

Of course this is a ludicrous suggestion. We talk together when we want to and when we have something to say about any subject that is on our minds. It is the most natural thing to do. When our children were growing up we tried to spend quality time with them individually, but as well as those special occasions, if there was any time during the day when they wanted to ask me something they knew they were free to do so.

Can you imagine Lydia coming up to me while shopping in Tesco's and saying: "Gracious Father, I wish to bring before thee a humble petition and ask that thou wilt grant my request. I would be grateful if we could purchase some edible tuber's, fragmented

and subsequently immersed in a seething emollient fluid, transmogrified into brittle morsels of an amber hue!" It is much more likely that Lydia would have said: Dad, can I have some chips!

When Jesus taught the disciples to pray He told them to use the word, ABBA or Dad. Can it really be that Jesus encouraged us to use this most intimate term to talk to God? YES! God, the Great Creator of the Universe, because of Jesus' death on the cross, has made it possible for us to be on intimate terms with Him. We don't need to sit there nervously twitching on the edge of a chair (like in an interview) wondering whether God is pleased with us, because He calls us to come running into His arms, to enjoy His presence, to open up our hearts to Him and to share with Him the things that are meaningful to us. This is a privilege reserved for His children. There are many of course outside the Family, in religious circles, who think that they are praying but are living on presumption. It is only when you have been adopted into His Family, committing your life to Him, that you are free to have access to Him.

And make no mistake, He is not the slightest bit impressed with so much of the waffle in our prayers - most of which we include in an attempt to somehow make God feel that we are good Christians! Paul uses the same term ABBA in Romans 8: "When we cry ABBA Father, it is the Spirit Himself bearing witness with our Spirit that we are Children of God, and if Children, then Heirs, Heirs of God and fellow Heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with Him in order that we might also be glorified with Him. (Romans 8: )

Of course we are not to be flippant or stupid but respectful in the presence of God, we are His Children and He has things He wants to say to us and He wants us to be real and open with Him. But we don't have to go to a special building to pray and we don't have to speak in a special language. We don't even have to talk in a particular manner. All we have to do is to be ourselves whenever we can and wherever we are.

I recall once speaking to a brand new Christian in London's East End about prayer. He had become a Christian a few days before. When I suggested we prayed, he didn't even close his eyes! (It's funny how we assume there is a right and wrong position to adopt when talking to God!). He then talked to God as if He were talking to me. He spoke in the most free and easy way, swearing like a trouper as he went! As he had not been a Christian long, swear words were still part of his vocabulary. If he had cut them out he would have been very short of things to say! Now, had he gone on swearing years later that wouldn't have been a good thing, but I believe God was thrilled with his prayer. He wasn't offended by the words he used (after all it wasn't the first time God had heard them!), but He listened to his heart and his heart was being expressed to God in a way that was honest and open.

When Jesus talked about prayer in Matthew 6 He was obviously tired of all the claptrap of the Pharisees who used eloquent phrases and made such a show of their praying so that everybody would be impressed with them. You can detect in his teaching a longing for ordinary people just to be open and natural with their Heavenly Father. They don't have to feel that every time they come to God he is weighing what they say (other Christians might but He certainly isn't). They don't have to make sure they say it properly so that He is pleased. He just wants to enjoy their company and wants them to open their hearts to Him. It is honestly that God wants because He knows our hearts before we start anyway. So there is not much point in trying to cover up, pretending we are feeling something we are not.

Prayer meetings can be so forced and formal. I can think of many times when I have been in a PM and spent 30 mins trying to work out a prayer that I felt would be acceptable to everyone around me. Only then could I safely pray. I would be just about to open my mouth to pray and somebody else would jump in and pray the same prayer! It's all rather hard work especially when so many prayers are either indirect preaching, or putting the last prayer right! ***Hey lets just talk to Jesus!!***

Nobody likes to have friendships where they know that a person is only their friend for what they can get out of them. We appreciate real friendship when we know the other person actually wants our company. I am sure that is why the psalmist said he wanted to seek God's face. He didn't just want to go to God to get what he could from Him, but he wanted to see Him, to know Him, and just to enjoy Him! This isn't something that comes easy to most of us, but it may be that we need to discipline ourselves to cultivate that sort of relationship. And surely we know that if we really are enjoying God's presence day to day then when He does have something to say to us He will be able to say it. He won't have to wait for the next time that we have set-aside specifically for prayer but he will know that He can get through to us whenever He chooses to.

So Luke wants us to grasp the language of Discipleship: it's the

### ***The Language of Intimacy***

Father - ABBA - Daddy Almighty

Prayer supremely the "Our Father"

### ***The Language of Persistence***

**Parable of persistence!** God is better than a neighbour. If a neighbour will eventually and reluctantly answer a call for help, won't God most willingly hear our prayers?

**Saying it six ways in case we don't hear it!**

### ***The Language of Heaven***

**Good gifts - Holy Spirit.** God is better than Human parents. If they with all their faults will never trick their offspring, won't God give good gifts to His Children (including tongues)?

Prayer without the Holy Spirit leaves it in the realm of the flesh and mere religion. Holy Spirit praying is the mark of true disciples.

Pastor David

February 23<sup>rd</sup> 2014.