

Pastor Daryl Diddle

Sermon Series: *Native Prayer*, No. 1

It's Natural

August 21, 2022

2 Chronicles 6:32-33; Acts 17:22-28 {NIV}

Solomon prayed, "As for the foreigner who does not belong to your people Israel but has come from a distant land because of your great name and your mighty hand and your outstretched arm – when he comes and prays toward this temple, then hear from heaven, your dwelling place, and do whatever the foreigner asks of you, so that earth may know your name and fear you, as do your own people Israel, and may know that this house I have built bears your name."

Paul then stood up in the meeting of the Areopagus and said, "Men of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious. For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription, 'To an unknown God.' Now what you worship as something unknown I am going to proclaim to you.

The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by hands. And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything, because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else. From one man he made every nation of men that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live. God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us. 'For in him we live and move and have our being.' As some of your own poets have said, 'We are His offspring.'

Native. Think about that word this morning.

What does it mean to be native?

Native is that tribe of people they discovered a few years ago in Brazil – do you remember that? A completely uncontacted tribe in western Brazil, in the jungle near Peru. From all indications, they've never had contact with the "outside" world. No electricity, no cars, no phones, no TV, no wifi. There's not a man, woman, or child in that tribe who knows who Duane Johnson, Jennifer Lopez, Elon Musk or Joe Biden is – can you imagine that?

They're *natives* to the Brazilian state of Acri – there along the Envira river. They were born there. They were raised there. They've never left there. They belong there.

Natives.

I wonder – how many people here were actually born here in Wilmore? [show of hands]

These are the natives. Thank you for opening your town to the rest of us.

Have you ever noticed the family of crows that live on this hill here, where our building sits? From time to time, you see them sitting on the ridge of the roofs, or on the top of the light poles, or on the sign out by the road.

That family of crows is native to this hill. When we built our building here, we kind of bought their

land out from under them – it's hard for crows to get financing these days.

So, we might own the land, but they're the real natives of this hill. They were here long before these buildings were built, and if Jesus doesn't come back for a while, they'll be here after these buildings are long gone.

Webster says that a *native* is someone or something that belongs wherever it is because it was born there, it fits there, it's comfortable there, and there's a familiarity that says it's supposed to be there.

Prayer – the desire and ability to pray, to talk with God – is *native* to human beings. Did you know that?

Prayer is not some *optional, extraneous addition* to human life. No, it's a *natural function* of human life.

Because we're made in God's image, we have the innate desire to communicate, to speak, spirit-to-spirit, with our Creator.

English author Samuel Johnson was once asked, "What's the strongest argument for prayer?"

He said, "There is no argument for prayer. It's like breathing or eating: people do it simply because they're human."

Prayer is native to humanity.

Do you believe that – that prayer is native to you?

When the construction of the Temple was finished, as talked about in that Second Chronicles passage just read to you, King Solomon prayed a prayer of dedication that said, "*As for the foreigner who does not belong to your people Israel but has come from a distant land – when he comes and prays toward this temple...*" Solomon was assuming that any stranger coming from anywhere on earth would likely be a person who prays.

About a thousand years after Solomon, the Apostle Paul addressed the Areopagus, the ruling council of Athens, Greece. These were the most influential, the most literate, the most intelligent people of Athens. Paul says to them in Acts 17, "*I've looked around your city and I see that you worship even an unknown God.*"

That urge to worship – that urge to pray – didn't even escape the greatest, most sophisticated minds of Athens, you see? Prayer was native to them.

Prayer has been present in some form in all peoples, in all places, in all ages.

Buddhists don't believe in a God, per se, yet wherever you find Buddhism today, you find prayer.

How do you explain that? To whom are they praying?

Confucius was more or less an agnostic. He urged his followers to have nothing to do with the gods—small “g.” Yet Confucius himself is now seen as a god and is worshipped by millions.

Among the Khonds of the Himalayas today, even though they are a tribe that is known for human sacrifice, you can hear in them the voice of prayer.

You can read the prayers of the Aztecs, written on their excavated walls.

The Illiad opens with prayer.

In Plato's words, “Every man of sense, before beginning an important work, will ask help of the gods.”

Muslims pray formally five times a day, at least.

Even the most committed atheist: you put ‘em into war, into the jaws of death, and what happens? They want to pray. There’s no atheist in a foxhole—or on a sinking ship.

Why?

Because prayer is native to humanity.

Do you believe that—that prayer is native to you?

The fact is, the notion of unbelief lies in our *opinions, not in our impulses*. Our *impulses* push us to *pray*.

When we’re overwhelmed, when we’re in crisis, when a heavy load of responsibility is dropped upon us, when things look hopeless for us and, especially, for those we love, our impulse is to pray.

In a church service in the deep south one Sunday morning, a little boy was being especially loud and disobedient. Finally, his irate father slung him under his arm and carried him out of the sanctuary. No one in the congregation so much as raised an eyebrow, until, as he left, the little boy cried out: “Y’all pray for me now!”

The notion of unbelief is a luxury that lies in our opinions—in the mind, but not in the impulses of the heart.

And just as you can’t have hunger without the existence of food and you can’t have breathing without the existence of air, you can’t have prayer without the existence of God.

This native impulse to pray that we have proves the reality of God.

That’s why Paul said to the people of Athens, “*This God you worship but that you don’t know: let me tell you about Him; let me introduce Him to you.*”

Of course, prayer is native to humanity. No matter what our heads might think, our hearts understand the need to communicate with the God who made us.

And so, the question becomes, “What do we do with this native that lives within us?

Some have tried to deny its reality. Some don’t want to give in to prayer because, the truth is, they don’t want to be burdened with the reality of the God that prayer points to.

You see, if a person gives in to the reality of prayer—if she gives in to the impulse of her heart to pray, then to what *else* might she have to give in?

Who else might she have to admit is real and then submit?

Because of pure selfishness and pride, some deny the reality of prayer.

Others embrace prayer, but only in the face of extreme need. In moments of crisis or desperation, when they need help—only then they will pray.

A pilot was flying along, when suddenly the rudder of his plane malfunctioned. In panic, he radioed the tower and shouted, “The rudder has malfunctioned! What do I do?”

The air traffic controller radioed back, “Just keep calm, Captain, and repeat after me: ‘Wing flaps... check. Velocity... check. Altitude—check.’”

The pilot made the adjustments, and the flight continued.

Not five minutes later, the starboard engine stalled. The pilot radioed the tower and shouted, “Now my starboard engine stalled! What do I do?”

The controller radioed back, “Keep calm, Captain, and repeat after me: Wing flaps... check. Velocity... check. Altitude—check.”

The pilot made the adjustments, and again the plane continued on course.

Just a few minutes later, the pilot radioed the tower a third time. This time he shouted, “Mayday! Mayday! Both engines have gone! What do I do now?”

The air traffic controller radioed back, “Just keep calm, Captain, and repeat after me: ‘Our Father, Who art in heaven, Hallowed be Thy name...’”

In cases like that, when we pray only in crisis situations, the God that prayer points to is seen merely as a *power* and not as a *person*, which certainly isn’t a Christian view of God or prayer.

Now, don’t get me wrong, God welcomes crisis prayer, but He calls us far beyond just that. Crisis prayer is crude and base. It’s uninformed and untrained and spasmodic—and usually it’s quite selfish.

It is as Samson prayed in Judges 16, his final prayer, at the end of his life, as he was tied between the pillars of the arena filled with Philistines, he prayed, “*God, remember me and strengthen me once more so I can get revenge for my two eyes!*”

You see, Samson knew God.

Samson had faith—and Samson prayed.

But isn’t there a higher plane of prayer than this kind of occasional prayer for our own self needs? If Samson had been praying—talking with and listening to God—all along, he likely wouldn’t have been in the position he was, there between the pillars.

Isn’t there a higher plane of prayer than this kind of occasional prayer for our own self needs?

Yes, there is.

Jesus’ life shows us this.

On the cross, Jesus could pray, “*Father, forgive them—forgive those who crucify me—for they don’t know what they’re doing.*”

That’s prayer of a different sort, isn’t it?

Is there a higher plane of prayer than just erratic prayer for self?

Stephen’s life says, “Yes, there is.”

As he was being stoned to death, Stephen prayed for those throwing the rocks, "*Lord, don't hold this sin against them.*"

Isn't this the depth of relationship – isn't this the degree of communion and the kind of communication of prayer – that God wants to share with us? Isn't this how prayer is supposed to be?

Imagine a father with two sons.

The first son only looks to his father as a last resort in times of his own need. He never invites his dad to coffee just to talk. He never seeks his advice, never wants his help in small difficulties, never shares his times of joy, never just wants to hang out and appreciate him as a person.

He goes off to college and his dad only hears from him when he wants money.

After school, he lives his life with utter disregard of his father's character and purpose, and turns to him, from time to time, only in desperation.

That's the first son.

The second son, however, sees in his father's love and wisdom the supreme motive of his life. He's aware of all his dad has given to him, and his gratitude pushes him to please him. His father is his friend. He confides in his father. He's advised by his father. He keeps close to his father. And in crisis, he comes to his father with a naturalness that comes with his long habit of communication. He knows He's loved, and He's comfortable talking, often, with his dad.

Is there any doubt as to which kind of relationship God wants to have with us?

Is there any doubt God wants us to be the second son?

And it all begins and ends with prayer.

God the Father sent His Son so that we might know Him as our Father and our Creator.

Jesus died so that you and I might be able to pray, and one of the most tragic things I'd think we could do is to squander this gift we've been given.

One of the saddest things we could do is leave prayer as an occasional and untrained tendency in our lives.

Our Heavenly Father wants us to know Him. He wants to pour His blessings upon us.

The question is, *will* we know Him?

Will we communicate with Him?

Will we discipline ourselves and work with God's Holy Spirit to develop this native prayer in our soul?

We'll be talking about how to do this for the next few weeks – because we all want to be the second son.

Let's take our prayer lives to the heights and the depths that God intended – that's what it means to be like Jesus.

Let me say first though, if you're here this morning and you don't know this Jesus I've spoken of, you need to know that He is God's Son who came to earth, lived a perfect life, was killed, but was then raised up again by God the Father to set us free from our bondage to sinful things and behaviors.

This Jesus will save your soul today if you'll just admit that you need Him – if you'll believe in Him by faith.

There's a simple prayer written in the worship folder to guide you in this most important conversation with God. If you pray that with your heart and mean it, you can have eternal peace and life with God.

Now, if you already know Jesus, then, over these next few weeks, would you seek Him for a deeper prayer life?

Will you ask Him to teach us, both individually and together, what He wants us to learn about prayer?

Before you answer, let me give a word of full disclosure, you might say: we need to understand that it's kind of dangerous to ask God to teach us to pray.

George Herbert said, "He who wants to learn to pray, let him go to sea!"

The truth is, God just might take us to sea.
Or to heartbreak.
Or to sickness.
Or to poverty.
Or to disappointment.
Or to frustration.
Or to war.

Those are typically the places where God takes people who truly want to learn to pray.

It's like when we ask God to teach us patience, what happens? He introduces an annoyance into our lives.

When we truly ask Him to teach us to pray, He usually takes us down a rough road.

So, the road may get rough.

The road may already be rough for you today.

Remember though, that wherever He takes us, He's there with us. And He's there to hear – to listen – and to respond.

So, again, will you ask God to teach us, individually and together, how to pray?

To pray more, to pray better – so that a month from now:

we'll all pray more effectively,

we'll all know our Father more completely – more completely than we do today,

we'll all be more like the second son and more like Jesus in the way we communicate with our Father in Heaven?

Prayer is our native land – our native practice. We were made to pray.

So, let's come to our Heavenly Father and sit and talk with Him a while.

He has so much He'd like to say.

Closing Prayer

Closing Song

Benediction