

Rediscovery in 2010 Part 7

This is the seventh sermon in the series of messages concerning rediscovery. We are looking at some foundational truths of our faith, but examining them in new light, asking God for fresh discovery of his truth. Last Sunday we talked about rediscovering evangelism with our missionaries Josh and Lindy Johnson. What a powerful lesson we learned last week about sharing the gospel story to touch the hearts of people. This morning we are discussing **Rediscovering the Significance of Prayer.**

I googled prayer and found page one of approximately 88,000,000 references to prayer on the internet. People must be interested in prayer. Wikipedia says prayer “seeks to activate a volitional connection to some greater power in the universe through deliberate intentional practice.” According to Wikipedia, prayer can be addressed to “a deity, spirit, deceased person or lofty idea for the purpose of worshiping, requesting guidance, requesting assistance, confessing sins or to express one’s thoughts and emotions.”

So there you have it. Prayer in a nut shell, right? Or maybe prayer for a nutcase. I don’t want to pray to a lofty idea, or to just express my emotions. I need to know there is a reason and a purpose behind the prayer. Why are we praying and what is it all about? What is the significance of prayer?

My simple answer is that prayer is about talking to God and the reason we talk to him is because he wants us to and it is one of the means by which we get to know him – by talking to him, just like all our other relationships. But obviously prayer is much more than that.

One morning last week I awakened early and couldn’t get back to sleep. About 5:00 a.m. I felt the Lord begin to speak to my heart about this message concerning prayer. I got out of bed and found a pen and piece of paper and began writing things down about prayer as fast as I could. I don’t think there is an outline to this. I’m not sure there is any rhyme or reason to it all, but I want to share some thoughts with you as we rediscover the significance of prayer. Hang on because there are several of these.

Let me share first a few things prayer is not. Obviously I would tell you prayer is not praying to lofty ideas or to some unknown universal spirit or power. People do it, but that's not prayer as we know it or desire it. We are just talking about the practice of Christian prayer.

Prayer is not bargaining with God. Some of us look at prayer as a means to negotiation. "Lord if you will just let me off the hook this time...if you will just void the consequences this time, here is what I can do for you. I will testify to everyone I know and I promise to never..." That isn't prayer. That's negotiation. Good luck with that because God knows everything and he knows you aren't bargaining or negotiating in good faith. He's seen your track record before. He knows you'll go back to your old ways. Don't bargain with God.

Prayer is not formula or spiritual incantation. Some folks will tell you, "Now say this and pray this verse and speak this declaration and then be sure and say 'in Jesus name' and then you will have what you desire in prayer." That's not how prayer works. That's magic. That's witchcraft. Say these words, use this magical formula, this incantation. Saints, prayer is not magic, it is relationship. Prayer is communicating with our heavenly Father and we don't negotiate with him and we don't manipulate or access his power through external or outside forces. We don't win him over with many words or praying louder or being more demonstrative. That's what Elijah did on Mt. Carmel to the prophets of baal. "Pray louder, perhaps your god can't hear you. Put more emotion into it. Use the right words, the right emotion, the right approach." That's what Jesus was referring to when he said, "**And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words...**"

Matthew 6:7. It's not magic, it's not special words, it's relationship. We approach God in prayer because of our relationship with him through Christ our Savior and Lord.

Prayer is not convincing God to give us what we want, prayer is bringing our desire into line with God's desire for us. God is not an irresponsible Father or parent who gives into his spoiled children because they beg or because they say the right words in order to get their way. That's not responsible parenting and it surely isn't what prayer is all about. To believe that we can ask for anything in Jesus name and the Father is just bound to give it to us whether it is for our good or not, that is not the

actions of a responsible earthly father, let alone our divine Heavenly Father. Instead, through prayer we discover the Father's desire for us, his plans for us, his plans for the kingdom and how we can be a part of that kingdom plan. Prayer brings our desire into alignment with God's perfect desire for us. That's a bit of what prayer is not. What is prayer?

Prayer is faith expressed. Why would I say that? The very act of prayer is an indication that you believe God is here and he is listening to what you say. It is an act of faith. Hebrews declares, **“And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.” Hebrews 11:6** In faith we reach out to him through prayer because we believe he is there and he is listening. It's where we all start in prayer. “God, I believe you are there and you are listening to me, and so, by faith, here goes...”

Prayer is God's presence encountered. That passage in Hebrews says he rewards those who earnestly seek him. With what are we rewarded? We are rewarded with his holy presence. We seek him through prayer and he rewards us with his presence. Prayer is a means to encountering the manifest presence of God. Through prayer we become aware that he is here and he is listening and he is responding. Even if we don't feel something, God has promised to hear the prayers of his people. Prayer is God's presence encountered.

Prayer is worship and honor given. Jesus taught us to pray like this: “Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.” Prayer is worship. Prayer is bowing our heart before a holy God who is to be revered and held in highest adoration and esteem. Prayer should always include worship and adoration.

Prayer is thanksgiving and trust acknowledged. The bible says, **“Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.” Philippians 4:6.** Prayer is acknowledging that God is trustworthy, that instead of worrying or being anxious, we are going to pray and put this situation into God's hands. We pray and make our requests known to God because we trust him. **“This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And**

if we know that he hears us – whatever we ask – we know that we have what we asked of him.” 1 John 5:14. We have confidence in coming to God and our prayer is one means of acknowledging that trust. Daily I pray, placing all my trust and hope in the Lord. .

Prayer is requests made. Sometimes we don't pray because we act like we don't want to bother God. Really? You think prayer will bother him? We just read that passage telling us to make our requests known to God. We think we don't deserve his help. You're probably right, however, he told us to ask. It was his suggestion. James said, **“You do not have because you do not ask God.” James 4:2 .** Prayer is about asking.

In teaching his disciples about prayer, Jesus said, **“Ask and it will be give to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds and to him who knocks, the door will be opened.” Matthew 7:7-8**

Prayer is asking. Of course, James gave us some further explanation about asking in James 4. We don't have because we don't ask. Or... **“When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.” James 4:3**

Ask. I believe it is always right to ask, but remember we are to ask with right motives, as good stewards of all we receive from the Lord. Jesus said “men should always pray and not give up (faint).” Luke 18:1. We should always ask, without hesitation. Pray and trust and don't give up.

Prayer is our means of entering into the ongoing activity of God. In prayer we are asking, “Father, what are you doing? How should I respond? Where do I fit in your activity?” Jesus said it this way in his model prayer, “Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” Prayer is us saying “Lord, show me your will here on earth, show me how your kingdom is coming to influence these circumstances and let me participate in fulfilling your will and purpose.” Prayer is a means of linking us to the purpose and will of God in our daily life.

Prayer is fellowship and conversation. Jesus said, **“He who belongs to God hears what God says.” John 8:47.** Earlier in the chapter Jesus said, **“...I do nothing**

on my own but speak just what the Father has taught me.” John 8:28. Jesus teaches us that prayer is a conversation, that part of the focus of prayer must be to quiet our own voices and all the noise around us and be able to listen, to meditate, to engage in active fellowship with God, learning and listening and obeying all he says and all we learn in prayer. And...

Prayer is listening. So much of prayer for many of us has always been about trying to find the right words to say but it must also be about listening, quieting our heart and mind and spirit before God and listening. When God said “cease striving - or be still - and know that I am God”,(Psalm 46:10) I think he was talking about prayer. Quiet your mind in prayer and become aware that he is God in your life and he is Lord over your circumstances. You may have come to him in the storm but in prayer we cease striving and struggling and start listening and we discover his presence with us, even in the storms of life.

Prayer is submitting our will to the will of the Father. I don't always know what God's will is in a situation but prayer is the means by which we get our will submitted to his. Romans tells us that the Holy Spirit helps us in praying according to the will of the Father. Paul writes, **“In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express...because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will.” Romans 8:26-27**

All of us struggle at times with knowing God's will. How do we pray? What do we do? Jesus gave us the greatest lesson in submitting our will to the Father in prayer in the garden of Gethsemane. In facing the crucifixion and all that would accompany it, Jesus prayed, **“Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done.” Luke 22:42.** Prayer brings us to a place of submission and agreement with God and his purpose. As I said before, prayer is about centering our mind, our thoughts, our heart, our spirit upon God, upon his presence, upon his desire for us, upon his purpose and his will. Give your will to God in prayer, surrender your will and your appetite and your desires to him and watch what happens.

Prayer is positioning our heart to receive what God intends for us. A great man of faith once said he had never had a prayer go unanswered. He said the key had

been he prayed until he knew what God desired or until he didn't care which way God answered and then he came into agreement with God's will in that situation. Through prayer he knew he was going to receive what he had asked of the Lord. Prayer brings us to that place where we only desire what God desires for us. And when we reach that place, we pray with confidence and with joy, fully submitted to God's great plans and his awesome purpose for us.

Prayer establishes God's authority and rulership over the circumstances in our life. Through prayer with thanksgiving we put those adverse circumstances into God's hands. The bible says we can cast all of our cares upon him. How do we do that but through prayer? In prayer we take all those cares and worries, all those needs and petitions and we place them in his hands. We place them under his authority and not our own. We submit them under his rulership to await his decision, his ruling.

The bible says he inhabits the praises of his people or he is enthroned upon the praises of his people. When we worship and praise and give honor to the Lord through prayer he is enthroned upon our praise. Where his throne is his kingdom is established and where his kingdom is established his will is done. Remember Jesus prayer? "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." Prayer establishes his authority and brings the rulership of his kingdom to bear upon the circumstances of our life.

Prayer is to be made in behalf of others. Paul writes, "I urge then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone – for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness." 1 Timothy 2:1-2. We are to pray for everyone, even those we may not be so fond of. I doubt the readers of Paul's letter were fans of the king or the Caesar in Rome, but they were instructed to pray – for everyone!

Prayer is offered to the Father, through the Son, by the Holy Spirit. Jesus said when you pray, pray like this – "Our Father who art in heaven..." We pray to the Father, upon or through the means, the authority given to us by his Son, with the help and direction given to us by the Holy Spirit.

Prayer is the will of God for us. Paul told us to pray continually, that this was God's will for us. "Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances,

for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus." 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18. It is always God's will that we pray.

Prayer is to be honest, sincere, open, transparent, confessional, expectant, fervent. Prayer is worship, thanksgiving, requests, petition, adoration, meditation, listening, receiving, awareness. It is real, heartfelt, sincere, faith-filled. Prayer can also be questioning, expressed doubtfully. "How can you say that about prayer?" Have you read the Psalms? The Psalms are filled with prayers questioning what God was up to, why had he delayed his help. Those ancient prayers are expressions of the heart of real human beings engaged in a real relationship with the living God. That's what it's all about. Prayer is our ongoing conversant life with our Heavenly Father and our loving Savior. Prayer is at the heart of this living, life-giving relationship with God. Prayer is how we humbly come, through Christ, to the throne of grace to "receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need." Hebrews 4:16

Prayer is not calling you to a certain amount of time spent each day, prayer is calling you to give your attention to a certain person throughout the day. I said it earlier, but prayer is about encountering the Lord. Every day. Throughout the day.

Look what happened when Jesus prayed. In John 5 Jesus had been teaching the people and it was late and they were hungry. With five loaves and two fish Jesus had the disciples seat the people (5,000 of them) and then he took the bread and the fish and he prayed and gave thanks and then distributed the pieces and feed the entire 5,000+.

Remember Jesus at the tomb of Lazarus. What did he do? He lifted up his head to the heavens and began to pray. "Father, I thank you that you have heard me..." and then he called out "Lazarus!" and Lazarus came back to life from the dead. Miracles happen when Jesus prays.

What happens when the church prays? In Acts 4 it says, **"After they had prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly. Acts 4:31.** In Acts 12 Peter had been arrested and was scheduled for trial. The bible says, **"So Peter was kept in prison, but the church was earnestly praying to God for him." Acts 12:5.** The night before the trial was to begin an angel miraculously appeared and delivered Peter

from prison. Miracles happen when the church prays.

The list can go on and on. The importance is that we engage in this relationship and this intimate conversation with God.

And understand, when I said miracles happen when Jesus prays – the good news is **Jesus is still praying for us!** The bible says concerning Jesus, **“Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them.” Hebrews 7:25.** He is praying for you this morning and because of that, I’m pretty confident you are going to make it. He is interceding for you.

He has given us this model, this pattern to follow. Praying for one another, interceding for each other. Communing with the Father through ongoing prayer.

Prayer is to be private. Jesus said, “But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen.” Matthew 6:6. But prayer is also collective. **“If my people who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land. Now my eyes will be open and my ears attentive to the prayers offered in this place.” 2 Chronicles 7:14-15**

I believe if we will pray he will answer. I believe if we will repent and turn to him he will heal our land and our families and our mind and soul and body. He desires that we walk in fellowship, in relationship with him and that involves communication, listening. It means prayer!

Let’s commit ourselves to prayer, to a living, growing relationship with God. Let’s talk to him. Let’s call upon him. Let’s pray and seek his face. Let’s rediscover what happens when God’s people commit themselves to a life of prayer in his presence.

I want to invite you to come this Friday evening and Saturday morning as part of this prayer for revival in our city and our nation. Come join together as we cry out to the Lord.