

March 30 – Pray Like Christ  
John 14:12-14

Prayer, it is one of those topics that can make a group highly uncomfortable. We know we are supposed to pray but when we examine our behavior we often find that we don't do it very frequently or for very long. There are all sorts of reasons why this happens. Some of it relates to misunderstandings or questions that we have concerning prayer. For others there is a mistrust about prayer and what is supposed to be happening and some think it is a waste of time.

Moore, in his book, lists a number of things that should and should not be in our prayers if we are to pray in the spirit of Christ. I am going to mention a few other issues that I have had to address as a pastor related to the topic of prayer and then I am going to share some of what I think is happening in prayer and then some guidelines for making prayer a more reliable and useful part of our faith journey.

Too often there is a belief that there is power in numbers. You have seen the requests on Facebook or heard about them on the news. People strive to get 10,000, 100,000 or a million people to be praying about a certain issue. They will even use terms like, we need to storm the gates of heaven with our prayers. There is a subtle belief underlying all this activity and words and it is that if we get enough people to lift up the same prayer we will force God to answer our prayer and answer it in the way we want! We even hear, after some miraculous healing, thanks for all those prayer warriors who made this happen.

People see this kind of thing and get turned off of prayer. After all, who would really want a God that can be manipulated by our actions? Who would want numbers to play into whether or not our prayer is heard? That would mean that in all likelihood my prayers will be listened to more than yours because I have lived so many places I can put my concerns on way more prayer chains than you.

We cannot force God to do anything God doesn't want to do. Prayer chains are for forming community, to bring the love and compassion of many together on an issue. They help the person going through whatever difficulty because they know they are not

alone. As to effectiveness? The prayer of one is as effective as a million because our God listens, loves and acts in the best way for that situation.

Another question I get asked is, "Is it o.k. to pray for a miracle?" To some, it seems selfish. Others are too rational believing that there is a divine order to creation and God will not intervene. Some think miracles are too much like magic. Yet, we hear about healings and other things that people proclaim to be miraculous. So what do you do?

I believe that there are miracles. Now in my finite understanding of things, I in no way understand why some person's prayer is granted and that miracle of healing or whatever takes place and another person hears a loving "no, not this time." I always encourage people to pray about what is on their heart and often what they really want is a miracle. As long as it does not become a test as to whether God loves you or not, lift it to God. What I mean is that I hear from people who have left the church and faith and their story is something like the following. "I, or a loved one, was going through a really difficult time. I prayed about it and God didn't answer. I don't want anything to do with a God who doesn't care about and love me." Their prayer was a test and God failed. Don't feel bad asking for a miracle but also be willing to hear a no. Even Jesus wanted a miracle that God did not grant. Remember in the garden before his arrest he prayed, "Take this cup from me." With the soldiers on their way, to be rescued would be truly miraculous. But he ended, "not my will but yours" or we could say, "I am willing to hear a no to this request."

Now here is another reason sometimes given for not praying. "Since God knows what I am going to say even before the words are on my lips I don't need to pray. God knows what I want and need and I trust that what happens is what God wants to happen." That seems, on the surface of things, to be a really mature view of faith but in a moment we are going to talk about why our praying is so essential to our spiritual well-being.

Moore, in this chapter, says this after having looked at the great prayers of the saints of the church. "I found that rarely, if ever, did they ask God for anything except

the closer knowledge of God's will and the strength to follow it. The great people of faith were more concerned with God's will than with their wants. They were more concerned with God's direction than with their desires. They were more concerned with God's purposes than with their possessions. They seem to be content simply to be in God's presence, to reflect on the wonder and mystery of God, and to commit themselves afresh to be the earthen vessels of God's will."

With that understanding we can see that prayer is a time of communion and community. When we pray we bring our hearts and lives into the presence of God along with others and there is great peace and strength in that communion and community. That is why it is important to pray, even if God knows what you are going to say. Prayer forces you to slow down and be in relationship. That is why it is important to be in prayer chains and groups for the strength that comes in knowing many are with you at this moment in prayer about this situation waiting along with you for an answer from God.

It is also a time of direction. It allows us to get the self out of the center of our lives and places God anew at the center asking what God wants instead of what we want.

Finally, prayer is a time of comfort. Remember when you were young how good it felt to crawl into a parents lap when you were hurt or upset. That physical connection seemed to take some of the hurt and pain away. I find the same to be true in my prayer life. When I go to God in prayer and lay my worries in God's hands and feel the love of God there is tremendous comfort. I know that after my time of prayer I will still have to face the same problems, make the same tough decisions but I know anew I am loved and that love will be with me no matter what. That great comfort is part of why I pray.

So here are my brief rules for developing a prayer life. I see Jesus modeling them in his own life and prayers. Have a set time to pray. Try to hold to that time each day. Jesus, it appears, took the early mornings to pray. There are several references to the disciples having to go and find him at the start of a day. Jesus, it seems, began his day with prayer seeking guidance and peace before meeting the crowds.

Second, prepare yourself to receive God. Jesus went and found a lonely place, a place free from distraction. Some today have a quiet chair they sit in to pray. Or they light a candle. They prepare themselves to be in an attitude of prayer so they are open to receiving God. It is hard to listen to that still small voice in the midst of a busy schedule. It is much easier when we are quiet and focused.

Listen as much as you pray. Too often we fill up our prayer time with our concerns and joys and then say amen and get on with the day. Prayer is a two way communication so we not only are to speak but be silent and listen. In that quiet you may just feel love and peace. Or, you might get a nudge to do something. But be still.

And finally, just as in the Lord's Prayer, we have to say and mean, "Thy will be done." Ultimately we have to let go and trust. Even when the answers are not what we want, we know God has heard and God loves. God will be with us in our joys but even more in our sorrows.

We all know the prayer, *Footprints in the Sand*. Remember the question. The person seeing only one set of footprints at the most difficult moments of life asks, "I don't understand why when I needed you most you would leave me."

The LORD replied, "my precious, precious child, I Love you and I would never leave you! During your times of trial and suffering when you see only one set of footprints, it was then that I carried you."

God will carry us if we allow it, letting our will be conformed to God's through quiet, listening hope. This is why prayer is so important "*When the World Takes the Wind Out of our Sails.*"