

File: Core Values Prayer 1

Dear friends in Christ Grace to you and Peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen!

Here we are, New Year's Eve has come and gone and resolutions have been made and already been broken. The biggest New Year's resolution people make have to do with weight and food. All of the food programs like Weight Watcher's will get a bunch of new customers and every gym has a membership sale going on right after Christmas and places like Lifetime Fitness will be packed for a few weeks and then it will be back to the regulars as the New Year's resolutions are broken.

People are looking for a quick fix to a life time of particular habits and when it doesn't change overnight they give up. Many of us have been there, right? We go on a diet or exercise program and then once we hit our goal or get discouraged, bored or frustrated we go off of it and go right back to where we were rather than making a complete lifestyle change. Some call it Yo-Yo'ing".

Same thing happens in long-term relationships. After 15 or 20 years of certain patterns of living and communicating in particular ways things finally get to a crisis point and the people hope (and who wouldn't) it can be fixed overnight. But it's taken 15 years to get to that point why would we think it could easily be

fixed or forgiven overnight. New patterns of relating have to be developed and stuck to they need to become a core value. The same goes for our spiritual life. But often our spiritual life and core values take a back seat because other things seem more pressing.

However I would make the case that if you get the spiritual core values right a lot of the other stuff follows. That's one of many reasons why it's a particularly good time to pick up our Fit4Life: Strengthen Your Core series on spiritual core values and we're picking up with prayer. Over the next few weeks we're going to look at prayer from a few different perspectives and some of the why's and how's and give some practical steps to help in our prayer lives

But to begin talking about prayer you have to begin with the elephant in the room which is "Where is God in my praying". I've never talked to anybody who was completely honest who didn't at some point ask that question: Where the heck is God when I pray?

Think of two fictional people, we'll call them Jennifer and John. They grew up together, went to the same Sunday School and Confirmation Classes were taught all of the same stuff about prayer and God. Jennifer is disciplined in her prayer life, she reads her Bible does some devotional work. Most of the time she

really doesn't even ask the question why should I pray? She just does it, she can't imagine not praying.

John, he prays before dinner occasionally (at least the kids do) and on Sundays he prays (at least the pastor does) but most of the time he doesn't even really think about prayer. He believes in God but really doesn't talk to God much. It doesn't really bother him but sometimes when he hears Jennifer talk about praying he wonders if he's missing something and asks himself where is God in my praying why should I pray?

For some prayer is pretty natural and it comes easily and for others it's minimal and it can seem so foreign like you're just talking to the sky. We are all over the map when it comes to prayer and wondering where God is when we pray is a common experience.

To begin our series there are three things that are important for you to know about prayer.

1. God created us to pray
2. Sometimes we wonder where God is in our praying
3. Don't give into that feeling and give up praying-persevere in prayer

So-God created us to pray. That's right. Genesis Chapter 1 the very first page in The Bible says we are created in God's image. That can mean a lot of

things but as author Dan Simundson says “whatever else that means, it seems that we are born to communicate with God.” Every single book in the Bible either talks about praying or contains instances of people praying to God. It’s pretty clear God wants involvement with what he created. I Love the way Paul puts it in Colossians 4:2 “Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful”.

No relationship thrives without good communication. Notice I said good communication because we’re always communicating it’s just a matter of what we’re communicating. The silent treatment, a slammed kitchen faucet, the big eye roll they all communicate just as much as a good sit down conversation.

The questions for us to think about is: What are we communicating to God with our prayer life? Because he has in fact created us to pray. Because you will at some point in time, pray. At the very least it will happen when you’ve exhausted every other option with your plans and there’s nothing left to do but pray. And your pray will go something like this. “God, I’ve got nowhere else to turn and I don’t know if you’re even out there but if you are please help”. Yeah we’re created to pray!

But and here’s the second point after we’re created to pray, it becomes easy to not pray because sometimes we wonder where God is in our praying. We pray for stuff that it would sure seem like would be part of God’s will and nothing

happens. We pray for people in church every week and they're not all physically healed. We pray for peace. We pray for reprieve from our own illnesses, we pray for our kids for our grandparents and the list goes on and on and it doesn't seem like prayers get answered. Or maybe we don't get the goosebumps in prayer that we'd hope for as a sign that God is really there or listening.

So instead of talking to God it becomes easier to sit around and talk about God. You know stuff like what does God cause, what does God allow, did God wind the world up like a clock and then take off somewhere in the universe waiting for the alarm to go off. And in some ways talking about God is easier than talking to God because then you aren't really in a relationship. And as we all know a relationship does require some effort. So whether it's unanswered prayer or whatever sometimes we wonder where God is in our praying.

Here's the good news, if you've ever felt that way you're not alone. Jesus himself said from the cross 'My God, My God why have you forsaken me'. Folks it's just a fact, you're not the first person and you won't be the last that sometimes hasn't wondered where is God in my praying? I'm just saying if it happened to Jesus then why wouldn't it happen to you and me.

But here's the deal and the final point this morning: **Don't give into that feeling and give up praying-persevere in prayer.** Just think if you acted on

every feeling you had? Everyone of us would be in jail for something. Feelings are great and they're not right or wrong they just are, you have to recognize them and you also have to recognize which ones to act on and which ones to not act on. Part of growing up and maturing to learn to not act on every feeling you have while driving.

I'm sitting in the Costco parking lot the Saturday before Christmas just having a ton of fun. This guy cuts right in front of me----I mean right in front of me. So I raise my hands (not in a prayerful position) and go "really" and the guy drives right in front of me looks me in the eye and tells me I'm number one. Okay so here's the deal, we have a beater of a car worth a few hundred bucks that my sons call the "swag wagon". I've have in just a split second developed some very strong feelings about this guy and I have a choice to make. Do I ram him with my beater of a car and feel a lot better, it would have been the best waste of a few hundred dollars ever or not or not act on those feelings. In that rare occasion I can say I made a good choice by not acting on my emotion at the moment, but oh it was close.

With prayer, we wonder and feel where God is in our praying. Sometimes we act on that feeling too quickly and give up. So we resign ourselves to having quiet times in the boat or deer stand or at the store or the fitness club or in the garden---quiet times where we can think. That's all good and fine but God wants

to talk. Listen to the opening verses of Psalm 61 ‘Hear my cry, O God; listen to my prayer. From the ends of the earth I call to you, I call as my hear grows faint...’ Now there’s somebody wondering where God is.

Psalm 4 “Answer me when I call to you, O my righteous God. Give me relief from my distress; be merciful to me and hear my prayer.”

Psalm 10 “Why, O Lord, do you stand far off? Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble?”

Psalm 13 “How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? How long must I wrestle with my thoughts and every day have sorrow in my heart?”

These are all words of someone wondering where God is in there praying, but here’s the deal they don’t give into that feeling and give up praying. They persevere, they all continue praying despite wondering where God is because their trust in God is stronger than their feeling at that moment. Here’s how Psalm 13 ends “But I trust in your unfailing love; my heart rejoices in your salvation. I will sing to the Lord, for he has been good to me.” That’s from the same mouth that just 4 verses earlier said “How long O lord, will you forget me forever, How long will you hide your face from me?”

How could they do that? How could they not give in or give up, because you might say prayer was a core value. I don't know whether your into New Year's resolutions are not but at the very least please know you've been created by God to pray. And in those times when you get frustrated and feel—where is God in my praying, know you're not alone. And above all don't give in—move forward and as it says in Colossians **“Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful”.**