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Pentecost 21, October 22, 2023 - corrected

“I Am a Christian – Part 6 - I Am a Prayer Warrior”

Read: Ephesians 6: 10 - 20 and/or Memorize: Ephesians 6: 18

When I was growing up my mom taught me to pray. I suspect she taught me what she had learned. Each night, we would pray the same prayers: the Lord’s Prayer. Then I would pray: “Now I lay me down to sleep, I pray the Lord my soul to keep, if I should die before I wake, I pray the Lord my soul to take.”

That one scared the bejiggers out of me. I hoped and prayed that I would wake in the morning. And the third prayer I may not have remembered well. It’s been too many years since I’ve prayed it but it went something like this. “Angel of God, angel bright, guard me while I sleep at night. Keep me good and kind each day. Wake me with the morning ray.” That was my prayer life.

It's a long time ago, but I suspect there were other prayers that came up during math tests and when I felt I had a special need. What I want you to hear is that I didn't really know a lot about praying growing up.

For many, prayer is a way to communicate to God exactly what they need. There is a danger that we see God as the vending machine of all our needs. And that’s not what God wants. God wants us to have a conversation with Him.

In that conversation we might acknowledge that He is God; confess our sinfulness and give thanks to Him. Then speak about cares and concerns. He has told us to talk with Him as a dear friend. After all, that is exactly who God wants to be, our dear friend who cares deeply for us.

He shows His care by redeeming us from the power of sin, death and the devil. So obviously, He has a great deal of care for us because He offered His own Son as a sacrifice in our place so that we could carry on this conversation with Him.

How did I learn more about prayer? It wasn't in an academic class. It was in a crisis. At fifteen I went to a dormitory school. I was a junior in high school. It was a very small school with about 120 guys, with a faculty that knew us well as did we know them.

One night we were gathered together by the principal because one of the faculty members had been injured in an accident. He pulled over to the side when his car started acting up. He got out and put up his hood, then another car hit his car.

His car rolled over him and the manifold of the car sat on his chest. The gentleman's name was Pastor Ernst; and we all liked him. The principal informed us he was in the hospital, but it did not look good. They were doubtful that he would live through the night. Along with giving us comfort, the faculty also gave us time to go down and pray in a little chapel we had in our dormitory.

Remember I only really knew three prayers and I didn't want him to die, so I didn't want to pray that one. So, I just talked to God about how much I cared about Pastor Ernst, how sad I would be if he were to die. All of us were hoping that God would intercede.

The next morning, we were told that Pastor Ernst had made it through the night, although he would be in the hospital for a long time, he would live and it struck me how powerful prayer was. This was my first experience where prayer became a conversation with my Heavenly Father about someone I cared deeply about.

I suspect if he had died I would have needed a lot more help understanding. When our prayer is answered in the way we desire, it is easier to deal with than when the opposite happens. It's at those times that we think we are called upon to trust God, but in truth, all times of prayer contain the challenge to trust, no matter the outcome.

Just as our original ancestors believed that they knew more than God, we are also beset by our original sin. We want to control God through our prayers. Prayer is not meant to get God in alignment with our will, but to bring us into alignment with His will.

God decides what's good for us. We sometimes are not able to discern that goodness in the midst of our own thoughts and desires. So, prayer leads us into a conversation with God so we get the help we need to understand how God is working. We are reminded by Paul in Romans 8: 28, God is always working for good in our lives, when we have been called according to His purpose."

In my prayers I have learned those magic words that remind us, as Father Tim says in the Mitford Chronicles, "it is the prayer that is always answered by God." Prayer, spoken in obedience, as it was by Jesus is always answered: "Not My will, but They will be done."

God is always working in and through us to accomplish His work in the world. We are the hands and feet of Jesus to carry out the will of God for all people, not just God's people. In going off by Himself, Jesus is giving us an example for our prayer life, that we might be refreshed and renewed by the Spirit.

Jesus promises us that when we speak to our Father we will find that our prayers are answered. Sometimes, the answer is yes, it is the right time for this; sometimes, it is no, it's not good for you. At other times, God reminds us that we're not ready for it, yet. God wants us to trust Him, no matter what His answer to prayer is.

As a Christian, prayer is not an optional item I pick up here and there to get in touch with God to get the things I want. Prayer is how I stay in close communication with my Heavenly Father. Through prayer I bring the hopes and the hurts of God's people to our Heavenly Father.

By praying I am expressing my certainty that God is working to accomplish the best for me as I bring my cares and concerns to Him, just as any parent would, giving us the chance to grow in our trust of Him.

So, the question is never should we pray, but rather who and what should we be praying for? The first part of that is we should be praying for everything. Not just our needs, but also bringing prayers of thanksgiving.

Paul says prayer is one of our instruments in our battle against the spiritual powers that are seeking to undermine God's mission and ministry. That prayer is spoken continuously. It has no limit on whom it rests and it ultimately involves praying for each other and for the needs of the church at large.

As we seek to be a witness, we want to pray that God will help us to find the opportunities to share our faith, as we witness to them and that we might be bold.

Thom offers several areas for our prayers. One of them is praying for our pastor. I believe it would also be good that we pray for Pastor Anthony that he might discern God's leading. No matter what his decision, we want him to hear clearly where God wants him to serve.

No matter who is our pastor, we want his ministry to be fruitful and filled with the spirit, to be lifted up because there are many headwinds in ministry. Without those prayers of support and encouragement, it is easy to grow weary. Paul reminds us how often the people were praying for him.

We pray for those who don't know Jesus that they come to know Him. We pray that we will live out that calling that Jesus has given us to be His disciples, witnesses, to the great and glorious love that God has for us in Jesus Christ.

We want to pray for the hurting. Sometimes prayer becomes a way for us to enter into the lives of people with that lifesaving word of Jesus when we're willing to take the opportunity. Prayer can lead us to be the hands and feet of Jesus in their need.

We also can pray for unity. It is one of the most powerful ways that we can be brought together in Jesus. When we are united in Jesus, all the other differences that might exist begin to pale in comparison. Our prayer for unity recognizes that we are part of the body of Christ in our local congregation. We've gathered with our brothers and sisters in Christ, to do the work that God has given us to do in this place.

Over the past couple of weeks I have challenged you to become a daily Bible reader, if you are not already. Daily Bible reading is one of the most powerful things you can do to change your own life, and others.

In the church, we enjoy a sweet fellowship and learn how to give to each other abundantly. As we listen to others pray, as we see them share the answers to prayer that they have received, we hear how that prayer knit them together and helped them to solve the problems that would come up in the church.

That unity also helped people to become part of the church. When they saw the peace that existed within the body of Christ, they were attracted as we hear from Luke in Acts 2: 47, "All the while praising God and enjoying the good will of all the people. And each day the Lord added to their fellowship those who were being saved". Prayer helps to unite us by gathering, growing, giving and going through faith in Jesus.

Count me in: Count me in: What will you do to improve your prayer life?