

May the Grass Never Grow on Your Path
Message for February 3, 2019
North East United Methodist Church
Rev. Dr. Drew M. Christian

Charles Spurgeon told this story of his grandfather James and his faith in God. *“He had a large family and a very small income, but he loved his Lord, and he would not have given up his preaching of the gospel for anything.”* One day the cow on which the family relied for milk for the children suddenly died. James Spurgeon’s wife was greatly concerned, but he said, *“God said He would provide, and I believe He could send us fifty cows if He pleased.”*

On that same day, a group met in London—a group James Spurgeon did not know—that wanted to help meet the needs of poor pastors. They raised a large sum of money, and began sending it to different pastors in need to help their families. When they reached the end of the list, there were still five pounds left. One man suggested sending it to James Spurgeon. Another said, *“No, let’s not send just five pounds. Let me add five more to go with it.”* Others joined in, and the day after his cow died, James Spurgeon received twenty pounds in the mail!

Prayer.

In the late 1800’s George Mueller operated an orphanage that at one time had 1,000 orphans. One morning there was no food to eat, but he called all the children and staff together and prayed thanking God for the provision of food, even though no food was on the table. A few moments later a baker knocked on the door. He told Mr. Muller that God had led him to bake bread the night before and give it to the orphanage. Before the bread was given to the children, a milkman knocked on the door. He said that his milk truck had broken down and he wanted to give the milk to the orphanage.

Prayer.

Dr. Helen Roseveare, missionary to Zaire, told the following story. *“A mother at our mission station died after giving birth to a premature baby. We tried to improvise an incubator to keep the infant alive, but the only hot water bottle we had was beyond repair. So we asked the children to pray for the baby and for her sister. One of the girls responded. ‘Dear God, please*

send a hot water bottle today. Tomorrow will be too late because by then the baby will be dead. And dear Lord, send a doll for the sister so she won't feel so lonely.' That afternoon a large package arrived from England. The children watched eagerly as we opened it. Much to their surprise, under some clothing was a hot water bottle! Immediately the girl who had prayed so earnestly started to dig deeper, exclaiming, 'If God sent that, I'm sure He also sent a doll!' And she was right! The heavenly Father knew in advance of that child's sincere requests, and 5 months earlier He had led a ladies' group to include both of those specific articles."

Just a few of the many, endless, amazing stories of how prayers are answered...prayer changes lives...prayer opens the door to the miraculous.

But prayer is much, much more...prayer is a gift we give to God...

As Gonville French-Beytagh wrote, "You are not drawn to God primarily for your own benefit but for his." Let me explain...

JOURNAL ENTRY 4/8/2010

Nate thanked me this morning. He missed the bus for school and I drove him and he thanked me. Twice. As I was driving him, before he said, 'Thank you, Dad,' I had this thought. So many things we do for our kids without a 'thank you,' so many actions that go unappreciated, so many moments our children are self-centered, thinking of no one but themselves. I had this thought - what if I made a list - a list of every moment my children were selfish, every moment they failed to say 'thank you,' every moment they misbehaved, were disobedient, were unloving. What if I made a list and then when they got ready to leave the home, go off on their own, I presented the list to them - every selfish moment, every moment of disobedience, every time they yelled at mom or dad or said 'I hate you,' how would it affect them, seeing that list? What would they think? What would they say? And then, what if before they had time to respond, I took the list and

tore it in two, shredded it, ripped it apart - would they make the connection? That's exactly what God did for us, His children. God, through His Son, Jesus Christ, tore apart the List. How would they respond? Our kids could respond the same ways we are able to respond to God's action. Our kids could walk away filled with pride or filled with shame, unable to face their father. Or they could embrace their father, cry on their shoulder, seek forgiveness, and accept the gift. They could say, 'Thank you, Dad,' 'Thank you.' My son said, 'Thank you' to me this morning and it meant the world to me. Perhaps that is how our heavenly Father feels when we spend time with Him, when we thank Him for so much, so many blessings, for destroying the List.

God is pleased when you bring before Him your prayers, just as a parent is filled with joy when their child comes up to them and says, "Thank you...I love you."

Even though prayer is all these things... a door to the miraculous, a love letter to a parent, a connection with the Creator of the Universe, we still find prayer difficult... we still fail to make time and spend our energies on lesser things...

Mark 14:32-42 - *They went to a place called Gethsemane, and Jesus said to his disciples, "Sit here while I pray." He took Peter, James and John along with him, and he began to be deeply distressed and troubled. "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death," he said to them. "Stay here and keep watch."*

Going a little farther, he fell to the ground and prayed that if possible the hour might pass from him. "Abba, Father," he said, "everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will."

Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. "Simon," he said to Peter, "are you asleep? Couldn't you keep watch for one

hour? Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.”

Once more he went away and prayed the same thing. When he came back, he again found them sleeping, because their eyes were heavy. They did not know what to say to him.

Returning the third time, he said to them, “Are you still sleeping and resting? Enough! The hour has come. Look, the Son of Man is delivered into the hands of sinners.

Jesus prays in the garden of Gethsemane, for He knows the horrific death that awaits Him in the hours to come. He asks the disciples to pray, but they fall asleep. Jesus says, *“The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.”*

Maxie Dunham, in *The Workbook of Living Prayer*, writes, *“As human beings we breathe, eat, drink, sleep, and pray. It’s part of our nature as human beings to pray. This is one of the ways we express our natural hungering for God. Natural it is; easy it isn’t! There is a difference between the tendency to pray and the practice of prayer. We have the tendency to pray – the reflexive crying out in the face of pain or trouble; the spontaneous shout of joy in the presence of beauty, accomplishment, fulfillment. We give expression to it sporadically according to moods and circumstances in our lives. To live a life of prayer is something else. To pray consistently is not easy. It requires commitment and discipline. Don’t condemn yourself if you find praying difficult. Most of us do.”*

A life of prayer takes discipline and many of us find that difficult, especially in the midst of the busy, busy world we live in.

Yet, Jesus says, in John 14:13, ***“You can ask for anything in my name, and I will do it, because the work of the Son brings glory to the Father.”***

If we are having difficulty in praying, we need to ask God for help...ask God to teach you, to help you focus, to give you the discipline to sit with Him...ask God to help in in your prayer life...confess openly and honestly how difficult it is for you to find time, to sit down, to stay focused with so much going on around you. God will help.

Furthermore, in James 4:8, it is written, ***“Draw close to God, and God will draw close to you.”***

The more we pray, the more we attempt to draw close to God, the more God will draw close to us and the easier prayer will become.

A few other instructions, encouragements, direction God gives us in His Word when it comes to prayer.

God wants us to come to Him first thing in the morning. Mark 1:35 – ***“The next morning Jesus awoke long before daybreak and went out alone into the wilderness to pray.”*** As John Bunyan wrote, *“He who runs from God in the morning will scarcely find Him the rest of the day.”*

God wants us to come to Him...confessing our sins...laying our mistakes at His feet. As Norman Vincent Peale was told by his father, as he tried to hide a cigar he was smoking behind his back and at the same time ask if he could go to the circus... *“Never make a petition while at the same time trying to hide a smoldering disobedience.”*

God wants us to come to Him out of our desire to know Him...to see prayer as a privilege not a duty. As Maxie Dunham writes, *“Not to pray is an act of self-robbery. We are free to pray. The privilege is open to all of us. The privilege is communion with God, feeling God’s presence, being aware of God’s guidance.”*

God wants us to come to Him...trusting the answer He gives to our prayer is in our best interests...sometimes the answer will be “yes”...sometimes the answer will be “no”...our prayers will never be unanswered...but may be ungranted...our prayers will always be heard...

God wants us to know the importance of prayer...the power of prayer...the early church knew...Acts 2:42 – ***“They joined with the other believers and devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, sharing in the Lord’s Supper and in prayer”*** – And the Lord added to their number daily in the midst of tremendous persecution. As James said, *“The earnest prayer of a righteous person has great power and wonderful results.”*

God wants us to pray for those in spiritual leadership...for fellow-believers...for ourselves...for the unsaved...for our enemies...

God wants us to know that God hears our prayers... As the psalmist cries out, ***“I love the Lord because he hears and answers my prayers. Because he bends down and listens, I will pray as long as I have breath.”***

God wants us to ask Him first... In I Samuel 14 – battle between Israelites & Philistines – Saul was king – In verse 36 Saul said, *“Let us go down after the Philistines by night and plunder them till dawn, and let us not leave one of them alive.”* His men agreed, saying they’d do whatever he thought best. But the priest said, *“Let’s ask God first.”* Here we have the tendency that eventually leads to Saul’s demise. He never made prayer his first disposition. Prayer was not ingrained in him until it became a habit – prayer was not an immediate response.

With God our mission for prayer is made possible...He will give us the strength and the resolve...Ask God to help you draw closer to Him through prayer...be encouraged...follow God’s instruction...His guidance...Know God’s desire for you to know Him, to meet with Him each day...

Early African converts to Christianity were earnest and regular in private devotions. Each one reportedly had a separate spot in the thicket where he would pour out his heart to God. Over time the paths to these places became well worn. As a result, if one of these believers began to neglect prayer, it was soon apparent to the others. They would kindly remind the negligent one, *“Brother, the grass grows on your path.”*

May the grass never grow on our paths...