June 1/2, 2019

Continually Seek Him

Prayer – Talking with God Series

Psalm 105:4

Pastor Mark Kremer

Several times already this morning we've talked about prayer and we've prayed, and Mike's shared the idea that prayer is also the songs that we sing. As I look back over the years, I don't know that we've ever taken an extended time as a church to really talk about prayer as a topic, as a theme. We know that it's a very important aspect of our relationship with God, of our spiritual journey. We know it's important from the Scripture. There are over 650 prayers written in the Scriptures—I counted them this week—no, I didn't; somebody did though. There are 450 answers to prayer recorded in the Scriptures. Forty-one times Paul talks about prayer or writes down his own prayers, and 25 times we see Jesus praying, that were recorded in the gospels, so we know it's really, really important! But, if you're anything like me, this is an area I've struggled with in my spiritual life on many different fronts, and maybe if you're like me, you can relate to some of the things I'm about to share.

One is that often times there has been a dissatisfaction with my own prayer life. You know, I've had the prayer list and I try to go down the list, and about halfway through my mind goes on to something else and I feel like, "Golly, I can't even get this thing done." I even find sometimes prayer at church to be quite dissatisfying—sitting in groups with people and praying and I feel like sometimes all we talk to God about are physical ailments of people I don't know and it just leaves me feeling there's got to be something more here. Or, as was true when I was growing up, people would talk normally and then say, "Let's pray," to start the meeting and then somebody would begin praying in a voice that was so other than their normal voice—their prayer voice—as if somehow we had to talk to God differently. And I could only imagine God sitting up there going, "What happened to that guy? *(laughter)* A minute ago he was just talking normally and now he seems to be somebody else." Along with that dissatisfaction, there is sometimes confusion for me about prayer. For example, we are told by Jesus the story of the persistent widow who needed justice and she knocked and knocked and knocked on the door of the judge until finally he answered and Jesus says, "That is how you need to approach Me…with that tenacity." And on the other hand Jesus says, "Let your words be few because the Father already knows what you need before you even ask, so I'm like, "Which is it, okay?" Or maybe it's both. And finally, because of those things, oftentimes for me there has been a sense of guilt. I feel guilty because I'm not better at this; I just haven't really figured this out and I've known Jesus for many, many years. And so there is some guilt mixed in with that as well. Maybe you can relate to that. So that is what we want to talk about this morning.

I would say mixed in with all those sorts of questions and unsettledness, there are also these moments where we have just really experienced God in a fresh way. We felt that He's heard us, and it is something that matters in that moment and that's what continues to pull us back to want to know how to do this. So over the next three weeks we're going to sort of unpack various aspects of prayer—of talking with God—but today we just want to lay a foundation.

I want us to think about prayer as a gift from God, like a diamond or a precious jewel. It, like a diamond, has multiple facets, and to really appreciate it you need to see it for what it is. So this morning we want to look at the various facets of prayer and begin to see it in the right sort of way so then we can start to unpack the things that flow out of that. To do that, we're going to look at a

number of Scriptures and put them up on the screen because there isn't just one passage. Prayer is all over the Scriptures. I'd encourage you to jot down some notes so you can remember these seven different facets of prayer that help us see it for what it is.

I want to start with these verses from Psalms. Psalm 105, verse 4. The whole beginning of this psalm is about talking to God…sing to God…praise God…delight in God…seek God, and this is what it says:

> **Seek the LORD and His strength;**
> **Seek His face continually.** (*NASB, Psalm 105:4)

Also in Psalm 27:8 David said this:

> ***When You said*, "Seek My face," my heart said to You,**
> **"Your face, O LORD, I shall seek."**

Here is the first facet of prayer. We have been given an invitation by the Creator of the universe to be in communication with Him, to talk with Him. Again and again in Isaiah, Jeremiah, all the way through God is saying, "Talk to Me and I will answer you and I will show you things." There is an invitation from the God who holds the entire universe together, who is all knowing, all powerful. There is an invitation from this God to be in communication and talk to Him. That is really a profound thing. He is so *other than* us, and yet He invites us to speak to him, to seek after Him and to be in communication with Him.

But the second piece of that in those verses is He says, "**Seek my face continually."** In Hebrew the word for **face** means the *presence or person*. So this is a very important facet of prayer, that it's an invitation not just to communicate with God but to do so in a relation-building way, to seek His person and His presence, not just His hands, not just, "What can You give me?" God is not a vending machine. I plunk in prayer and out come treats. That's how oftentimes we've thought about prayer. I pray; then God gives, and I'm just asking and asking and asking and asking. But God says, "Come and seek My face; come and seek relationship with Me."

You'll recall that Abraham was called a friend of God's. Jesus said to His disciples, "I no longer call you slaves; I call you friends." God is inviting us to communicate, to dialogue with Him as with a very close personal friend and to deepen that relationship through our communication with Him. This is to be a deepening, growing friendship and understanding of who God is, and basically doing life together with a good, close and respected friend. We need to make sure we actually see prayer not as duty or formality, not with the fear that God is so holy and so *other than* that I have to speak to Him in a certain formal sort of rigid way, but it's an invitation by God to be in constant communication with Him as a friend, becoming a deeper and closer friend of God. So, it is highly relational, like a close friend that Proverbs says, "God is like a friend, closer than a brother." A marriage would be another picture of the relationship with God. There's a covenant, on-going, permanent relationship there of love, of giving and receiving and communication. Or, as God's invited us to speak to Him and address Him as Father, there is a familial relationship, an intimacy of family. That is what prayer is first and foremost about; it's connecting relationally with God.

So here is a third facet and an important one: we have, as followers of Jesus, unlimited access to the presence of God. This was a major theme in the book of Hebrews—that we, because of what Jesus has done for us, He opened up a new and living way so that we don't have to go through someone

else such as a priest or someone who communicates to God for you. But now you and I, all followers of Jesus, have unlimited access directly to the throne and presence of God. Not just pastors, okay? Somehow I think there is a little left over from the old covenant that we drag into even our church, that sometimes there is this thought that if the pastor prays for me, that carries more weight, right? I mean the holy man praying has got to be better than just me praying. I'm just telling you there is no difference; God sees and hears your prayer. Your conversation with Him is no different, no less than my conversation…Bryan's conversation. We all have equal and unlimited access to the very presence of God. Anytime, anywhere, He is available. It's super important for us to understand this. It's not that prayer is something we just do at certain times or just when we are at church, or at certain times of the day, but prayer is unlimited access to the presence of God.

Here's the fourth facet that we need to understand if we're going to dive deeper into this, and that is that God sees and hears and cares and answers when we talk to Him. Look at these verses—a number of Scriptures we could go to. Here is what Psalm 40, verse 1 says:

> **I waited patiently for the LORD;** (There's a waiting to being in God's presence.)
> **And He inclined to me and heard my cry.** (Or this from Psalm 34, repeatedly in this psalm)
>
> Psalm 34, verse 4:
> **I sought the LORD, and He answered me,**
> **And delivered me from all my fears.** Verse 6:
> **This poor man cried, and the LORD heard him**
> **And saved him out of all his troubles.** Verse 15:
> **The eyes of the LORD are toward the righteous**
> **And His ears are *open* to their cry.**
>
> Psalm 91, verse 15:
> **"He will call upon Me, and I will answer him;**
> **I will be with him in trouble;**
> **I will rescue him and honor him."**

Again and again and again God says He hears; He cares and is listening. Finally in Hebrews, chapter 4, verses 15 and 16:

> **For we do not have a high priest** (speaking of Jesus) **who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as *we are, yet* without sin. Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.**

This is very important because if we don't think God's listening or that He hears or cares, then we won't talk to Him. We don't talk to people who don't care, right? We know when someone says, "Hey, how you doing?" we know whether that's a sincere question that invites a conversation or a perfunctory sort of thing. We have to believe and understand that God sees, and He hears and He cares, and He answers. He's listening; He's waiting for us to enter into conversation with Him. That's super important for us to understand. I think the challenge for us—and we're going to talk about this extensively next week—is we know God's listening but the question is, "Are we listening to God in prayer?" I mean, if you have a relationship, a close friendship, and one person does all the talking, pretty soon you're like, "I don't think so." I wonder if God sometimes feels like, "Hey, you know, you keep coming to me with your stuff and your story but you're never like, 'Hey, God,

what's on Your heart? What's important to You? What do I need to learn and hear from You today?'" I think that was kind of the point with Job, right? Job had this terrible downfall in his life, and all the good things were taken away. And he had these three worthless friends who came together and commiserated with him. And then they poured out their complaint to God, again and again and again…dozens of chapters of pouring out their complaints, and finally God says to Job, "Enough now, I need you to be quiet and listen…listen." We're going to talk about that next week—listening to God in prayer. That's worth some extra time and attention.

Here is the fifth facet—this relational conversation that God invites us into is exactly what our souls most long for. This is David in Psalm 42, verses 1 and 2:

> **As the deer pants for the water brooks,**
> **So my soul pants for You, O God.**
> **My soul thirsts for God, for the living God;**
> **When shall I come and appear before God?**

We were created, like Adam and Eve, to walk and talk with God, to do life together with God and nothing else will satisfy that longing for a deep rich connection to God, made possible to us by the work of Jesus. But we often misidentify that hunger and think it's something else, don't we? We think if we go out and buy some things, that will fill the void inside. Sometimes we actually feel the hunger of our souls and we mistake it for physical hunger, and we go the refrigerator and then we go, "That wasn't it." There is a longing and a hunger in our soul and so this deep conversation with God and doing life together with God is what will satisfy us; it will quench our thirst and hunger. That's why it's so important that we learn and understand what this is supposed to look like.

Here is the 6th facet: He invites us to keep the conversation going continually. Look at these verses, in Ephesians chapter 6, verse 18:

> **With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit,**

And in 1 Thessalonians 5, verse 17:

> **Pray without ceasing;**

This is supposed to be an ongoing conversation with God, and that can be confusing because how do I do that and continue to do all the other things I do in life? We're going to talk about that in just a minute. But God wants us to be in an ongoing, perpetual conversation with Him. That's the essence of prayer. It's not supposed to be something you do at a certain time; it's supposed to be day in and day out, weeks…months…years.

And finally the 7th facet of this diamond is that He invites us to talk to Him about everything. There is nothing that's off limits to talk to God about. Philippians chapter 4, verse 6 says:

> **Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.**

Everything that is happening in your life, that's happening in the world, matters to God. Ryan Harmon shared this definition of prayer from Dallas Willard which I really, really love: "Prayer is talking to God about what we are doing together." And here is the reality for us who know Jesus,

right? Because we now know Jesus, He came to give us His Spirit who indwells us, so that everywhere we go and whatever we do, God goes with us. Right? He is there and He is present, so everything we do matters to God and He invites us to talk to Him about everything we are doing because He's there and in it with us. So, there is nothing off limits. Talk to God about everything. The good things, the bad things. There is praise; there is rejoicing; there is thanksgiving; there's sorrow; there's tears! Talk about life together with God, about all of it.

All of those things together help us understand this is an invitation from God into conversation and into a relationship-deepening conversation, and that we can talk to Him about everything and that He cares. It matters to Him. We have unlimited access…day and night…and this should be as natural for us to be in this kind of relational, dynamic conversation with God as it is with our very best friend or our spouse or a dearly-loved family member. That's what God wants for us when it comes to prayer, to talk with Him.

So here is, I think, a summation for me of sort of the way we should look at prayer. God wants us to have an awareness of His presence, resulting in a continuous, ever-deepening conversation with Him about everything. I think that's what God's heart is. He is here; He is with us and He invites us to talk with Him about everything. So the question is: what does that look like? I just want to share this morning some of the things that might be helpful for how you can deepen that relationship with God, just like you would deepen any relationship. And I think it's important that we would see parallels between our deepest, closest human relationships and how we might relate to God.

So there are three different kinds of communication that we have with the people that are closest to us. One is there are scheduled, regular times of connection, of talking together. Whether that's as a husband or a wife or as a friend, you set up specific times, and you want to have those times when you connect and you talk and you share, and those times need to be consistent or you lose touch. So I think it's important that we have regular daily and weekly patterns and rhythms where we set aside times to have conversation with God. Coming to church, being in a small group, these are designated times when we have connection with God. We pray; we talk; we share with others and with God. But on a daily basis, do you have a routine where you talk and communicate with God? We saw a couple of weeks ago that three times a day Daniel stopped everything he was doing and took time to just reconnect with God. There is an ancient practice called the *daily office* that talks about that—morning, noon and night, just setting aside a few minutes…30 minutes…20 minutes…15 minutes…just to stop and connect and talk with God.

I actually have written that into my calendar. I don't always do it but it is there as a reminder to stop and talk and connect. My wife and I have to do that on a daily basis. We get up in the morning and sit in our favorite chairs together in front of the fireplace and sometimes we're just quiet. Sometimes we're reading, but we talk through things, the schedule for the day and there is a regularly scheduled time to do that. I have several other kinds of things that I do that are helpful in that regard. One thing I have is a large lawn, almost an acre, and I have a push mower. People ask me, "Why don't you get a riding lawn mower?" But first of all, I love to be outside and in nature, and I get to spend two and a half hours of exercise free of charge, twice a week. (This spring it's three times a week. *(laughter)* I have a lot of time with God.) And I need the exercise, and this is a place where I talk to God. I actually have certain places in my lawn where repetitively the same people come to mind and I talk to God about them. It's kind of weird. I'm sure my wife and kids look out the window and say, "Who is he talking to?" Some of you get prayed for underneath a certain tree that I mow under. When I exercise or walk I'm not listening to music; I'm using that time to talk to God. There are times set aside regularly. So that's one element—regularly scheduled times of communication.

A second kind is spontaneous, quick, touch base, spur of the moment conversations. It used to be we couldn't do this but now we have text, Instagram, smart phones, and they're with us all the time. We can talk to anyone instantly, "Hey, do you need anything from the store?" "Hey, how did your test go today?" We have this instant, touch base opportunity every day. Because we have unlimited access to God also, we have that opportunity throughout the day, in between things, as we go. I try to have a practice every time between meetings where I take a minute to say, "Okay, God, what do you want for this meeting?" When I drive between appointments, I don't have music on that has words to it. I sometimes play instrumental music, but I take that time to say, "Okay, God, how do I enter into this next thing with the right perspective?" Touching base throughout the day. Sometimes it's just a spur of the moment need that comes up where you say, "God, I need you right here." I'm reminded of Nehemiah, where he's praying intentionally and all of a sudden the king says, "What can I do for you?" and he says, "Lord, help. This is the moment I've been waiting for, but I don't know what to say," but he just stops and says a quick prayer to God, "Help me." So that's a part of our routine.

And finally I would suggest that to have a very deep, close, personal relationship—whether that's with your spouse or with a friend—there needs to be extended times where the two of you just get alone together. Whether that is a day or a week or a couple of days, I find that for myself, sometimes I need refreshment or there's a major life decisions right in front of me, and I need to have special extended time set aside with God. Jesus did that. Before every major movement in Jesus' ministry He spent extended time talking with His Father. So all three of those things are things we ought to incorporate into our prayer life: regularly scheduled times, spontaneous spur of the moment conversation, and extended time where we get alone with God. Find a special place that you and God just share together. Maybe it's in the mountains or by a stream or in a favorite chair in a favorite room—somewhere you can go so you can just spend extended time with God talking and listening.

There are a lot of different postures people have taken in prayer. Scripture talks about standing, sitting, kneeling, laying prostrate on your face before God, and prayer can come out of us in many different ways. It can be sung; there is shouting, talking, silence. Sometimes it's shouting at God. Come on, you've done that, right? There is a not a particular posture; the only posture you don't see in the Scriptures is: close your eyes and bow your head. Some Baptist preacher invented that when he was doing an altar call *(laughter)* and now that's how we think you should pray: close your eyes and bow your head. Most of the time in the Scriptures people would raise their eyes up to the heavens and lift their hands and have a conversation with God. I found that I was so easily distracted praying in my head, that to speak the prayer out loud was very helpful…or to write down what I'm praying. My journal is full of prayers that I've written, I've had some long, hard conversations with God in that journal but for me that's very helpful to write it out. I can articulate what I'm feeling or thinking and then I can listen and write down what I feel like He's saying back to me through Scripture and promptings. Praying with someone else is often helpful. So you have to find that rhythm and balance to stay in communication with God and talk to God on an ongoing basis. Get out of the rut that you're in. God has an incredible invitation waiting for us.

Now in closing I just want to mention two quick hindrances to dialogue. One hindrance to us having deep communication with God is unresolved offenses. This is no different than with any other friend. If you do something to hurt someone, a family member or a close friend and then you just pretend like it never happened, they're like, "Hun, uh, we have to resolve something before we can go back and resume our deep relationship." The Scripture talks about that. If we regard iniquity in

our heart, the Lord is not going to hear us. We have to do some confession. If we confess our sins, if we acknowledge our sins, our offenses against God, then He will forgive us. He cleanses us and then we can be back in good communication with Him. That's a very important thing, or we will be hindered in our prayers. In fact Peter said to husbands, "If you don't treat your wives with honor, your prayers will be hindered." That's offensive to God. So, we have to deal with those offenses and confess those things and say, "God, I want a relationship with You; I want restored dialogue with You."

The second hindrance is what we've already talked about, and that is if you only come to God with requests and all you do is ask and ask and ask. We've all known two-year-old's, and all they want is *something*. Can I have a cookie? Can I go outside? Can I? Can I? Can I? and after a while you're like, "Just stop!" No one wants to have the friend that all they do is ask you for things. So, if all we do is see God as a vending machine; we plunk in a prayer and He gives an answer, then we are not going to have the kind of deepening, personal relationship with God that He desires and what we need. It's got to be more than asking. It's got to be listening. And then we have to align ourselves and ask in the right way. We'll talk more about that in the next couple of weeks.

So this morning, as we close, I just want to help you see this rightly. Do you see it biblically? Do you see prayer as a relational, ongoing conversation with the God of the universe who invites you to be His friend and talk with Him about everything? Are you aware that He's listening and He cares, and are you entering into that, to experience that through regularly scheduled times, through spontaneity, and then through extended times with Him where you get away and just He and you spend time together? Sometimes we think, "I can't stop and take that kind of time," but you and I can't afford *not* to take that kind of time. We'll flail around in life, trying to make it all happen ourselves, when God says, "Hey, if you just take some time and *be still and talk to Me*, I'm going to do this together with you. And I'll give you what you need, but it's found in my presence…together.

Father, thank You for the invitation into Your presence to have an ongoing dialogue with You. Thank You that You are very much present and aware of what's happening in our life and I pray that we'd have the same awareness of what You're up to. Lord, I pray that we would grow and deepen in this conversational relational connection with You so that at that moment when we pass from this life into the next life we're not going to come face to face with a stranger but with our very best friend. This we pray in Jesus' name, Amen.

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