

RECONNECTING WITH GOD

Series: Plugged into Prayer

Mark 1:32-39; Matthew 6:6

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We all know what it's like to be driving down the street in our car and listening to a song on the radio but then as you start to head out of town, the static starts to set in. You hear the song, then the static, the song, then the static. It keeps cutting in and out until before long it's just white noise. If you want to finish the song, what do you need to do? You must turn around. You must drive towards the signal until the connection is strong again. Well, I want to apply that to our lives this morning in that the further we drift from God, the weaker His voice and presence in our life seems. The old saying is "*If you feel distant from God, guess who moved?*"¹ Now, we're all going to feel distant from God at times. There are times when God is doing a long work of faith in our lives and testing our faith over our sensibilities. But isn't it true that many times we feel distant from God because we're not taking time to spend with Him? We're not intentionally connecting with Him. Put it this way: we might text Him or call Him for a few minutes when we need something, but we're not sitting down to have a meal with Him and getting to know Him, if you know what I mean. So, my prayer this summer is that we will **reconnect with God through prayer.**

Prayer, simply defined, is **communication with God**. It's talking to God. It's **a key means through which we experience and connect with God.**² It's essential to Christian living. Even when we come to the Word of God to know God, we come *prayerfully*. So prayer is not an end in itself. **The goal is not prayer, but a relationship with the Heavenly Father through prayer.** Remember, God doesn't just want to save us, He wants to save us to bring us into an intimate, rich fellowship with Him (1 Jn. 1:3; Rev. 3:20). Our fellowship with God isn't to wait until heaven. His desire and our greatest need is to be in constant fellowship with Him *now*, and the greatest expression of that is prayer.³ Thus, failure to seek God in prayer would deny that purpose.⁴

The old preacher Martin Lloyd Jones said, "*Prayer is beyond any question the highest activity of the human soul. Man is at his greatest and highest when upon his knees comes face to face with God.*"⁵ That's a bold statement. The highest activity of the human soul? Coming face to face with God? That's the Christian's great desire. If we want to know God and be used by God, it won't happen apart from prayer. We are dependent upon Him for everything. He is our power source. And if He is our power source, I want to consider prayer the connection—the cord that connects us to Him. If we want to be a light in this world, we must connect with Him through prayer. So if this is the case—if prayer is that important—prayer should be as natural as breathing, shouldn't it? It should be a way of life. So why do we struggle with prayer so much? The reality is that most Christians are frustrated with their prayer lives. I want to highlight a few ways we are frustrated in prayer.

Frustration #1 – The done-that prayer life.

Or, the tried-that-before for while prayer life. Sometimes I think our prayer lives are like an old diet. Maybe we've made efforts to improve our prayer lives before and were really disciplined for a while and then it just became too routine and slowly faded as a priority in our lives. Maybe we've done that a handful of times and we have just kind of given up on it. We don't want to take our prayer lives seriously because we know we'll fall into that rut again. I think that's a normal experience for many Christians.

Frustration #2 – The drowned-out prayer life.

Our prayer lives are drowned out by the busyness of life. Our culture makes it hard to pray. It's easy to bow down to the gods of noise, hurry, crowds, work, and entertainment. We find it uncomfortable to slow down or quiet our souls to pray. Every bone in us tells us we need to get to work and be productive. We tell ourselves we don't have time to pray. When we aren't working, we feel we should be entertained so, exhausted, we veg out. It's amazing how if we get one moment of waiting for anything, even waiting in line at the grocery store for a minute or two, we pull out our phone and scroll. Prayer isn't even a consideration.

Frustration #3 – The divided prayer life.

Maybe we want to give up on prayer because we get so distracted while praying. The to-do list comes up. We aren't even really sure where to start with prayer or how to pray biblically because we just have cemented in our minds what the Bible teaches about it. Or we feel like we can't or shouldn't pray because of sin in our lives. We're ashamed to come before God, divided over our sinfulness and how a holy God can accept our prayers. Or we feel like we should feel a certain way when we pray, or that we aren't getting the answers to our prayers that we want because we aren't praying like that one guy does in church. We think we need refined, polished prayers. Just the other day, my professor was telling me about how the people he served in east Asia had an honorific prayer language. They had words they only used in prayer. It was an unnatural prayer language. He said his wife who was born into that didn't learn how to pray relationally with God until she learned to pray in English because we pray with the same words that we speak in. But even then, sometimes we feel like our prayer life is lacking because we aren't eloquent or polished enough.

Frustration #4 – The doubtful prayer life.

We all know the frustration of praying hard for something and it just doesn't get answered the way we want. We become discouraged by what from our view is an unanswered prayer. Sometimes we think, "*Why pray at all if God is sovereign? Does it even change anything? How can God hear all of our prayers? Doesn't He get tired? Am I pestering Him when I pray?*" These are just a few questions and frustrations I want to address through this series. We most definitely are going to be challenged in our prayer lives through this series—prayer at times is a battle, and a spiritual one at that—but I don't want it to be a slap on the wrist. My intention is that we would rekindle our prayer

lives, if need be, and learn to enjoy our prayer lives again. I think there's a lot of confusion and uncertainty out there about what prayer should be like and that trips us up, and I hope that this series is really freeing for you as you learn to pray with confidence because you will know what the Bible says about prayer. The first thing we want to do is to start to get a glimpse of what a healthy prayer life looks like from the example of Christ from **Mark 1:32-39**.

32 When evening came, after the sun had set, they began bringing to Him all who were ill and those who were demon-possessed. 33 And the whole city had gathered at the door. 34 And He healed many who were ill with various diseases, and cast out many demons; and He was not permitting the demons to speak, because they knew who He was.

I. THE BUSY LIFE OF JESUS. (MARK 1:32-39)

We need some context here. At this point in the Gospel of Mark, Jesus has been tested in the wilderness; He has been baptized by John; He just kicked off His ministry, having chosen some disciples to follow Him; and He has made His way to **Capernaum** on the north side of the Sea of Galilee. This is where Peter's house is and it becomes the "home-base" during His ministry in Galilee (the territory in northern Israel). He started His ministry here with a bang! In **verses 21-28**, He **amazed** people with His teaching in the synagogue. He didn't teach like a scribe. He spoke more like a prophet, with authority. He also cast out an **evil spirit** in the synagogue that called Him "*the Holy One of God.*" Mark 1:27 says, "*Immediately the news about Him spread everywhere into all the surrounding district of Galilee.*" Everyone wanted to witness Jesus' powerful ministry. I like how one commentator, William Lane, said, "*The disturbance of men by God had begun.*"⁶

Well, immediately after the synagogue incident, in **verses 29-31** they come to the house of Peter (Simon/Cephas) and Andrew where Peter's mother-in-law is lying sick with a **fever**. Yes, that implies that in direct contrast to Roman Catholic doctrine, Peter was married. Other apostles were as well (1 Cor. 9:5). But Jesus comes, takes Peter's mother-in-law by the hand, and raises her up, healing her instantly. It's immediate, complete healing—no trace of weakness in her at all. With the fever completely dissipated, she began to wait on them with hospitality. Both these accounts where Jesus proves His Messianic authority over the physical realm (sickness) and spiritual realm (demonic/Satanic), took place on the same **Sabbath** day.

This is why when the Sabbath ends at sunset, **the whole city gathered at the door** of Peter's house to see Jesus! The Sabbath runs from Friday at sundown to Saturday at sundown. The Sabbath ends Saturday evening, they said, when there are "three stars in the sky" at twilight. Until then, the land of Israel basically shut down. The Oral Law of the Pharisees (the manmade traditions; not God's Law) which became Rabbinic Judaism (once the temple was destroyed in AD 70) said you couldn't **travel** more than 2,000 cubits on the Sabbath day (about a half mile). You couldn't **heal** on the Sabbath. (Mk 3:1-6). You couldn't carry **burdens** on the Sabbath, which in this case was carrying people: the ill, handicapped, and demon possessed. So as soon as the Sabbath ends, people flood the home of Peter and there is a lingering line of lanterns at the door long into the night as Jesus ministers to them. It's a great picture of Jesus as the prophetic "Servant" foretold in the OT (Is.

42:1). Mark portrays Jesus as that Suffering Servant. But as busy as Jesus is, where does He find time to pray? That's what we look at now.

II. THE PRAYER LIFE OF JESUS. (VV. 35-39)

35 In the early morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house, and went away to a secluded place, and was praying there. 36 Simon and his companions searched for Him; 37 they found Him, and said to Him, "Everyone is looking for You." 38 He said to them, "Let us go somewhere else to the towns nearby, so that I may preach there also; for that is what I came for." 39 And He went into their synagogues throughout all Galilee, preaching and casting out the demons.

So Jesus is up healing people late into the night, gets a few hours of rest, and is up **early again while it's still dark to pray**. He got up, left the house, went to a **secluded place**, and was praying there. You know, God never wears out. God never gets tired. But Jesus was fully God *and fully human*. He was tired! He needed sleep too. But even though He's tired, weary getting out of bed, Jesus exercised the wisdom and discipline to pray. And we don't know if it was always that early in the morning, but it was His pattern to get away and pray alone. **Luke 5:16** says, "**Jesus would often slip away into the wilderness and pray.**" He did this often. This was His practice. He had to spend time with the Father. He couldn't not. He viewed, we could say, prayer as "*the highest activity of the human soul.*" And I think that's really key for not letting the busyness of life drown out your prayer life. To see it as the priority that it is. If you see it that way, you will sacrifice for it—morning, noon, or night. It doesn't matter what time you pray. You will just pray!

Prayer is the highest activity of the human soul. We should sacrifice for it.

Meanwhile, Peter and the others wake up to find Jesus missing. Because of the excitement in town, people are up with the chickens, gathering at the door and wanting to see Jesus again. The disciples, excited to capitalize on His sudden popularity, put out a search party. And when they finally find Him and try to bring Him back, He basically says, "*It's time to move on.*" It's time to keep preaching in other towns, for that is what He came for. At this point, Jesus has sufficiently testified in Capernaum and other places need witness. It's not that the remaining human needs weren't unimportant, it's that others needed to hear so they could believe. And it's apparent to me that **because Jesus was in prayer and stayed connected to the Father, He continued to do the Father's will**. Anybody else would've went right back and put on a show for the adoring fans and let them build a throne right then and there. **Prayer keeps Him on track and from giving into temptation**. Prayer has re-centering power, reminding us of what's important. Without solitude in prayer, we lose our way. I like the saying, "*If we don't come apart for a while, we'll come apart in a while.*" But you'd think that because Jesus is the Son of God, He wouldn't need to pray, but He did and we're just going to take home two more principles for our own prayer life as we consider His.

Have a regular prayer time where you're alone with God.

Later on, we'll talk about the importance of praying *continually* and what that looks like, but we need to establish the importance of spending quality time alone with God in prayer regularly. Even when life was incredibly busy, like after this Sabbath where He is teaching and healing from sunup to sundown, Jesus made it His practice, His habit, to spend time alone with the Father. He would frequent the Mount of Olives or another secluded place to pray. You'd think that since He's the Son of God, He wouldn't need a specific prayer time either because He was perfectly in tune with the Father at all times. But He too needed time alone with the Father. He wants to be with His Father and do the Father's will, so He spent a great amount of His time in prayer.

Now it does appear that like for many today, morning was a normal time of prayer for Jews. Psalm 5:3 says, "*In the morning I will order my prayer to You and eagerly watch*" (Ps. 88:13; 143:8). There are other psalms as well talking about prayer in the morning. Personally, that's when I *prefer* to pray, though it's not always possible. I just find it helpful to commit that day to prayer before I go about doing everything. Long or short prayer, I am in the habit of doing that anyway. However, there's plenty of Scriptures demonstrating longer, intercessory prayer time all around the clock. When I was working midnight shift on the railroad, the bulk of my intercessory prayer life was at night. The time does not matter—and you don't want to get legalistic about it because the schedule doesn't always allow for your legalism! The point is to **just pray** and **aim to find significant time alone with God in prayer**. Jesus did this as an example for His disciples to learn from.

When Jesus slipped away to secluded places to pray, He was living out His own teaching from **Matthew 6:6**, which says, "*But when you pray, go away by yourself, shut the door behind you, and pray to your Father in private. Then your Father, who sees everything, will reward you*" (NLT). In the cultural context Jesus was in, it was typical for the religious Jews in that day to make a show of prayer on the streets. They would recite repetitious prayers at different times during the day and do in it public places to impress others. That's a big problem. There's nothing wrong with praying in public, but they were doing it for the sake of appearing righteous. Thus, they were hypocrites. To make as great contrast between their prayers and prayer God desired, Jesus says to **pray in secret**. Go into an **inner room** (the word might suggest something like a storage closet) and **shut the door**. Again, time doesn't matter. Location doesn't matter. What matters is the attitude and motives in prayer.⁷ You can be praying "alone with God" in a busy airport without showing off or making it known. You can pray without people even knowing that you're praying. Prayer isn't about showing off to God or men. It's about **time spent in fellowship with the Lord**.

But this verse here, **Matthew 6:6**, is the verse that I want to highlight this morning. The Lord has had this verse on my mind for weeks and it's our memory verse for this series. Memorize Matthew 6:6 with me if you will because a strong prayer life and strong connection with God—being a light in this world—will require alone time with Him. **Much of our prayer lives will literally take place in secret**.⁸ And what we do in secret, He says, will be **rewarded**. He doesn't tell us what that reward is, but I imagine some of it is answered prayer, thus bearing fruit through prayer, and with it eternal rewards. God is sovereign, but He does reward those who are faithful in prayer. A good example of God answering prayer is in Exodus 32 where Moses intercedes on behalf of idolatrous Israel and God relents of His wrath in response to Moses' prayer. Obviously, God is

sovereign from beginning to end, but we do make choices, He does honor our faithfulness, and He really does respond to prayer.

The last principle for today that I want to pass on to you addresses one of the common frustrations many have with prayer, and it's feeling like you have to pray perfectly elegantly. In response to that, I say:

Pray like a child.

This principle comes from Jesus' complete dependence on the Father. Jesus prayed because He Himself said things like, "*Apart from the Father I can do nothing.*" In all His life, He only did what the Father willed. He was always praying because He was always depending on the Father. So when He tells us to come like a child—completely dependent—He's telling us to do what He's doing. He was the most dependent person who ever lived. We don't come to God demanding things of Him. We come with humility, with childlike dependence seeking His will. As one man said hey, "*When you know you can't do life on your own, prayer makes complete sense.*"⁹

Sometimes praying like a child means forgetting proper prayer formatting and just blurting out what's on our heart. We don't critique our children when they come to us with what's on their heart. We welcome it. God does too when we come to Him as needy children. As you go to pray this week, remember it's about a relationship, not the prayer itself. You're bringing these things to Him that are on your heart and mind to Him. It's a conversation. It's going to flow from one subject to the next. Sometimes there are distractions, but that happens in any conversation. But in order for that conversation to happen and our relationship to develop, we have to provide both the time and the environment where closeness can happen.¹⁰ Maybe if you're new to prayer or it's been a while, just take 5 minutes or 10 minutes to pray. Take baby steps. Before long, some days you might be praying for a half hour and wonder where the time went. May the Lord bless your prayer life this summer as we study.

¹ Skip Heitzig, *Psalm 19 – Say Something*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zphSnLS4Zg4>

² Paul Miller, *A Praying Life* (NavPress, 2017), 8.

³ John MacArthur, *Alone with God: Rediscovering the Power and Passion of Prayer* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C Cook, 1981, 2011), 21.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 20.

⁵ Martin Lloyd-Jones, *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1979), 2:45.

⁶ William L. Lane, *The Gospel According to Mark* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1974), 76.

⁷ MacArthur, 46.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ Miller, 33.

¹⁰ E. M. Bounds, *Purpose in Prayer* (Chicago: Moody, n.d.), 53-54, writes, "God is always within call, it is true; His ear is ever attentive to the cry of His child, but we can never know Him if we use the vehicle of prayer as we use the telephone, for a few words of hurried conversation. Intimacy requires development. We can never know God as it is our privilege to know Him, by brief and fragmentary and unconsidered repetitions of intercessions that are requests for personal favors and nothing more. That is not the way in which we can come into communication with heaven's King. 'The goal of prayer is God,' a goal that can only be reached by patient and continued and continuous waiting upon Him, pouring out our heart to Him and permitting Him to speak to us. Only by doing so can we expect to know Him, and as we come to know Him better we shall spend more time in His presence and find that presence a constant and ever-increasing delight."