

# Sermon Text for September 10, 2023

By Rev. Robert K. Bronkema

## *II Chronicles 7:12-18, James 5:13-18*

### *“Prayer”*

This past week we made the news as a church as one of 10 recipients in the country that received the Rekindle grant, you know the grant that we have been talking about that is helping us to focus on Prayer, Scripture, and Action. I've been getting phone calls from people I know asking us how it's going? So, how is it going for you? Have you been reading Scripture more? I know I have now that we have started back up the read through the Bible. Are you praying more? Yesterday we had an opportunity for each and every one of you to be involved in a deliberate, concerted effort to pray together and individually.

This past week a new member who filled out their opportunity for service sheet said something very insightful. They said there wasn't much I could check off because I'm limited on how I can get around. There isn't anything on there for people who want to pray for the church or the people of this church. Now, that is something I can do. What a great call. Often when we think of serving the church we go automatically to how can I do, be on a committee, help out in the nursery, do this or do that. But fundamentally there is nothing more important for this church than that there is a group of people of, a cloud of saints, that are lifting it up in prayer.

I have covered the topic of prayer extensively in a number of different sermons here in Strasburg and in all of the places where I have served. I have led seminars on prayer and have notes and a presentation that is over 3 pages long and it addresses the importance of prayer and how people of faith have seen prayer as the most important building block of faith. Calvin calls it the chief exercise of faith, Barth attributes the reformation to a continuous act of prayer, Soren Kierkegaard said “A man prayed, and at first he thought that prayer was talking. But he became more and more quiet until in the end he realized that prayer is listening.”

You've heard all of this before, we have covered it, we even had a sermon series on the four elements that you need in order to have an effective prayer life according to Calving: location, pray for what you need, humble yourself, believe you'll get what you pray for. We've covered all of this already. But I'm guessing that many of you simply don't know how to pray. You're in good company, in Matthew, before Jesus teaches his disciples the Lord's Prayer they ask him the same question. Lord, teach us how to pray.

Unlike reading Scripture, prayer is a bit more vague in its practice. We all know how to read Scripture. We pick up the Bible and we read it. Even if we don't know where to go, you can follow the brochure we have put out so all the thinking is taken away from you. Just read. But in prayer, how do we do that? Some of us don't feel qualified or understand the practice of prayer.

Both of our Scriptures this morning address prayer and also give us elements of how to so that hopefully after we leave the sanctuary today we will be much better equipped on the how to of prayer. We already know the importance of prayer, the umbilical chord that connects us and God, but now how do we pray? The goal is to get us to pray more and to understand better what prayer is.

### **READ**

Let's turn to Chronicles, our first Scripture reading. The protagonist today is arguably the most powerful king known in the history of the world. Solomon had all the riches and all the lands that anyone could ever acquire. He has just finished building the temple of the Lord, which is where God had said that he would reside in Jerusalem. He has just finished praying in front of all the people that God would make the temple his home, and here we see God respond to his prayer.

In the middle of the night we see that God appeared to Solomon. Prayer invokes the presence of the Lord. Last week I mentioned that I had an encounter with God when I was not a believer and it changed me from an unbeliever to a follower. I wasn't in prayer in that time, but God was present. You don't have to pray to encounter God, but if you do pray, you will encounter God. Solomon did here.

Just like what we saw last week where Scripture is a fundamental aspect to our faith in Christ, it is not the only thing. So prayer is not the only thing we need to bring to the table to have a relationship with God where we are able to experience Him. Look at vs.14, this is the how to pray portion of this Scripture. If you don't know how to pray, here is what I would tell you, follow the formula that is given in this Scripture.

Find a place where you are alone and a time that you can keep consistently and start with 5 minutes a day. Then in vs.14 it tells us to humble ourselves, pray: which is listen and speak to God as you would to any person whom you know loves you unconditionally, listen for God's voice which is seek His face, and then change your actions. Next week we will look at action.

But if you don't know how to pray and praying the Lord's prayer is just like a routine that you do that doesn't bring you closer to God, try this.

Humble yourself, remind yourself that Jesus died for you even though you don't deserve it, pray, by offering your petitions, your requests to God, seek his face by just being in silence listening for his voice, and then change your ways, you will be convicted in your prayer so turn from those ways that are taking you away from God and taking you away from loving your neighbor or your spouse or your family. The formula is right there.

Our New Testament lesson contributes to our understanding of how to pray. Let me give you some feedback to the survey that we all took before we go into James. We did much better as a congregation in regards to prayer. Tangentially we now have 20 on our prayer chain which are people who are willing to pray when an emergent need comes up, before we put an announcement in the bulletin we only had 12. So thank you!

80% of us says that we pray at least once a day, some more. 50% of us have a routine that we follow in our prayer life. Can I emphasize this? You need a routine because it allows you to be disciplined in your prayer life where you know that you have established a way in which prayer is going to be a part of your life regardless of what is happening around you. So well done, we want to increase that 50% number today so that most of you will take the time to pray in a scheduled, disciplined way. 80% of you say that you experience the presence of God in prayer. 70% of you say that you pray spontaneously, which is great because it shows that prayer is a tool in your spiritual belt that you are willing to use at any moment.

These are some pretty good numbers folks. Give yourself a hand. But before you get too proud of yourselves, let's determine to do better. Let's pray more. James uses in these verses uses the word prayer in every single verse and in verse 16 he uses it twice. It is clear in these Scriptures that prayer was a normal part of the life of the church. If someone was sick then session would meet and some elders would be dispatched to go to that person's house to pray over them. We started home communion back up this week after not doing it for more than three years. It just feels right to go to the homes of the members of this church who haven't been able to be in church for a while to take communion.

Look at this Scripture and we see what seems like simple commands, but not something we do in regards to prayer. When we suffer is our first step to pray? Vs. 13 tells us it should be. When people within our church are sick do we actually reach out to them and pray with them at

their home or over the phone? How many of you do that? I know from experience the flood of calls and cards that people receive when they are sick in this church, so this is something that we do fairly well, but we can do better. We need to pray for each other as we are sick.

Do we pray for each other as we stumble in our lives and make bad decisions, or do we try to hide it so that no one would know? This church needs to be a place where we can share not only our need to be healed physically, but also our need to be healed from our sin. We don't do that very well.

I want to leave you with this encouragement from the pulpit. Here is one thing that you can take home with you as a result of what you heard today. Calvin tells us that every one of us should appoint a particular time in which we are engaged totally in prayer. Just take five minutes a day, which is less time than what it takes to read the Scripture we have assigned. If you already do that then spend 10 minutes a day. Our goal is to pray more as a church and as individuals. The goal is to be mature in prayer, not just mastering certain techniques, but rather being open and honest to God.

To pray is to change and I am convince that certain things will happen in history if we pray. When prayer disappears, faith ceases. Let's get back to prayer. Amen.