

Prayer

Sermon Synopsis: The most important rhythm is personal interaction with God

It was hard for me to connect with my kids as babies at first. I knew I was supposed to feel this magical feeling, but it wasn't there. I didn't immediately connect on a deep level with my daughter until 4 months after she was born. What changed? She smiled at me. I had an *interaction*.

Do you ever feel the same way about prayer? Do you want a meaningful relationship with God, and probably intuitively know that prayer has something to do with it, but perhaps you struggle with prayer.

What gets in the way of prayer? (Facebook survey)¹

1. Prayer can be difficult to understand
 - **Ashamed** - undeserving, doing it wrong, etc
 - **Ineffective** - don't see the value, doesn't "work."

Perhaps at the heart of this first struggle is a misunderstanding about prayer:

- I. "We must earn the right to talk to God"
- II. "Once we hear it, it will 'work' the way we want."
 - So when we feel ashamed, or we don't get the answers we were looking for, it may feel like prayer is not even worth starting.

What if we had an interaction with God? (**like I did with my daughter**)

John 15:4-5

Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.

Abide (menō, μένω)

To stay (in a given place, state, relation or expectancy)

To "make your home" somewhere.² In this case, "Jesus invites us to live with him" (Bruner)³

Keener: "continued dependence on him, as one might continue to dwell in a shelter."⁴ **Rainy SB!**

Matthew 6:6

But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And **your Father who sees in secret** will reward you.

Matthew 6:9

Pray then like this:

“Our Father **in heaven.**” [οὐρανός = in the heavens – with us]

These three verses show us a picture: to intentionally place ourselves in his presence as one who is as close to us than the air we breathe, and learn to depend on him and be sustained by him in the moment.

Prayer is *mutual interaction* between God and us.⁵

Ephesians 3:18-19 (NLT)

May you experience the love of Christ, though it is too great to understand fully. Then you will be made complete with all the fullness of life and power that comes from God.

“True, whole prayer is nothing but love.” – Augustine

What keeps us from love?⁶

2. Prayer is sometimes hard to do
 - **Busy** - can't make time

There are various methods for interacting with God

- Loud emotional (Psalm 141:1)
- Corporate (Acts 4:24)
- Requests (Philippians 4:6)
- Silence (1 Kings 19:12; Psalm 62)
- Scripture (2 Peter 1:19)
- Nature (Psalm 19)
- Listening (1 Samuel 3:10) Absence (Psalm 22:2) – he's weaning us⁷

But the essence of prayer is ***interaction with God***

If prayer is divine interaction, the ways of interacting w/God are deep, wide, flexible.

[Staff examples]

Anything can be turned into prayer if you are turning your attention to God in it. [Lawrence: “the time of business does not with me differ from the time of prayer”⁸]

App: what can you do? (even if it's small)

- **Distracted** - can't concentrate (by far the most popular reason!)
 - Rhythms
 - **The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak** (Matt. 26:41)
 - Brigid Shulte: we train ourselves for distraction⁹
 - Breaking bad habits means adopting new rhythms

The presence of God is available to us. We just need to be made available to Him. This has its difficulties. But we can learn through rhythms

There's going to be times where you don't "feel" anything. That's ok. Stay in rhythm. The occasional experiences are nice, but the most important thing is showing up, because it's the *regularity* of opening yourself up to God that forms you over time. So even if showing up means making tiny goals just so you show up consistently, it's worth it.

A way forward

1. Where did you last sense God's nearness in your life?
2. How can you turn that into a rhythm?
 - Challenge: twice a day for the remainder of this series