

Pray to the LORD

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Preacher: Raymond & Pat Dague

[0:00] What we've just had is the song, What a Friend We Have in Jesus. It's all about prayer. So, Pat thought that would be the appropriate way to begin our discussion tonight, where! we're both going to do this presentation, and then we'll have a little chat afterwards about it. So, why don't we begin in prayer. Father, we're we bless and thank and praise you that you have given us this church, this time, and this relationship with you. We pray, Lord, that you would speak to us, you would teach us, that you would be one who can come to us in a time of prayer, and help us to discern your will and to learn what it is that you would have us to learn this night. All these things we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

So, the way we're going to do this is we're going to kind of break it up into a little bit right now from me, and then some from Pat, and then I'll wrap it up with talking a little bit about the kinds of prayer and how we should pray or how we can pray. And some of you people are very mature Christians, and you probably have great prayer lives. But I continue to, I pray every day and many times a day, but I continue to struggle with it. So, on one level, I'm really talking to myself, or I'm talking to anybody else who struggles to kind of get a prayer life or keep a prayer life in a good way. So, with that, let me turn it over to Pat, and she can kind of lead off with some of the scriptural foundations. Thank you. Okay.

Thank you. I love it, actually.

Anyways, I need to read this mostly, because that's how I do best. I really believe we are a praying church, one that places high value on prayer, both personal and corporate. We have had many fine teachings and seminars on prayer, especially from Bishop Dave, who, along with Mary Ellen, practice what they preach and teach on prayer. All of us have testimonies on the many blessings, including some miraculous answers through prayer, both personal and communal.

The overall title of this series is Approaching the Lord. Most of what we have heard this Lent at these teachings involve having a right heart attitude, and this is vital as we approach the Lord in prayer. Having holy fear, entering his presence with praise, determining to walk in obedience or agreeableness, as Bishop Dan said, and also honoring him in every way. These are keys that help us approach the Lord through prayer. Jesus said, when you pray, not if you pray. In Matthew 7, we're all familiar with this, ask and it will be given to you, seek and you will find, knock and it will be opened to you.

[3:42] For everyone who asks, receives, and the one who seeks, finds. And to the one who knocks, it will be opened. In Matthew 18, again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them.

John 15, 7, if you abide in me and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish and it will be done for you. So, laying the groundwork, that said, I have two suggestions that have worked in my prayer life.

The first one is praying the scriptures. One of the best books I have ever read that has helped me to energize and focus my prayer life is called Praying the Bible by Donald Whitney. And I know I have given it to some people here a few years back.

Very short book, but very focused and very helpful. The book's initial premise is praying the same old things about the same old things can result in the B word.

Anybody can guess? Boring. Boring. Thank you. The problem is not that we pray about the same things. Family, situations, finances, our future, crises, Christian concerns.

[5:19] That is all normal and we should be praying about those things. The problem is we may be saying the same old things about them. Prayer can get boring and repetitive and we might be tempted to give up on prayer because it's hard to pray in a heartfelt way.

We might hear a sermon, read a book, or hear a testimony on prayer that revitalizes us for a time, but enthusiasm can vanish and you are back to praying the same old things about the same old things.

First of all, we know that God wants us to have a vital prayer life. And we also know that God wants us to be in his word, the scriptures.

So, one simple but effective and biblical solution is when you pray, pray through a passage of scripture, particularly through a psalm.

One quote says, By praying the psalms back to God, we learn to pray in tune with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Also, for 30 centuries, God's people have found in the psalms an answer to the disciples' plea, Lord, teach us to pray.

[6:36] Why scripture and especially the psalms? And in this book, some people gave some feedback. Like, praying through scripture, passage, or psalm, the wandering mind can be tamed, because the scripture text can hold your attention.

Prayer becomes more about God and less about me. It can seem like a real conversation with a real person. The psalms speak directly to all life situations.

And we studied the psalms a while in this church, and it's so true. And we have greater assurance that we are praying God's will. And we are inspired to pray for people in situations we don't normally pray about.

So, you start to pray about the same old things, but in a new and fresh way. I want to go to Acts 3. And I'll just, the passage that I'm referring to is the story of the lame from birth beggar who sat at the temple gate daily to ask for alms.

[7:45] He was healed when Peter prayed for him. And then a crowd gathered because they were astonished at the miracle. And Peter took the opportunity to proclaim Jesus in his resurrection and calling them to repentance in his name.

Peter and John, who was with him, were arrested by the priests and rulers who were, quote, greatly disturbed at their preaching.

They were admonished and released the next day and were told not to speak in the name of Jesus. I love Peter and John's reply. Why? Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge.

For we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard. So, Peter and John, they were released, went back to their friends and reported the whole thing. Now, in Acts 4, starting at verse 24, And here's a quote from Psalm 2, verses 1 and 2.

And the prayer goes on.

[9:14] But verse 31 says, First of all, notice that the believers were in unity in their prayer.

Then they focused on God's attributes. He is sovereign. He is creator. They have confidence in God's character. And they did not pray for protection.

Considering the threats against them, they asked for boldness to speak the gospel. And then the Lord shook the place where they were gathered. The point is that they acknowledged the Holy Spirit's role through David in Psalm 2.

The early believers prayed the psalm. And if you read the rest of that psalm, a lot of it is about the nation's rage. And it's a great psalm to pray for our country, especially with the political turmoil that we have.

So I highly recommend this book if, you know, you want to jumpstart, do something different with your prayer life. And this will dovetail with Raymond's teaching later on.

[10:30] Okay, my second point is memorizing scripture. Jesus memorized scripture. One source says that Jesus quoted the Old Testament 78 times.

The Pentateuch alone 26 times. He quoted from Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Deuteronomy, Psalms, Proverbs, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, Amos, Jonah, Micah, and Malachi. He referred to the Old Testament as, quote, the scriptures, quote, the word of God and the wisdom of God. So Jesus prayed the scriptures.

When he was tempted in the desert, you remember, he quoted Deuteronomy 3. Oh, Deuteronomy 3 times in response to each temptation of Satan.

And on the cross, you know about the seven last words. His fourth utterance, he quoted Psalm 22:1. My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

[11:36] And his seventh utterance, he quoted Psalm 31.5. Into your hand, I commend my spirit. Scripture tells us to memorize scripture.

Colossians 3.16 tells us, let the word of Christ dwell in us richly. And also in Deuteronomy, it says, Some of us were prayer counselors at the Billy Graham crusade here in Syracuse a few years ago. We were given a list of scriptures to memorize to help us as we talked with people who came forward for prayer. Oh, wait, I got a fine number.

Three. Three. I'm on three? No. I'm on four. So, John Piper had some good points about memorizing scripture.

It makes meditation possible when reading is impossible. It strengthens your faith. It helps guard against temptation.

[12:57] In Psalm 119, how can a young person stay on the path of purity by living according to your word? And it goes on, I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you.

It helps guard our mind. When we have scripture, it's a wonderful way to talk to others about the Lord. In 1 Peter, we learned, but in your hearts, revere Christ as Lord.

Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. Chuck Swindoll, I think we know him.

He writes, Finally, we know Jesus, our greatest.

Great high priest, our mediator, and our merciful savior is at the right hand of God and hears and intercedes. I think we all know Hebrews 4.16.

[14:19] Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. The NIV says, The NIV says, Let us approach God's throne of grace with confidence.

This verse has one passion, one imperative, one command, and that is to draw near to God, to approach him. What a privilege to carry everything to God in prayer.

Okay, we're done. Now, Pat talked about the scriptures for prayer, and Jesus prayed, and he told us to pray, and scriptures tell us to pray.

But I'm kind of a funny guy. I have to ask these kind of ponderous questions. Why do we do it? Why do we pray? What's the point of praying?

I mean, it isn't like we need to tell God something. He knows everything. So why are we petitioning him in prayer? Well, I want to talk about one fundamental reason as to why it is that we need to pray.

[15:35] And it's called communication. And forget about God for a moment. Take a friend or a spouse. You know, your husband, your wife, your best friend, or whatever the case may be.

You can have a good friend, or you can have a relationship with your husband or wife. But if you don't communicate, if you don't talk to them ever, it's not much of a relationship at all.

And it doesn't matter what the person is, whether it's just good buddies or whatnot. If you never talk to them, you know, they may know a lot about you, but communication is in the nature of what it is that we do.

And it falls into two categories, talking and listening. And so when we pray, it is important that we both talk to God and, in addition to that, listen to him.

Because he will speak to us if we listen to him. If this God is really there, you know, if it's just all fairy tale, we're just talking to the ceiling. But if there's really a God there, and of course, I take Jesus' word pretty good on that one, he will speak to us at times.

[16:50] Now, there are really kind of two kinds of prayer. There's what I call liturgical prayer and improvisational prayer. And liturgical prayer is a liturgy that has been written a long time ago.

And you say it, we all say the Lord's Prayer, we all say the Nicene Creed, those kind of things, over and over and over again. Most of us have many of those memorized.

And then there's what I call improvisational prayer. Improvisational prayer is when you're just speaking your heart and talking to God. Now, actually, they're both the same thing.

I'll tell you a story. Back in the day when I first became a Christian, I went to a Baptist church. And Baptist churches are known for not having a liturgy at all.

But not really. One thing I noticed very quickly is that the pattern was always the same. Even listening, the pastor, he was a great pastor, and he gave an improvisational prayer that lasted about 10 minutes or so before the sermon that he gave.

[17:59] And the prayer that he uttered almost always from week to week was the exact same pattern. Slightly different words, but it was the same pattern. Liturgical prayer was once improvisational prayer.

David wrote a psalm. He sat there with his lyre, and he put words together, and he played them. So on one level, there's really very little difference between the two.

Now, that said, the church has for a long time, by the time of the Middle Ages, had what are called offices of the day, periods of time when they get together for prayer, in particular in monasteries or in cathedrals or in churches.

People would gather for prayer. And it was a little complicated. St. Benedict is one of my very, very favorite guys.

He lived from about 480 to 547 A.D. And he was the founder of the Benedictine movement, the Benedictine monasteries. And there were already, at the time, he codified these, but this already was existing.

[19:13] There were eight times when you would get together, when you would gather with your friends to pray. Matins was about between 2 and 3 in the morning or sometime like that.

Lods was when you got up in the early morning, dawn, to pray. Prime, the day is divided into 12 hours from 6 o'clock to 6 o'clock.

So prime was the first hour when sunrised. Of course, it depends on the season when sun rose. Terse, terse, 3, was the third hour.

It was roughly 9 o'clock in the morning. Sext, 6, noon, was the noon prayer. Gnone, the ninth hour. Gnone, 9, about 3 o'clock in the afternoon. And then Vespers was sunset. Call it 6 o'clock, but it would change depending on the season. And then Compline, this is the end of the day, the last thing you do before you go to bed.

[20:14] And it got exceedingly complicated as the Middle Ages went along. So when the Reformation came along and Thomas Cranmer came onto the scene, he was the Archbishop of Canterbury.

And he wrote the first Book of Common Prayer. And the Book of Common Prayer, and you've seen him in the pews. This is the latest version of it.

This is the 2019 one. He simplified it to just two of them, a morning prayer and an evening prayer. Now, I passed out to you these liturgy books.

And you don't really need to paw through them right now. But basically, and of course, these were in the pew for the longest time. And before we had the prayer books, we used these.

I've taken the Eucharist out and set it aside. And this is just morning prayer and evening prayer.

And I'll tell you the way I use this thing. Is that once in a while, I will go and I will track through morning prayer or evening prayer, just as it's written.

[21:21] But more often than not, I just kind of dip in here and dip in there. You know, like, for example, for evening prayer, on page 24, you might want to flip to it.

There's this unbelievably cool and very old prayer called the Phos Hileron. It goes like this. O gladsome light.

Funny term, isn't that? O gladsome light. Pure brightness of the ever-living Father in heaven. He's talking about Jesus. O Jesus Christ, holy and blessed. Now as we come to the setting of the sun and our eyes behold the vesper light, we sing your praises, O God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. You are worthy at all times to be praised by happy voices. Interesting phrase. Praised by happy voices. O Son of God, O giver of life, and to be glorified through all the worlds.

Sometimes if I do evening prayer, that might be the only liturgical prayer I'll use. I kind of dip around and go back and forth. Sometimes I'll read it all the way through and pray it all the way through.

[22:29] But usually when I do, I intersperse it with my personal improvisational prayer. You know, every one of these two services, the, you know, Cranmer took the complicated system of the Middle Ages and crunched it down into two, begins with an opening sentence, and then it begins with a confession of sin.

If you can't think of something that you've done wrong during the day or evening, well, you should come talk to one of our clergy, because there are plenty of things that I can think of that I do wrong during the course of the day.

And the beginning of the prayer time is a great time to reflect on it. And then the rhythms that are in these are just very, very, very good. Take this home.

This is not, this is, this is yours. Take it home and put it with your Bible. And don't say to yourself, oh, Raymond says, I've got to slavishly follow this thing.

You know, you use it as you choose to use it. But there will be places in it where it will resonate with you. It will speak to you. It will be different on different days. Sometimes my prayer is very improvisational and free form.

[23 : 43] It kind of goes wherever I think it will go. So, but usually I pray the Lord's Prayer. That's in here. You all have it memorized. You don't need it written down.

Or one of the creeds. We say the Nicene Creed at the communion service. There's the Apostles' Creed in morning and evening prayer.

So, what it is, is it's a, liturgy should be a tool. So, this is a liturgy. This is the time-honored liturgy. This isn't exactly what Cranmer wrote.

It's basically taken, if you've got one of these things, one of these prayer books, it's basically the same. Although there are a couple of little modifications in it that were made by someone to accommodate to the way our practice is here at Holy Trinity.

So, use it as a kind of a little guide. And there's also an advantage of having this thing is that when you see this book there on your nightstand or wherever it is that you go and find yourself a place to sit and pray, it's a reminder, gee, I really should talk to God.

[24 : 54] And when you do that, try to be conversational with him. Try to pray to him and then try to sit back and listen.

You know, there are a lot of places in Scripture where it talks about wait on the Lord. What does that mean, wait on the Lord? What it meant is that the person who comes before God was supposed to wait, and God was actually real.

He was there and he would speak to them. He doesn't want to do that constantly all the time. He wants you to wait for him. He wants you to hang on waiting for him to speak to you.

I can think of some dramatic times when God spoke to me. I'll give you one that still brings tears to my eyes. Because I was very, very close to my dad for many, many years.

When I was a teenager, we kind of tussled a little bit. But boy, from the time when I left law school onward for my whole life, we were incredibly close.

[26 : 04] And I always wondered when Dad died how I would react. When I got word that he died, I was in Milwaukee, and we knew the end was very close.

The most unbelievable thing happened to me. I had this overwhelming sense of joy that came from God. I could have not in a thousand years have imagined that God would speak to me on my dad's death, which I thought was going to be one of the worst days of my life.

And suddenly I had this overwhelming sense of God coming to me and giving me great joy as to who and what he was. It wasn't in speaking a word.

I didn't hear a voice from heaven. But it was indisputable. I waited for that. And I didn't know that that would be the case. If you wait for the Lord, he will speak to you in some way.

It's not going to be a constant thing. Maybe it will with some people. I don't know. I'm just telling you the way Raymond had the Lord speak to him. What I thought was, I thought I would be so crushed that I would be crying for days.

[27 : 18] And it lasted about five minutes. And then it was gone. And it was God speaking to me as I spoke to him in prayer.

You know, I knew when I made the call to my sister that there was half a chance that she would tell me that dad had died in the night and he had. And I hung up and prayed.

And then, wow. I mean, like nothing I've ever had before. So, in that, with that, take the little liturgy booklet, if you like, and use it as you choose, in pieces, or in whole, or different from time to time, and just use it as a little prompting for you to pray, maybe a guide for you to pray, to try and get you started, or if you're very experienced, to keep you on track in order to do that.

Thank you.