A Life of Prayer: The Child Memory Verse: 2 Corinthains 6:18

Nov. 10th, 2024 Scripture Reading: Galatians 3:25-4:7

Today we begin a new series on prayer. I wanted to open with a excerpt from a book called “The Praying Life” by Paul E. Miller who heads up a global discipleship ministry. He writes:

**SLIDE 1**

READ page 3-4. To me, that rings true. Some if it might hit a little harder for some of us than for others, but it makes the case that, when it comes to prayer, we have a lot of factors working against us.

**SLIDE 2**

 Awhile back, I got into a little trouble. And not just any trouble, I was in trouble with my wife. I had spent the night away from home due to a ministry related seminar. The next day was busy with meetings and emails and catching up with other clergy. In the swirl of the day, I did not get in touch with my wife. It was not until our break at lunch that I dialed her up. I can still hear the flat and disinterested “hello” coming from my phone. I could also hear various cries of children screaming in the background reminding me that she had been dealing with sick kids all week and was not feeling so well herself. “Hi hon!” I said in the most upbeat voice I could muster. “Don’t call me hon..” From there, as you might imagine, began a long day of begging and pleading and arguing. By the time I actually got home, we were both bitter and emotionally spent.

 Her point was a good one: She is my wife; we are in a very important relationship, she ought to be a priority for me, I should have a desire to communicate with her, to check in with her, to talk with her. My point was also a pretty good one: I was busy…

 In my failure to talk to my wife, I was speaking loudly with no words. My lack of communication was communicating something. From her perspective, I did not care about her, I was disinterested in her and she did not factor into my life. Pretty harsh. I would never actually say those things…those things are not actually true to how I feel or what I think yet…that is the message I have sent. As my wife has said to me numerous times before, “I need words!”

 I use this example from my marriage to point out that a relationship without communication is no relationship at all.

**SLIDE 4**

This morning we are going to embark on a sort of mini-series on prayer and as we think about prayer, I want to keep this idea in mind; a relationship without communication is no relationship at all. But instead of talking about husbands and wives, we are going to pivot to the topic of children.

It is good for us to talk about children because, whether we like it or not, we are all children and God is our Father. So I want to approach this idea of prayer from the perspective of a child.

 Prayer, at it’s most basic, is communication with God. And I have long thought of prayer in comparison to my marriage. I show love and trust and fidelity to my wife by living in open communication with her; speaking freely and listening intently. In the same way, I grow in my relationship with God by living in open communication with him. But the problem with this comparison is that God is not my spouse, we are not equals. I am the child and he is God.

 So, let’s adjust the comparison and look at my prayer life from a little more honest perspective. How do my conversations with my children go?

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 Well, one of my children has been nicknamed “The Badger” because he (or she) constantly badgers my wife and I for whatever whim is currently on his mind. When we say “no” he says “why?” He is relentless and, unfortunately, more than once his strategy has worked. Just wear ‘em down over time. Often his requests are way out of the bounds of possibility or affordability or common sense. But he is undeterred because he is the badger.

 Another of our kids is completely random.

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In the middle of a conversation with a third party, this child will just barge in with some comment about what happened last week or something they remember from a song they heard, or some description of some character from some TV show. Whatever it is, it seems to come out of nowhere.

 Another of our kids sort of short-circuits all communication and just screams a lot.

**SLIDE 7**

 Yet another one sort of strategically tries to avoid us if possible.

**SLIDE 8**

 Conversations with my children are not what you would call “normal”. The reciprocity of speaking and listening or question and answer is lacking when you find yourself talking to a kid. Many parents, after some time home alone with kids, find themselves longing to engage in a little adult conversation. Kids are demanding. Kids are rude. Kids are unaware of appropriate boundaries.

**SLIDE 9**

But isn’t it true that this exactly what we bring to God in our prayers? Sure, we might try to act mature when we come into God’s presence. We might try to say the right words and give great reasons for our requests. We try to be articulate and to present ourselves well…in short, we often come to prayer trying to be something we are not. The truth is, we are badgers, we are random, we are screaming out for answers. We are extremely impatient. We want what we want when we want it…just like a child.

The good news for us is that God is our heavenly Father! **SLIDE 10**

 He is the perfect parent! He wants us to come to him for what we need. It is his pleasure and his delight to hear us out. God does not weary of hearing our voices, He does not need a break from the chaos or some alone time. God is our Father, and we are his children.

**SLIDE 11**

Paul reminds us in 2 Corinthians 6:18 that God says “I will be a father to you, and you will be my sons and daughters.” These words were originally spoken to king David as part of the promises God makes to him. Paul applies these promises to the Christians in Corinth. God will be a father to you, you will be his children! The next verse then begins chapter seven. It reads,

**SLIDE 12**

“My dear friends, since we have these promises, let’s cleanse ourselves from anything that contaminates our body or spirit so that we make our holiness complete in the fear of God.”

Being a child comes with some responsibilities! We are to live in the boundaries set by our Heavenly Father. We are to defer to his will even when we don’t want to. We are to accept it when he decides to discipline us. Children are to honor their parents, and that rule applies no more acutely than to each of us as Christians, as children of the heavenly Father. We just read what Paul says, “We make our holiness complete”; that is, we obey and we do so “in the fear of God.”

 Some of you might be familiar with the phrase, “Wait until your dad gets home.”

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Maybe, like me, you heard your mother say this to you through clenched teeth, maybe you have said it to your own children, but the idea is that everyone involved knows that something bad has happened, some poor decision has been made, and now consequences will ensue because of it. You might say, I had a healthy fear of my father. He wasn’t my buddy, he wasn’t my equal. He was my dad and he enforced and upheld the rules of our home. Part of my job as a kid in that home was to live under my dad’s authority and accept the punishments he might dish out for my disobedience.

 We have a similar dimension to our relationship with God as well. Fearing God does not mean we cower or hide away from him. It means that we honor and respect his authority in our lives. We make our holiness complete in the fear of God.

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 But we are still children and children are messy. We just are not very presentable, and because of this we often feel like we need to clean ourselves up a bit before we come into God’s presence. But the problem is twofold:

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One, we can never get ourselves clean enough and two, God is already present anyway. And he is able to handle the mess. He would rather we come as we are and allow him to start the cleanup process. That’s his job as our Father.

 If there is one thing little children are good at, it’s helplessness. Jesus himself was there once. At one point, the incarnate God was unable to feed himself, unable to move around, unable to lift his head. But for us this state of helplessness does not change with age. Yes, I can dress myself and feed myself (if I have to). Yes, I can take on responsibilities but as I grow in maturity, spiritually, I am also growing in dependency. Take a look at this chart.

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(pg. 45). This chart comes from an organization called World Harvest Mission. And it highlights this idea of coming to God in prayer as a child, as someone who is utterly dependent, as someone who is a mess.

 If we think of maturity as self-awareness, then it follows that the more mature we become in our faith, the more sinful we perceive ourselves to be. Does that makes sense? The more mature we become, the more we understand our own sin. And the more we understand our own sin, the more we know we need Christ. The more we need prayer. The more helpless we become. So it is an interesting paradox of the Christian faith: the more we mature, the more dependent we become. Author Paul Miller says, “Mature Christians feel less mature on the inside.”

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 That is not how it works in other areas of life. As I grow into something, I need less and less supervision. I can go out and do it on my own. As parents, we celebrate when our kids reach a new developmental milestone. We clap when they begin to walk. We beam with pride when they sleep the night through on their own in the toddler bed. We are relived when they transition out of diapers. They are maturing. And in that process, they are becoming less and less dependent. We have a son in college and a daughter who is a senior in high school…they are in the process of moving into the driver’s seat of their lives and we are in the process of letting go. They can do it now…we hope. This maturity, development, growth…it all leads to parental separation. As they grow, they need us less and less. But God forbid that is how we grow in our spiritual life. As children of God, our need only deepens.

As I grow, I see more and more truth and that truth is more and more ugly, because it reveals who I really am. I am broken, I am sinful. And it’s not that I have not grown out of my sin. I can look back on my walk with the Lord and see how he had delivered me and worked in my life so that I do not struggle in the ways I once did. I am different, I have been transformed. But in those victories also comes a revelation of another aspect of my life that I need to address. In my experience, this movement of God begins with behaviors…

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through God’s grace and power I am able to put a stop to certain actions that are sinful. I can better control my behavior, but then the Holy Spirit leads me deeper into the recesses of my heart. He takes me below the surface to the murky blackness of my own heart. There I find attitudes and character qualities that need work. I’ve moved from outward behavior into the inner realm of who I am. And I realize, the work of repentance is never done, the fight against sin is never over. That sounds bit hopeless, and indeed, it is. That’s the point…In that hopelessness and in my overwhelming need, I can turn to Christ. So as this chart shows,

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 the more I grow the more of my sinful nature I see but at the same time the more of God’s holiness is revealed as well and I have no other choice than to come in humble prayer to Jesus my Savoir as an utterly dependent child. As I grow in maturity, my need increases but so does the cross of Christ!

 Paul Miller writes, “Little children are good at helplessness. It’s what they do best. (As an adult) I, for one, am allergic to helplessness. I don’t like it. I want a plan, an idea…This is how I instinctively approach everything because I am confident in my own abilities.” Our confidence in ourselves seems like maturity, it seems like progress, but the job that faces us is too hard. The life that lies before us is too brutal. We are the child and he is our heavenly Father. We need him! The apostle Paul writes in Galatians 4:6 “Because you are sons and daughters, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, ‘*Abba*, Father!’

**SLIDE 20**

 It’s the same thing a child in the middle east might say when their own father returns home from work. “Abba, Father, Daddy…” It is an intimate term of affection. It indicates complete trust. By calling God our Abba, we admit our helplessness and we name our need for Him. And as he meets our need, we are shown another and another and another area where we are helpless and another area where we are not in control. And on and on it goes.

 We need our Abba. We need prayer. No one of us has outgrown it. Remember, a relationship without communication is no relationship at all. So I want to invite you to become a child or at least admit that you are a child and be a part of a PAX team.

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 I want us as a community of faith to be able to come together in our collective helplessness and make our requests known to God. A PAX team is simply an opportunity to be in prayer with brothers and sisiters in Christ. PAX stands for “Prayer Awakens Expectation” and we can’t expect anything from God until we ask him for something. Once we make our requests known, we can then live expectantly on the lookout for his answers! Praying together bonds us in our faith and it helps us grow in maturity which in turn makes us more and more dependent on him. We have several groups currently meeting and there is room for more if you would be willing or interested in starting up a new team, please contact the office and we will get that started.

We held off on offering today because I wanted to give each of us a chance to respond to the Holy Spirit. Who might very well be pressing you to pray more, to step more fully into the role of being a child. As a church, I want to help confirm that push and make it happen. If you would write in the prayer requests portion of your connect card a day and time that would work best for you to set aside some time to pray with others. With that information, we can help facilitate some new teams and get more people praying more. So think about what a normal week looks like for you. Where might you have some space to carve out some intentional prayer time? Could be early mornings, could be midday could be weekends…whatever it might be for you, please jot that down on your card and we will collect them at the double doors here as we exit this morning.

We don’t have to get cleaned up first. God our Father will worry about that. We come to make our audacious requests, to cry out for help, to leave aside our own confidence, to grow into the maturity that is dependance upon our heavenly Father. Amen.