

Prayer Is: Essential

01.15.2023

We're wrapping up a 3-week series today

Titled: PRAYER IS...ESSENTIAL

Prayer is Asking

Prayer is Listening

And today – Prayer is essential

Let me show you a couple pics from our recent trip to Israel

Pic 1

Describe chapel

Pic 2

This place is the ancient site of the city of Gibeon

Exciting, right?!?

We learn about Gibeon in the Bible

In Joshua chapter 9

Where Joshua is leading the army

Into the Promised Land

And God has told them to conquer all the land

No exceptions

They've conquered the cities east of the Jordan River

They've conquered the cities near the Jordan River on the west side

And now the cities further west are freaking out

One of those cities

Is the ancient city of Gibeon

So, they decide to try a different tactic

Bible folks call it

The Gibeonite Deception

Now notice how I've underlined the word Gibeonite

That's called foreshadowing, boys and girls

I'm gonna change that word in a minute

I know... fancy

So, the Gibeonites put on old clothes

And old, worn-out shoes

They pack some moldy bread

And cracked wine skins

And they go to meet Joshua and the army

They deceive them

They say we've come from a long ways off

So, make a treaty with us

We're no threat to you

The guards say, "wait a minute"

How do we know you're not lying to us?

They say – look at our clothes

Taste our bread

It was fresh when we started out to meet you

Joshua 9:14 - The Israelites sampled their provisions but did not inquire of the Lord.

Translation: We're smart enough to handle this

Without... God's help

Now, it's likely that none of us

Have ever made a treaty with an enemy city

Because of moldy bread

But it's also likely

That *all* of us have lived out of this mindset

We're smart enough to handle this

Without... God

I can do this job

Without... God's... help

I can fix this problem

Without God's help

I can raise these kids

Without...

Actually, wait a minute

No one's ever said that

That's not just the Gibeonite's deception

It's the modern deception

And the enemy of our souls

Continues to deceive all of us

Jesus told us plainly

John 15:5 (NIV) – I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.

The Greek word Jesus uses, that's translated nothing

It carries the picture of shutting the door

Like... nothing... the door's shut

The Greek dictionary I use expanded the idea:

It said, "No valid example exists"

Apart from me, Jesus says, there is no valid example of anything you can do

Apart from me you can do... nothing

Shut the door – drop the mic

Instead, Jesus gave us a different model for life:

Matthew 7:7 (NIV) - Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.

According to Jesus

Our lives should involve "asking", "seeking", and "knocking"

I never had really thought much

About how those are distinct

Asking – seeking – knocking

Hands

I mean, for many of us

If we're honest, we don't pray much at all, really

For others

We ask

But we don't seek and knock as much

We ask God for what we want

But we don't seek Him out to involve Him in our struggle

And we don't knock

Begging God to open doors that are currently closed

We just ask Him to do what WE think

Cause we know

Or we don't ask at all

Because we're smart enough to handle this

Without Him

This is a really important time in our church

This is a true story:

I wrote that in my notes

"This is a really important time in our church"

And I wrote it thinking about

How God is going to use us to reach lots of people

In this next season

And help lots of people

In this next season

And see lots of people come to faith in Christ

In this next season

And that's all true

But it hit me

This is a really important time in our church

Because it's a really important time for each of our families

Think about it

What 5-year period

In anyone's life

Is unimpactful?

If you have kids or grandkids

What will change in *their* life in the next few years?

How old will they be 5 years from now?

Go ahead and think about it

In your job or your marriage or your relationships

5 years is a long time

Life is uncertain

Some of us are not here

That would have expected to be 5 years ago

And some of us will be in eternity

5 years from now

So, I say

With a little more umph than I originally had planned

This is a really important time in our church

And it's so vital that we – as a community - are here

In Spring Hill

And at our spiritual best

Because it's also a really important time

In the lives of families all around us

And *they* need a spiritual family to love them thru

They need support and encouragement and accountability

And they need what only Jesus can provide

And right now they don't have Him

And they don't have a spiritual family

They need us to stop sending our thoughts over Facebook

And start sending our prayers to Heaven

They need us to

I'm picturing the OT book of Nehemiah here

They need us to take up our place on the wall

To defend – spiritually – this city

I was reminded – praying thru this morning

Of Jesus' statement in the Garden...

Matthew 26 says - "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me."

Our community needs us

To be here

Keeping watch... in prayer

This is an important time... for our church

More specifically

And more personally

For just a minute

This is my first Sunday back after Sabbatical

If this is your first Sunday here

You didn't know that

Welcome – this is my first Sunday back after Sabbatical

I went on Sabbatical

Because my 20-year anniversary here is coming up

But I mainly went on Sabbatical

Because I was struggling

Mentally... emotionally

I was depleted

And my counselor strongly recommended a sabbatical

Right before I went on Sabbatical

I met with my counselor

Who told me he was proud of me for the mental / emotional / spiritual work I'm doing

He was excited for me to get this break

And then he said

"I think you were closer to the edge than you realize"

I said, "Well... I thought I was pretty close."

"I know," he said

"I think you were closer than that."

Theologically: I believe Satan is limited

He can't work everywhere at the same time

His guys can't work everywhere at the same time

And I think he tried to take me out

And I think I was closer than I realized

Thanks to God

And a faithful wife

And supportive elders

And a great staff
And a generous church
I feel more like myself today
Then I have in a long time
But I think he tried to take me out.

And I'd be naïve to think he won't try again
And I'd be arrogant to think he was only coming for me

We need to pray
To ask – and seek – and knock
Because this is a really important time for our church

Let me give you
Three specific prayer challenges
As we finish this series
And start our year

#1 – Pray first

No matter what you're facing in the day
Pray first
On your way to work?
Pray first... before you get there

Picking your kids up from school?

Pray first... before they get in the car

Got an important meeting?

Pray first

Need to have a difficult conversation with your wife or husband – boyfriend or girlfriend?

Pray first

Whenever you switch from one item in your day

To the next item in your day

Pray first

James 5:13, 16b (NIV) - Is anyone among you in trouble? Let them pray. Is anyone happy? Let them sing songs of praise... The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.

The question - Do we believe that?

And if we do – we should take a moment to pray first

Hebrews 11:6 (NIV) - 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.

The question - Do we believe that?

And if so – we should take a moment to earnestly seek Him

We should take a moment to pray first

#2 – Pray strategically

Pray first

And pray strategically

In the OT, we read about a righteous man named Daniel

He was a high official in the government

A rising star

And he was also a devout

Who prayed religiously

Some jealous people

Convince the king to pass a law

Saying you can't pray to anyone but the king

For 30 days

And I love Daniel's response

Daniel 6:10a (MSG) - When Daniel learned that the decree had been signed and posted,

He posted on Facebook how offended he was

No, it doesn't say that

Repeat... he worried and fretted about his religious liberties

No, that's not it

Repeat...

he continued to pray just as he had always done.

When Daniel learned that the decree had been signed and posted, he continued to pray just as he had always done.

Daniel was living in Babylon

A thoroughly secular culture

Much more than ours, today

They outlawed prayer

Something our lawmakers today wouldn't dream of trying

Even though they may want to

And yet Daniel prayed

Just as he had always done

We're living in a free culture

With many Christian liberties

No one opposes us praying in our homes

But many of us don't pray

Most of us own multiple Bibles

That we rarely read

Daniel faced execution

For his willingness to pray

But he continued

Just as he had always done.

I hope we begin to read His Word

And pray like we should

Without someone having to threaten us

To wake us up

Let me say that again...

Philippians 4:6 (NIV) - Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.

“Every situation”

Do you believe that?

If we do – let’s pray

And let’s pray strategically

So, look what it says

In “every situation”

Are you anxious about the state of our country?

Don’t worry and stew about it

That doesn't accomplish anything

Except get you to watch the news more

Pray and petition God for our leaders

Are you anxious about the next generation?

Don't grumble about them

Pray for them

Pray and petition God for our students

Are you anxious about the economy or inflation?

Don't post about it

Pray about it

Pray and petition God for our nation

Let me get really specific

A leadership truth I believe in

Most people want to help make good things happen

They just don't know what to do

I know many of us want to see spiritual renewal in our country

And I know that many of us believe that Christ – through the local church –
is the only hope the world has

So, I want to ask that you would pray and petition God

For our church

Every service, we have people praying over the service

There are people praying for you right now

I'd like to invite you

To be part of the team that's keeping watch

To be part of the team that's asking, seeking, and knocking for the church

If you'd be open to praying on occasion on that team

There's a table out in the lobby TODAY where you can sign up

Rob, our student pastor

Wants to bring that same level of spiritual support

To the teens on Wednesday night

I know we're all eager to see the next generation

Thrive when we're gone

And we don't just want them to make a lot of money

We want them to follow the Lord

And live and life of purpose and meaning

That can only be found in Christ

At that same table, in the lobby

You'll have an opportunity

To sign up to pray on Wednesday nights

For our teen program

You can sign up for one

Or the other

Or both

Are you concerned for the next generation?

Back it up

I would say put your money where your mouth is

But this is free

You may say, "I'm too old to work with teens"

You're not too old to pray

Back it up

Stand watch... with them

Ask, seek & knock... for their souls

Now that team is a separate signup

From the Sunday morning pray-ers

Because everyone who serves on Wednesday nights

Has a background check to be around our students

They'll explain all that

I just need some of you to sign up for that today

I can think of few praying opportunities

More strategic

Then praying for this service

And praying for our students

Pray first

Pray strategic

And third

Pray Often

Bethlehem story...

“you’re not the Apostle Paul!”

I thought to myself

If you did that

I’d probably get beat up

And then the Holy Spirit whispered

Yeah, just like the Apostle Paul did

I think their religion is completely based on false information

But their devotion is impressive

A core tenet of their faith

Is prayer 5x / day

5x / day, over the loud speaker

You’ll hear a call to prayer in these communities

And everyone stops what they’re doing

And prays to Allah

Well, I'm competitive!

So, I thought

If they can do 5x

We should pray 6!

Stay with me

What would it look like

If all of us

From the oldest to the youngest

If all of us

Stopped what we were doing

6x a day

<i>To ASK for what we need</i>

<i>To SEEK God's direction</i>

Not just ask Him to bless what WE think

<i>And to KNOCK for Him to open doors</i>

That we can't budge

6x a day

The loud speaker doesn't meet codes

And I don't speak Arabic

So, let me make this easy

6x / day:

When you wake up... first thing... stop & pray

On your way to work or school... ask... seek... knock

At lunch... pray

On your way home... pray

At dinner time... pray

And as you go to bed... ask... seek... and knock... again

Ask for a couple things

Seek God in your life

And knock on those stubborn doors that won't open without His help!

A couple of minutes

6x / day

Listen to me:

I was convinced of the reality of God 3 months ago

I was convinced of the reality of God before we went to Israel

But I have never been more convinced of the reality of God

I have never been more convinced about His Son Jesus

Then I am right now

I am convinced

To the core of my being

That the God of the Universe...