

March 22, 2009

Westminster Presbyterian Church



Sermons

Prayer Prompts

by The Reverend Dr. George H. McConnel

Luke 11:1-13

Comments before the sermon:

As a congregation during Lent our theme is the spiritual discipline of prayer. For the last two Sundays we've tried to define effective prayer by saying it's not this, instead it is this.... Prayer is not magic; prayer is reporting for duty. Prayer is not begging God to do things our way; it is orienting ourselves to do things God's way. It is the frontier where our need and God's strength meet. Prayer is not changing God's mind; it is cooperating with God. Prayer is not the speaking lips; it is the listening ear. Prayer is spending time with a friend.

Today we move to a practical application of a way to pray...certainly not the only way, but a way – a way that incorporates our learnings from the past two weeks. These prayer prompts are adapted from *The Secret to Abundant Living* published by Upper Room Books.

The sermon

“A prayer in its simplest definition is merely a wish turned Godward.” - Phillips Brooks

“Prayer is conversation with God. - St. Clement of Alexandria

“Prayer is the pillow of religion.” - Arab proverb

“Prayer enlarges the heart until it is capable of containing God’s gift of himself.” - Mother Teresa

“Prayer is the most important thing in my life. If I should neglect prayer for a single day, I should lose a great deal of the fire of faith.” - Martin Luther

Prayer—a wish turned Godward; a conversation with God; the pillow of religion; the most important thing in my life. We all know how important prayer is to our Christian faith. How come we neglect it so much? We are too busy; too worried about what we shall eat, what we shall drink, what we shall wear, what we shall drive. How come we neglect it? We haven’t made it a habit. It’s not a part of our routine. How come we neglect it? We don’t know how. O, we know how to say the Lord’s Prayer and if pushed we can say grace before a meal, but the **most important thing** in our life? Not many of us can truthfully say that prayer is the most important thing in our life.

John Wesley said, “I have so much to do that I must spend several hours in prayer before I do it.” I’m not suggesting several hours each day—15 or 30 minutes of full undivided attention each day would be fine. Fifteen minutes a day alone with God is a long time for those not used to it. Today I want us to try one way of spending that 15 minutes in conversation with God—it’s not the only way, just one way, to do it. Prayer is an experience, not an idea. In some ways prayer is like riding a bicycle—you only learn by doing it.

The title of today’s sermon is “Prayer Prompts.” Eleven easy steps to God. Now, I don’t know about you but I’m a little suspicious when someone offers me 11 easy steps on anything. Five steps to a new you—yea, sure. Seven natural laws of time management—not with my schedule. “11 Steps to God.” Will you put your suspicions away for a few moments and let me lead you through 15 minutes of quiet prayer?

The outline of these Prayer Prompts is on this little card that we sent to you before Lent, but you don’t even need to look at that now. Let me be your guide and if you find this helpful you can try it at home. The card can prompt you. If you’ve lost yours we have extras in the office.

1. The first step is to find a place in your day where you won’t be interrupted—a quiet place where you can be alone and comfortable. A devotional book can help you get started. Reading scripture is another way to start and that’s what I want us to do today. Please turn in your pew Bibles to page 526. I’d like each of us to center ourselves on God and approach God by reading silently Psalm 62.

The following passages are especially helpful in preparing for prayer: John 14, Psalm 23, Matthew 5:1-12, Romans 8:35-39, I Corinthians 13, Psalm 91, Matthew 6, John 3:1-17, Psalm 46, Romans 12, John 15, Psalm 27, Psalm 103, Psalm 121, Isaiah 55, Luke 15, Psalm 84, John 1:1-18, Psalm 90, Psalm 19, 1 John 4:7-21, Psalm 139, Luke 24, Psalm 130, and Luke 18:1-17.

Suggested Readings:

- Making Time for God: Daily Devotions for Children and Families to Share* – Susan R. Garrett & Amy Plantinga Pauw.
- Bread for the Journey: A Daybook of Wisdom and Faith* – Henri J. Nouwen
- The Upper Room Disciplines 2003: A Book of Daily Devotions*
- Listening to Your Life: Daily Meditations with Frederick Buechner*
- Living the Message: Daily Reflections with Eugene Peterson*
- Sacred Journey: A Woman’s Book of Daily Prayer* – Jan Richardson
- Jesus CEO: Using Ancient Wisdom for Visionary Leadership* – Laura Beth Jones

2. Now you may put your Bibles away. Take everything off your lap; sit up straight in your pew; close your eyes; take four or five deep breaths; relax. Now we are going to move toward God by moving away from a sense of your own self-sufficiency. Give thanks for three personal blessings that you are especially conscious of today. Amen.

3. Pray for the life of the world. Amen.

4. Ask God to help three other persons who you feel need God's help today. This helps you move toward God by moving away from self-centeredness. Amen.

5. Ask God to forgive your mistakes, your debts, your trespasses, your sins and give you the strength to forgive others. This helps you move toward God by admitting your need for forgiveness. Amen.

6. Now ask God to help one person whom you find it hard to like. Ask God to give that person insights into his or her personal problems and ask for the power to let God's love flow through you to him or her. Amen.

7. Ask that you will be sensitive to the needs of one person today with whom you can share God's love in word or deed. Amen.

8. Ask for insights into your personal problems. Amen.

9. Ask for help in achieving your personal goals. Amen.

10. Ask that God will tell you the most important thing you need to do today in order to "seek first his kingdom" (Matthew 6:33). Amen.

11. Now - and here's the hard part -conclude by listening intently for three minutes to what God may say to you. Amen.

How did it go? If you will commit yourself to methodically follow these Prayer Prompts for 40 days in a row, I promise you will grow closer to God. It won't happen overnight. Will you try it for 40 days?

"Here's what I'm saying:
Ask and you'll get;
Seek and you'll find;
Knock and the door will open."