

Message: “How to Pray”

Why do we pray? Last week, we began our series on prayer with the question, “Why pray?” What we discovered is that prayer isn’t an obligation or a requirement. There’s no rule saying, “Pray or else” Prayer gives us life and energy. It doesn’t take our life or energy away.

We believe Jesus makes our lives together better in every way.

That’s our why. We know it. We put it on our bulletin to remind ourselves and share it with others. Prayer is one of those ways Jesus makes our lives better. Prayer is a time of spiritual nourishment and rest. To paraphrase Richard Rohr, “Essentially, prayer is a way to accept that you are accepted. That’s faith.” If you want some more information on why we pray, I invite you to visit our website (coronaumc.com).

You’ll find last week’s sermon posted.

Today, we’re going to move to the second part: How to Pray.

Let’s hear from you. **How do you pray?** Those are all good responses. You’re verifying what we saw in the video; what we know. Prayer isn’t about posture – what’s on the outside, but about attitude and intent – what’s on the inside. When we pray, we’re making a two-way connection to God.

Do you know what that’s called? It’s a relationship. I saw a quote on Facebook, “If you want to have a best friend, you have to be a best friend.” I believe it applies to the way we think about God, approach God and pray to God. If you want God to help, you need to believe in God and trust God. That’s first. Believing there’s a higher power, a supernatural being who is greater than yourself, one who will listen and respond to you is the first step.

Once you take the chance to trust God, you need to be authentic. Be open and honest with yourself and with God about whatever is going on in your life. God already knows. The book of Hebrews tells us, *“God’s word is living, active, and sharper than any two-edged sword. It penetrates to the point that it separates the soul from the spirit and the joints from the marrow. It’s able to judge the heart’s thoughts and intentions. No creature is hidden from it, but rather everything is naked*

and exposed to the eyes of the one to whom we have to give an answer” (Hebrews 4:12-13, CEB).

God knows all about you. Not in a creepy, God-stalker kind of way, but in a loving, caring way. Jeremiah tells us where God’s heart is, *“I know the plans I have in mind for you, declares the Lord; they are plans for peace, not disaster, to give you a future filled with hope”* (29:11).

God wants the best for every one of us. God isn’t leaving anyone out. That’s why we pray for others – family, friends and neighbors, as well as people who we don’t know and haven’t met. It’s why we serve the community, openly gathering and spending time with people from different faiths and denominations, as well as those with no beliefs. That’s why we spend time with people who are different in other ways. That’s what an open, affirming and accepting relationship means.

Jesus told a story to help us understand how our attitude and intent are key to how we pray. Jesus compares two people: one is a person who goes to pray but who’s only intent is to make themselves look good. This person looks down on other people. They’re self-righteousness, which means they look good to themselves. They like to compare themselves to others. They don’t really need God. They falsely believe they’ve got it all figured out. The other person is a someone who goes to pray seeking help. Rather than trying to make excuses or blame other people, this person realizes they need God. They’re looking for God’s help, for God to give them answers. Their attitude is humble, reverent. They know nothing is impossible for God.

When we go to God in prayer, attitude and intent make all the difference. When we go thinking we have all the answers or just to look good or when we have to, then our prayers are all about what we want, rather than what God wants. We’re only interested in God when we see our desires being met. We have a “me-first” attitude.

Jesus teaches us to have a “God-first” attitude. When we put God’s interests first, our prayers are all about what God wants: relationships. We realize we have more questions than answers. We’re interested in God because we know there’s no other place to go. We’re reverent

toward God. That means we show respect, we listen, we're open to other's opinions, we care about what God wants for us, our families, our neighbors and people all around the world. When we go to God that way, our prayers are for the needs of all people; not just ourselves.

Jesus said, *"This is how I want you to conduct yourself in these matters. If you enter your place of worship and ... you suddenly remember a grudge a friend has against you ... leave immediately, go to this friend and make things right. Then and only then, come back and work things out with God"* (Matthew 5:23-24, MSG). Forgiveness is important.

It takes courage to forgive other people when they've done something to us that really hurts. I know. We want to strike out, get even and show those who hurt us what's what. The problem is that when we buy into that view, the pain and hurt we feel can begin to define us. That's not healthy, for us, for our family or for others.

Going to God in prayer means naming the hurt and pain we feel. No matter whether it's physical, mental, emotional or spiritual, name the elephant in the room. If you come to me for advice or counseling or prayer, you'll find that I'm going to ask you to identify your hurt or fear. Once we're honest with ourselves and others, then we know what to take to God. Healing can begin.

That's true for us as individuals. It's also true for us in groups. Household prayer is important. Praying for each other is powerful and intimate. It shows we love and care. Praying together as household, especially when we pray for other households is important. The best way to see how God is blessing your home is when you pass God's blessing on to other households, starting with prayer.

We pray as a congregation for several reasons. We pray for individuals in need and for our households to be spiritually vibrant. We pray for the community we live in; that's where we serve the Lord. We pray for people and groups across the world. When we do that, we join in the greater work that God is doing around the world. There's an invitation to be part of the solution to the challenges of the world.

How do we pray? We do so with honesty, humility and respect. When we do, we find ourselves in a place of rest, peace, pardon and

healing. It's where we find a better life. I don't know about you, but that's how I want to live.

Let us pray...

2 Samuel 7:18-22 (CEB)

Then King David went and sat in the Lord's presence. He asked:

“Who am I, Lord God, and of what significance is my family that you have brought me this far? But even this was too small in your eyes, Lord God! Now you have also spoken about your servant's dynasty in the future and the generation to come, Lord God!

What more can David say to you? You know your servant, Lord God. For the sake of your word and according to your own will, you have done this great thing so that your servant would know it.

That is why you are so great, Lord God! No one can compare to you, no god except you, just as we have always heard with our own ears.”

Luke 18:9-14 (CEB)

Jesus told this parable to certain people who had convinced themselves that they were righteous and who looked on everyone else with disgust: “Two people went up to the temple to pray. One was a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and prayed about himself with these words, ‘God, I thank you that I'm not like everyone else - crooks, evildoers, adulterers - or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week. I give a tenth of everything I receive.’ But the tax collector stood at a distance. He wouldn't even lift his eyes to look toward heaven. Rather, he struck his chest and said, ‘God, show mercy to me, a sinner.’ I tell you, this person went down to his home justified rather than the Pharisee. All who lift themselves up will be brought low, and those who make themselves low will be lifted up.”