

Rooted: Prayer

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Date: 01 October 2023

Preacher: Kent Dixon

[0 : 00] Welcome here for this Sunday, October 1st. Is there a chill in the air? There's frost on the cars. Yikes. We've started turning on the furnace in our house, which I resist all the time.

And Michelle says, it's way too cold. It's way too cold. She doesn't sound like that, but today she does because I'm up here and you're back there. It's way too cold. And I say, put on a sweater. I pay the heat bill. And she says, so do I. Turn it up. So welcome to each of you this morning. It's good to see your faces here this morning. And as you know, people do tune in and listen different times in different ways.

So welcome, no matter how you're connecting with us this morning. So we're putting a picture up on the screen. Are you familiar with the game? One of these things is not like the others.

I heard some yeses. So these things are quite different in many ways, but they all have something in common. You see a lady talking on her phone.

[1 : 03] You see someone texting. I still remember when one of my nieces taught me how to text. Feels like not that long ago. And I felt very, very old. And now I can't stop doing it.

Social media. So whether you're on Facebook or Twitter, which is now called X, so the bird is now relevant in that picture. If you are on YouTube, if you're on Instagram, if you're on any of those kinds of social media platforms, that's something else.

And the last one, hopefully, is obvious. So that last image is a form of communication that doesn't require a smartphone. It doesn't require access to the internet.

It doesn't require money. It just requires the time and desire to do it. This morning, we're continuing in our sermon series, Rooted. And our series is considering some important concepts and truths that are essential for us as followers of Jesus.

Things that we need to remember and understand clearly to remain rooted in our faith. And over the past three weeks, we've looked at the Bible. We've considered the attributes of God in an idea that what is God like?

[2 : 13] And we, last week, explored the idea of the Trinity. And this morning's focus is, maybe you got it a little bit from the songs this morning or from some of my basic comments here, but this morning's focus is on prayer.

This morning, we're going to consider a few things. What prayer is, why we do it, the effectiveness of our prayers, and then a few other important details.

And I'm strongly considering a focused sermon series on prayer that we may start in the new year. So stay tuned for that. Let's start with a definition.

What is prayer? Any guesses? Audience participation time. Thank you. Communication with the living God, one God.

Growing closer to God. What about getting through a traffic jam? It's valid. Lord, give me the patience to get across White Mud Freeway.

[3 : 26] Yes. Catch that? Prayer's also listening. So as we've already considered in that opening picture that we looked at, prayer has one thing in common with phoning or texting someone or social media.

It's a form of communication, as some of the comments have suggested. Prayer is communicating with God. It's pretty simple, right? And like last Sunday, I'm done.

That's it. I hope you enjoyed. Well, I mean, it is that simple. But praying to, communicating with God, is not like communicating with anyone else in our lives.

That probably makes sense. But why is that? Well, do you remember the qualities and attributes of God that we considered a few weeks ago? God is eternal.

He is omnipotent. He is omnipresent. He is all-knowing. God is holy and perfect and righteous and just and loving. God is all those things that we are not.

[4 : 31] He is the one true God. And through prayer, only through prayer, do we have an open and direct link, a line of communication to him. There's no call center.

There's no please hold and wait to speak to an agent. We have the honor of speaking with the creator of the universe. Is that not humbling?

Deeply humbling. So that should be pretty important to us, right? It should be. So prayer is communicating directly, here's our definition, with the one and only true God.

Being reminded then what prayer is, why do we, why should we do it? Well, let's look at Matthew 6, verses 7 to 8.

So you can pop there or you can listen. Matthew 6, verses 7 and 8, where we read, Did you catch that?

[5 : 44] God knows, God already knows, what we're going to ask for, what we need before we even say it. So he knows what we're going to say.

And unfortunately, some people take that, take the easy route at that point and say, well, why bother to pray if he knows? Well, let's think about it.

First, God wants us to pray to deepen our dependence on him. Luke 22, verses 9 to 12 says, And I tell you, ask, and it will be given to you.

Seek, and you will find. Knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives. The one who seeks finds. And to the one who knocks, it will be opened.

What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will instead of a fish give him a serpent? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion?

[6 : 49] The scorpion McMuffin is not popular. Matthew 21, verse 22 says, Whatever you ask in prayer, you will receive if you have faith.

So when we pray, we're consciously expressing our faith in God and putting our trust in him. And even at times when we may not be filled with faith or trust, we may not feel like praying, the fact that we're still reaching out to God and talking to him shows that even if it's just in some small way, we believe that he is there and we believe, we trust that he will hear us.

And God likes that because he wants us to depend on him for everything, big or small. Second, God wants us to pray to deepen our relationship with him.

James 4, verse 8 says, Draw near to God and he will draw near to you, that reciprocal relationship. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.

Each time we pray, we draw a little closer to God. And every time we pray, he also draws closer to us. And it's that sense of intimacy and closeness with him that should lead us to pray more, to grow even closer, to desire to build and deepen that relationship.

[8 : 24] See that wonderful progression that's available there? The more we do it, the closer we become. And it's like any other relationship. The more you communicate, the more time you invest in the relationship, the closer you will come to the other person.

I see people nudging each other. Oh yeah, you should talk to me more. But do you see why the cold shoulder, the icy experience you may have in relationships sometimes, is completely counter to building relationship.

So it's exactly the same way with prayer, with you and God. God wants us to seek him and know him more, so he wants us to talk to him.

He wants us to pray. Third, God wants us to pray to become, I love this idea, to become something, part of something bigger than ourselves.

Matthew 6, 10, part of the Lord's Prayer that Jesus taught us says, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. We are asking for God's will to be done.

[9 : 38] He wants us to ask for that to happen. Your kingdom come, your will be done. Not my will, your will be done. So when we pray that way, we're praying for only something that God can do.

Can you recognize that? We're taking the focus off of our own expectations of God, and our tendency to ask for what we want. Do you pray for what you want?

We all do it. But as God hears and answers our prayers, asking for what he wants, then we can become part of something greater. something that we simply cannot do ourselves, and he wants us to become involved in.

Have you ever prayed about something that you couldn't control in any way, and then seen God make it happen? Whoa. Isn't that cool?

If that's happened to you, I hope it has. In that moment, God allowed you to become part of something that he is doing. And I'm sure each of us, I hope each of us have stories that we can tell like that, because they are truly awesome.

[10:54] So we've looked at what prayer is. We've talked a little bit about why we should do it, why we do it, hopefully. But a question that every prayer, one who prays, has likely asked at least once in their life, how effective are our prayers?

Have you ever thought that? Have you ever asked that? Have you ever said it out loud? Well, Luke 11, verse 9 and 10 says, and I tell you, you're hearing this again, I tell you, ask and it will be given to you.

Seek and you will find, knock and it will be opened to you. For anyone who asks, receives, and the one who seeks, finds, and to the one who knocks, it will be opened.

And we heard this a moment ago. Jesus is telling us to keep asking, keep seeking, keep knocking. And I don't believe that he would tell us to do that if he didn't intend to answer.

The Bible, it shouldn't surprise you, is full of stories, true stories of people praying, and God answering their prayers. And Moses is just one example.

[12:08] In Exodus 32, verse 12 and 14, we have the ask and the response. Why should the Egyptians say, with evil intent, did he bring them out to kill them in the mountains and consume them from the face of the earth?

Here's the ask. Turn from your burning anger and relent from this disaster against your people, Moses says. Verse 14, and the Lord relented from the disaster he had spoken of, bringing on his people.

Ask and you will receive. Show of hands, how many of you here this morning have prayed and seen God answer your prayers?

There you go. I hope everyone looked around. I would say that was 100%. Pretty close. So if you can't think of, at the moment, you know, getting put on the spot by the pastor is not always great. If you can't think of an answered prayer off the top of your head, let's see if hearing 1 John 1, 9 helps you. 1 John 1, 9 says, if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

[13:29] Have you asked God to forgive your sins at any point in your life? Prayer answered. When we confess our sins to God and we repent of them, we are forgiven.

It's clear in Scripture. If you are a follower of Jesus, God has answered this prayer for you likely many times. So here's a hard question you might have.

How come God doesn't answer all my prayers? Anybody thought that? You don't have to raise your hands. I'm not taking notes. How come God doesn't answer all my prayers?

I pray to Him all the time and I don't get all the things answered that I want. Well, let's hear the words of Psalm 66, verse 18. Oh, this is humbling.

If I had cherished iniquity in my heart, the Lord would not have listened. Proverbs 15, verse 29 says, The Lord is far from the wicked, but He hears the prayers of the righteous.

[14:43] 1 Peter 3, verse 12 says, For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and His ears are open to their prayer, but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.

So one of the reasons God doesn't answer our prayers is because of sin. When we're living in or doing things that are contrary to God's will, should we realistically expect answers?

No. I don't think so. Because sin builds up a wall between us and a holy God. That wall doesn't have to be there. we choose to put it there.

Maybe when you start thinking about this a little bit more, if God only hears the prayers of perfect people, I'm hearing this needs to be a perfect person, why does He hear any of our prayers?

Well, don't miss that point. I hope that all of us can recognize that none of us are perfect. Is that a revelation for you?

[15:53] None of us are perfect. perfect. So God tells us to use prayer as a way to receive His grace and forgiveness. Remember what we heard in 1 John 1.9.

Psalm 19, verse 12 says, Who can discern His errors? Declare me innocent from hidden faults. Do you think we're able on our own to be able to say, Oh, this is bad in me.

I need to let go of this. This is sinful. We're sinners, folks. It's an inherent thing that we do. We're not good at rooting it out and confessing it ourselves all the time.

That's why we need God and the Holy Spirit to convict us of those things. In 1 John 5, 14 and 15, we read, This is the confidence we have toward Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, do you hear that?

He hears us. And if we know that He hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked of Him. So the reality of there is that God will not answer also if we're not praying according to His will.

[17:14] That needs to be clear. John 15, verse 7 says, If you abide in me and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish and it will be done for you in God's will.

So when we say God's will, you hear that all the time, I'm sure. Are you thinking, how do I figure that out? How do I know it? If you go on Amazon and search knowing God's will, I bet you you'll get thousands and thousands of its books.

Google it. Speaking of social media. So when we're talking about God's will, what we're talking about is the desires of God and what He wants.

It's not a secret. None of this is a secret. There's no magical formula where we can just tack on our personal desires and have God answer them.

Have God answer what we want to have happen or to somehow force God to do what we want.

We're called to pray for what God wants in a given situation, not what we want.

[18:28] So sometimes this can be simple. We can see what God wants through His actions, through His reactions in the Bible. We see through God's character what He wants.

And we can pray according to that. We have a model. We have examples. So we can have a pretty good sense that we're praying according to God's will. But sometimes it's not that simple.

When we don't see a direct similar situation in the Bible, we should pray according to the principle that is at work. So in other words, we know enough about God's character to have a sense of what His will might be in a given situation.

So that's a good step in the right direction when you seek to do that. And the reality is that sometimes we may pray according to what we believe is God's will, or we just simply pray with the best of intentions for Him to do or not do something in our lives, and then the answer that we want doesn't come.

Has that happened to you? There's a really good example in Scripture of this type of situation. In 2 Corinthians 12, 8 and 9, the Apostle Paul gives a personal example of this when he says, Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me.

[19:56] But he said to me, My grace is sufficient for you. My power is made perfect in weakness. Therefore, Paul says, I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

Paul was plagued by something that he referred to as his thorn, and maybe you've read it about it. His thorn in the flesh. Bible scholars have tried for centuries to determine what this might have been, but we don't know for sure.

The Bible doesn't spell it out for us. People have guessed, have surmised, that it may have been a physical issue or a health issue of some kind. It may have been a personal issue that he struggled with in his faith, or it may have been a person or people who made his life and ministry difficult.

We don't know for sure. But what we do know, the way Paul talks about it and the way Paul comes to the conclusion of what God is doing in and through it, is that God didn't answer Paul's prayer to remove it.

God clearly had other, possibly bigger and better things in mind that would have only come about if Paul's prayer had not been answered.

[21:22] That's a tough one, right? We can see how unanswered prayer deepened Paul's trust in God. Trust in God's will for his life.

Friends, it's tough, but sometimes we just need to be content that God knows what he is doing. Even in the midst of frustration or disappointment that may come with what we perceive to be unanswered prayer.

Lord, don't make me have to face this. Lord, take this away. Lord, heal this relationship. Lord, restore my health. And the answers don't come.

We need to trust him. Sometimes God's timing and the ways in which he answers our prayers come about in totally different ways than we want or expect.

Maybe there's been times when you've been able to recognize the amazing effects that unanswered prayer has come to have in your life. Maybe how it played out ultimately in wonderful ways you could never have expected.

[22 : 38] My friends, we have to trust God even when what we want to see happen doesn't.

Romans 8.28, you knew I was probably getting here eventually, says, and we know that for those who love God all things work together for good for those who are called according to his purpose.

When we're in constant communication with God, when we're seeking his will, we can trust that all things, the good and the bad, will ultimately be used by God for our purposes and his.

When you feel that, at least from your perspective, a prayer hasn't been or isn't being answered, remember, God is not just sitting up there ignoring you or picking and choosing at random.

That's not the way he works. It's that he actually knows far better what's coming. He knows how each circumstance can best be used according to his will and his best plan for our lives.

Have you ever felt a sense of entitlement about prayer? I know the answer is yes. A sense that God should give you what you're asking for because of whatever reason you've got in your head.

[24 : 14] I give to the church, I give to your kingdom, Lord. Answer my prayer. Whatever reason you have in your head, you've probably done it. So let's remember something important.

This is going to sound harsh, but don't panic. We have no right to ask God for anything. I'll just let that sit there for a second.

You ever considered that? We have no right, no right at all. Who we are and what we have done should ultimately disqualify us from expecting anything from God or even coming into his presence.

The fact that we're here this morning is miraculous. Friends, in prayer, we are all sinful people talking to a holy God.

It's as simple as that. How can we even expect him to hear us? It's because of Jesus. I didn't hear an amen.

[25 : 29] Can we have an amen? Amen. Thank you, Jesus. 1 Timothy 2 verse 5 says, for there is one God and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.

John 14 6 says, Jesus said to him, I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

friends, we have a mediator, a representative with God. Remember what we said last week as we explored the Trinity.

We come to the Father through the Son. Jesus is the only way for us to get to the Father. Jesus is the one who has provided a way for our prayers to reach the Father's ears.

There's one prayer that God will always answer, my friends, and that is when we tell him that we trust Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior.

[26 : 43] When you did that, you opened a line of communication and the opportunity for a relationship through prayer that is unlike any you have or ever will know.

Amen. Does hear you have a man who does me to come and que a girl and them to them and them to