

Who you gonna call?

Prayer: Talking with my Father

Matthew 7:7-11

Sermon 01

As soon as we arrived in Florida, I'm walking through and checking out our accommodations. I immediately discovered that the light fixture in the bathroom had become unattached from the wall. My good friend, Larry Wise, was letting us use his winter home in Bradenton and I didn't want him to think that we'd broken it. So, I quickly took a picture and sent it to him (**picture**).

Then, while we were away, our bank made a minor error in our account, so we called up a friend of ours at the bank to resolve it. When we got home, the washing machine was acting up, so we called up the repair company.

Those are all little things. We all do stuff like that all of the time. But if we're really honest, we don't like to ask for help, even from God. Yet, our Heavenly Father wants us to ask for help...even with the seemingly little things.

We think that we're so independent but we're not. Every now and then God reminds us of that, like with a *Hurricane Dorian*. Or, a wayward child or the test results from a medical test.

Our theme for this year has been *Going Forward on our Knees* (**picture**). This morning we're beginning a six week sermon series called *Prayer: Talking with my Father*. One of the things God has been teaching me is that He wants me to come to Him, talk with Him, and share how needy I am. This is big for me because I didn't have that kind of relationship with my biological father. Some of you have similar backgrounds.

Even though our children are now adults, Jane and I still love to help them. We love to talk to them. One of our highlights in Florida was when Charity came down for a week.

And if you have a personal relationship with Jesus, that's how it is with your Heavenly Father. God doesn't just want you to come when you need something. He wants to talk to you all of the time. There's never a bad time. He's never too busy or tired or in a bad mood. I'm praying that this series will help all of us grow in prayer and know what have a privilege we have. The truth is that we're inadequate and incompetent, apart from God. We think we're all sophisticated but we're not. Individually and as a church family, we must grow in this area of prayer. Recently, I stumbled on this quote by Ray Ortlund (**picture**): *"When we depend on organization, we get what organization can do. When we depend on education, we get what education can do. But when we depend on God, we get what God can do. That is why we pray. We want to be involved in what only God can do for us..."*

But if you're like most of us, if you're like even most preachers, if there's one area of your life where you feel inadequate, it's your prayer life. Right up front I want you to know that I have no desire to add to your guilt. Almost everyone I know feels guilty about prayer in the sense that most of us feel like we should pray more than we do. Yet, what I long for in our church is that as the Grace Family, we take spiritual strides forward together in this area. Because I really believe that we haven't seen even a fraction of all that God can do in our lives, in our church and in this community – if we'd simply learn to pray. So, my goal is to increase our joy and fulfillment by working through together some of the basics and boundless possibilities of prayer. We all know that God wants us to pray. He wants to be in constant communication with us, so (if you're taking notes).

1. Why don't we pray? I believe that there are *three primary reasons*.

We've convinced ourselves that we're too busy. Most of us struggle with the little voice inside that tells us we've got more important things to do. Prayer is good, but we need to get on with the "real business" of the day, so we don't pray as we ought or as we'd like to.

We've been deceived by pride and with it, independence. Proud people don't pray. It's that simple. Our culture values independence and being self-made, and we're easily contaminated. We want to do things ourselves. We hate asking for help. We don't even like reading the directions for new components in the home. It's why our Heavenly Father must give us a wake-up call.

Recently, I finished reading Brett Baier's book, *Special Heart* (**picture**). In it he shares how desperate he and his wife were when they learned shortly after his birth, that their little son, Paul, had major heart defects. I don't know where Brett Baier is at spiritually. But he was desperate. He and his wife, Amy, were asking everyone they knew to pray for Paul.

We're so dependent and are oblivious to it. Last weekend 33 people on board the dive boat, *Conception*, (**pictures**) paid \$665 for what they thought would be an adventure of a lifetime. They're sleeping on what's a common adventure. Somehow the boat caught on fire and they were ushered into eternity.

Visit any ER and you'll find people who had no plans on being there. Some won't leave alive. We're so dependent and are oblivious. Our Heavenly Father loves us so much, that He wants us to talk to Him and humbly depend on Him. Often He will give us a wake-up call.

Our tendency is to act and then pray. We must learn to pray and then act.

We wrongly think that we won't pray the right way. When your child says their 1st word, like “bread” but they say “bre” or “ju” for juice. No parent tells them, “Now say please” or “Make a complete sentence.” No way! They're thrilled their child is communicating, even if it's little more than babbling, and they jump to answer. That's our Heavenly Father. God wants us to talk to Him.

2. Why should we pray? Please turn to Matthew 7:7-11 (p. 812). This passage tells us why we should pray. Let me suggest **four reasons** from these verses.

* ***God invites us to pray.*** The Packers have a new coach this year, Matt LaFleur (**picture**). If you tried to call him on Friday about last Thursday's game, you'd be out of luck. He may only be the coach of the Packers, but access to him is granted to just a few. You're probably not one of them. Add probably a thousand layers to that to try get ahold of the President.

Think about how wonderful this is! You may not be able to get through to Coach LaFleur or the President, but someone infinitely more powerful invites you to talk to Him. Three times in this passage, Jesus, invites us to pray, even commands us to pray. He repeats it so we get it: ***“Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.”***

What's shocking is that God, who is infinitely powerful, who lacks nothing, who is surrounded by angels, and enjoys perfect fellowship within the Godhead, invites us to talk to Him. We pray because God invites us to.

God makes promises to us if we pray. Not only does God invite us to pray; He makes promises to those who pray, ***“it will be given to you... you will find... the door will be opened to you.*** Including the end of verse 11, Jesus makes seven promises in this passage. God answers when we pray.

I know that we read these verses and have lots of questions about unanswered prayer. It's a legitimate question and deserves its own sermon. But we must never lose sight of the amazing fact that God does answer prayer. He answers everyday requests: prayer for Him to provide and protect, prayer for guidance and wisdom. He answers extraordinary requests. Maybe you've seen someone that you've been praying for come to Christ, but you never really thought that they would. Sometimes we see God heal someone in a miraculous way in response to prayer. Jane and I've seen God intervene and meet our needs in response to prayer. ***We pray first because God invites us to, and second, because He makes promises to us if we pray.***

* ***God is available to all of us all of the time.*** Jimmy Dodd (**picture**) was at a pastors' conference in Haiti. Posted at the reception desk of the hotel was a sign promoting tennis lessons for a mere \$5 per hour. The sign read, ***“Tennis instructor available 24/7. \$5 per hour. Please contact reception for reservation”*** (**picture**). He let the receptionist know that he wanted to take advantage of this amazing offer. “Great,” she exclaimed, “what time would you like your lesson?” “3 AM” he replied. “But our only tennis instructor is not available at 3 AM. Is there another time that would work for you?”

With a big smile on his face, he pushed a little harder. “But your advertisement says the instructor is available 24/7. That's why I asked for a 3 AM lesson. Because that's my only break during this conference and it says right here that he is always available.” “Come on Mr. Dodd”, she replied (also smiling), “No one is available 24/7”.

But someone is available 24/7. We know Him as Abba Father. No other person is always available, 24/7 to take your call, respond to your questions and meet all your needs. This powerful reality should bring every believer great hope, comfort and peace. It's a profound theological truth: God is available 24/7. He is always at work. In John 5:17 says, ***“Jesus said to them, ‘My Father is always at His work to this very day, and I too am working’.***”

This incredible promise brings encouragement, comfort, and hope. God is unceasingly at work. Jesus is continually at work. The Holy Spirit is perpetually at work. Lamentations 3:22 promises us that the Lord's loving kindnesses never cease, that His compassions never fail. Deuteronomy 11:12 tells us that the eyes of the Lord are always on the land for which the Lord cares. Psalm 54:4 reminds us that the Lord is our sustainer.

Last night, while you slept, the Lord, once again, was up all night. God has no need for sleep. Psalm 121:3-4 says, ***“He will not let your foot slip – He who watches over you will not slumber; indeed, He who watches over Israel will neither slumber nor sleep.”*** He didn't sleep because He's always at work. Last night – the Lord never left his watch. He never slipped away to catch a nap. Even as God rested on the 7th day of creation, He was sustaining all of creation.

Taking this truth an additional step – because God is sovereign, how much of His attention can He specifically give to you? **All** of His attention! And how often can He give you all of his attention? **All** of the time! It's humanly impossible, yet Matthew 19:26 reminds us that that ***“with people this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.”***

God is always able to give you His undivided attention all of the time. He works 24/7, on every difficulty, each individual problem and all challenges that impact you in any and every way. God is forever, unendingly, incessantly, relentlessly at work! God is always at work.

The practical application? Why do we lose sleep worrying? The weight of the world is not on our shoulders. The Lord is doing just fine bearing that weight. We can rest because God doesn't rest. We can recharge our batteries because our

Heavenly Father never needs to recharge His. Sleeping, resting, having a sense of peace are an acknowledgement of your trust in the truth of the Word of God – that indeed, our Heavenly Father is always at work.

Notice how Jesus described three levels of how prayer can feel to us. Sometimes it's *asking*. God seems present, and all we have to do is ask. Sometimes prayer is like *seeking*. We actually have to go looking for God, because He doesn't seem present. Sometimes God seems even further away, like someone who's locked behind a closed door. In that case, we go *knocking*.

Jesus says God is actually available to us in all three cases. No matter how far away God is, He's available to us. When we just have to ask, when we have to go looking for Him, even when it seems we're knocking on a closed door. Notice what He says in verse 8: "*For everyone who asks receives.*"

Sometimes I read accounts of Christians who excel in prayer and they intimidate me. I'm not a prayer warrior like some. But our Heavenly Father never plays favorites in prayer. "*Everyone who asks receives.*" God is available to us all of the time, not just to some of us but to all of us all the time.

* **God is inclined to answer.** What's your Dad like? It's a tough question because there are all kinds of fathers. Some have been blessed with good fathers, but nobody has a perfect one. Jesus says as much in these verses: our fathers, no matter how good they are, aren't perfect. But most are inclined to do good things for their children. It's just part of being a dad; you want to look after your kids.

Jesus not only says that God is our Father, He's a Father who never lets us down. He's always looking out for what's best for us. He's incredibly interested in the welfare of His children. He is inclined to give good gifts to his kids. Anglican Archbishop Richard Trench (**picture**) said, "*Prayer is not overcoming God's reluctance...it is laying hold of His highest willingness.*"

When Jesus says that God is our Father, He also reminds us of who we are: children that are dependent on him. When you're a child, you don't try to be self-sufficient. You accept that your father has everything that you need. And that's exactly our position with God. We need Him and He is more than willing to meet our need as we come to Him.

It's here that we see the real shift in our relationship with God. When you begin to see God as your Father, you understand all that Jesus said. You know you've been invited. You hear His promises. You know He's available and inclined to answer you. But you notice that it starts to be less about what you can get from God and more about the sheer delight of relationship with the One who offers all of this to you. We move from prayer being about getting things from God, to prayer being about spending time with Him, and marveling that He actually really wants to spend time with us.

We not only have access to God, we have a relationship with Him. God isn't just open to hearing from us. He gave up His own Son, Jesus, to make it possible. We never have to wonder if God is interested in hearing from us. As the Apostle Paul said, "*He who did not spare His own Son, but gave Him up for us all—how will He not also, along with Him, graciously give us all things?*" (Romans 8:32).

I find that I often pray many of the same things every day. It probably seems like a waste of time to some. But our Heavenly Father has invited you and I to talk to Him. Our Heavenly Father has made promises to those who pray. He's available, all of the time, to everyone. And He's inclined to answer.

Prayer isn't just about getting things from God, it's about the sheer joy of an intimate relationship with Him. It's why we pray. **Who else you gonna call?**

Conclusion: Prayer is for family, God's family. It's for His children.

Telemarketing on our landlines has been replaced by spam and robo calls (**picture**) on our cell phones. If you're like me, you've learned to ignore them, letting them go into your voice mail before you respond to them.

Yet, if I see that one of my children is calling, even if I were meeting with the President, I'd answer the call. *Why?* It's obvious. It's my child. Words can't express how much I love them. There's never a "bad time" for one of my children to call me.

Like us, God wants to hear from His children. The Bible teaches us that prayer is the privilege of those who have become the children of God (John 1:12). The Psalmist wrote, "*The eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and His ears are attentive to their cry; the face of the Lord is against those who do evil...*" (Psalm 34:15). But the Bible also teaches that not everyone is God's child. Scripture is clear – you aren't born into God's family. You must be born-again into God's family. It's what Jesus unpacks for us in John 3.

I appreciate the words of John Piper (**picture**): "*As far as unbelievers are concerned, there is one prayer that we know God answers for them, the earnest plea to Christ for salvation. Whether God answers any other prayers of those who reject Christ is irrelevant. It is irrelevant whether persons who throw away eternal life and insist on going to hell are given a few earthly pleasures along the way. The only thing such pleasures will do for them, if they persist in their unbelief, is to make their guilt and their torment all the worse because they don't use them as an occasion for repentance. So it is no great boon even if God does answer some of their prayers.*"

If you're a believer, if you've committed your life to Christ and trusted Him as your personal Savior, you're not praying to "God." Prayer for you is the wonderful privilege of talking freely with your Heavenly Father. Because of Jesus' cross, you're His child.

It's not because we're good or moral or nice. It's all because of the cross. It's all because of God's grace. It's not enough, as that TV show dubs it, "God Friend Me" (**picture**). He must be your Father and you must be His child.

And if you've never received Christ, I beg you to please make your commitment right now to God by turning from sin, trusting Christ to forgive you, and inviting Jesus to come into your life as your Lord and Savior.

If you will do this, you will immediately become a member of God's own family. He becomes your Heavenly Father and is listening for your prayer!

Our goal with this series and emphasis on prayer is for each of us, particularly our church family to see growth in this vital area of prayer.

So, let me tie this up with some simple suggestions to help you take steps forward in your prayer life and conversing with your Heavenly Father. These are adapted from Paul Miller's great book on prayer, *A Praying Life* (**picture**).

Go to bed. You don't have to pray in the morning, yet what a great way to start your day. If you commit to investing the time in the morning, it's more likely that you'll take the time to pray.

Get up. Praying in bed is wonderful. In fact, the more that you pray *out* of bed, the more you'll pray *in* bed. But it's too easy to doze unless you get up.

Get awake. Maybe you need coffee or a shower first to wake up.

Get a quiet place. Maybe a room, a chair or a place with a view. Some pray as they walk. Have a place where you are basically free from interruption. For most of us, that means that our phone is not in the area.

Get comfortable. There's nothing particularly spiritual about praying on your knees. Being comfortable and able to focus is more important than your prayer posture.

Get going. Start with just 5 minutes. Start with a small goal that you can attain rather than something heroic that you'll do a few times and quit because you got discouraged.

Keep going. Consistency is more important than length. If you pray five minutes every day, then the length of time will slowly grow. You'll grow in your enjoyment of spending time with your Heavenly Father.

Spend time in the Bible, too. Children ask for things that are childish. As we spend time in the Word, not a marathon but bite size time, we will know God's mind and will pray more in line with our Father's will and eternal perspective.

For example, God loves most of us too much to make us millionaires. He knows that it's not in our best interest and would cause most of us to sin and even turn most of us into idolaters. So, know your Father's heart and will because you're faithfully in His Word.

When our back is against the wall, we're all going to call someone. **Who you gonna call?** Your Heavenly Father longs to talk to you. Can I encourage you to start even today, this week, consistently spending time in prayer, talking to the One who loves you and knows your every need and burden?