

Pastor Daryl Diddle

Sermon Series: *Glorious Gift 1*

Prayer

September 10, 2023

Hebrews 10:19-25 (NIV)

Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus,²⁰ by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body,²¹ and since we have a great priest over the house of God,²² let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.²³ Let us hold unwaveringly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful.²⁴ And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds,²⁵ not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another – and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

We're in the book of Hebrews this morning, Chapter Ten, if you'd like to turn back there with me

Who is the most important person with whom you've ever had a conversation?

Who is the most important person with whom you've spoken?

Now, let me clarify a couple things.

By "important," I mean in the world's terms. Someone famous. Somebody well known. Maybe a movie star, a pro athlete, a musician, or someone high up in business or government.

Now, I know some are thinking these holy thoughts like, "My wife or my husband or my mother or my child is the most "important" person in my life." OK, yes, I'm not arguing that with you.

But I mean a person that if a friend of yours saw you talking to them, your friend would think, "wow - how does he know *him!*?"

Who's the most "important" person with whom you've ever had a *conversation*?

And I should say, too, that maybe "conversation" is too strong a word. I don't necessarily mean some long, deep, soul-baring talk, but more than just a wave and a "hello." A significant interaction.

Who is that for you?

Anybody ever have a conversation with a President? Prime Minister?

Pope or Cardinal?

Movie star?

Pro athlete?

Taylor Swift?

Who is that for you?

For me, it would be Senator McConnell. I've mentioned before that a number of years ago, he visited Wilmore and invited local church pastors to meet with him to talk about the spiritual state of our state. It wound up that just a few of us were there, and I was pleasantly

surprised at how candid and honest the conversation was.

I also remember quite a lot about the conversation, which, you know, is not surprising.

We remember the important people we've spoken with.

We remember the significant things we've seen.

We even remember where we were when big, historical events happen in our world.

Those moments make impressions that are not quickly forgotten.

So, why do you suppose we so easily take for granted our conversations with God? Have you ever thought about that?

I mean, He is *El Elyon*, God Most High. He's the Creator of the Universe, King of Kings and the Lord of Lords, right?

So, why do we tend to put off prayer?

Why do we resist taking time to listen to Him?

Why do we, at times, minimize or even forget what He says when we do pray?

Why do we go to Him last with our troubles instead of first?

Why don't we go to Him more than we do, since we have the opportunity?

At this point in his letter, the writer of Hebrews has just finished a major theological presentation: a work that some compare, in significance, to the book of Romans. It is true that Hebrews is not given the attention Romans gets, probably because we know that the Apostle Paul wrote Romans, but we're not sure who wrote Hebrews.

Just the same, the topics covered in these ten chapters include some really big things:

Like *Jesus' intentionality in His saving work*.

Hebrews tells us that Jesus wasn't simply a passive victim of the aggression of others. Jesus came to do what He did – and all for us. We are loved that much! That's the message.

Hebrews also speaks strongly of both the divinity and humanity of Jesus – both held in tension in His unique person.

Apparently, God knows that the only way to have experience is to have experience. So, God Himself became human so He could be sympathetic to our condition. As it says in Chapter Four – Jesus was, "*in every respect tempted as we are, yet remained without sin*" (Hebrews 4:15).

Hebrews also speaks strongly of the Christian life as a *pilgrimage*.

To this group of believers who were tempted to give up on Jesus and go back to Judaism, the writer emphasizes their need to keep going, to keep pursuing

the goal of entering into God's promised rest, which he compares with Abraham's pursuit of "a city with foundations" (Hebrews 11:10).

He says that just like Abraham and his descendants, we are nomads here in a place we don't belong. But one day we will have a country that is our own, a place where we can drop our anchor, he writes in Chapter 6; a place that is truly home (Hebrews 6:19-20).

These are all big theological concepts the writer explores, but none is more striking, especially to the writer's Jewish-Christian audience, than the declaration he makes that Jesus ends the need for all Jewish priestly practices.

Jesus ends the Jewish priesthood.

Because of Jesus' perfect, once-for-all sacrifice on the cross, the world has no more need for a human priesthood, or a temple or animal sacrifices or any of those other trappings – period.

So, you see why the chief priests were set on putting Jesus to death?

Now, none of this change was supposed to be a surprise.

God long ago promised all of this, back in the Old Testament. We see it in Jeremiah and Hosea and Psalms.¹

But, of course, very few, it seems, were able to see this coming, which is why the author here invests all the time and effort, all the explanation and words that he does up to now, presenting this reality.

Jesus ends the Jewish priesthood.

No more cutting up animals. No more coming to the temple once a year for the atonement sacrifices.

No more going through all of that to get to God.

Which is a big, big deal.

In the Old Covenant, even the most serious, faith-filled Jew could only get so close to God when going to the temple. Even after keeping all the laws and sacrifices and living lives of integrity, when they came to the sanctuary, they could not get to the inner chamber of God.

They could not even see inside.

The closest they could get was the curtain of the outer court.

But now, in Jesus, you see, as verse 20 says, the curtain has been opened – removed!

That innermost chamber, the holy of holies and the most intimate company of God, the place where only the high priest could enter (and only once a year): the curtain that restricted access has been torn away, and the very dwelling place of God has been opened to us by Jesus, who, by the way, does not just sit there uninterested.

From there, from that place, Jesus now calls to us. He asks us – He invites us – to come in and to come in without fear or hesitation. Jesus welcomes us into God's presence, simply by trusting in Him

His sinless life, death and resurrection have made a way for all who will to come back to God.

He welcomes us into the closest intimacy possible with God our Heavenly Father, our Maker.

After all these centuries, Jesus tore down the barrier that kept us apart from the most important person with whom we could ever converse.

It's like Jesus going in and taking down all the barricades that keep us out of the governor's office – or the oval office.

Jesus effectively did away with that bulletproof, plexiglass bubble thing on top of the "Popemobile."

He sent the King's Guard: you know, those British soldiers with the furry black hats that protect the King? It's like Jesus sent them, and the Secret Service people, and all those sorts of "bodyguards" who keep the world's common people away from the world's so-called "important" people: why, it's like Jesus sent them all on permanent vacation, only better!

Jesus, personally, takes us into the very presence of the Maker, the Father, the Holy, Living God.

All we need to do is have our hand in His.

If we do, by faith, the words we'll hear are, "Oh, you're with Him? Then go right in."

That is the theological reality of what Jesus has done.

And so, the practical implication of that, you see, is that we who follow Jesus can converse directly with God!

That is the glorious gift that Jesus has given to the Church.

We have *direct access* to the *mind* and *heart* and *will* and *wisdom* of God Himself. We can go straight to the source of every good thing and ask His opinions and hear His assessments and listen to His perceptions.

No appointments needed!

Open 24 hours!

No receptionists screening His calls.

No special agents blocking his doors.

We don't even need to pay for parking.

Unprecedented access to God – to Jesus' Father and ours. That's what Jesus, the Great High Priest, the priest to end all others, has given us.

And all this is because God is *for us!* He *wants* us to know His mind. He *wants* us to enjoy His good. He *wants* us to overcome evil and succeed in life. He *wants* us to become holy, as He is holy. He *wants*, for us, His best.

And all this He's willing to give us...

If only we'd come to Him and connect with Him.

If only we'd give Him our attention.

If only we'd hear His voice.

If only we'd bring to Him our concerns, and those of our loved ones.

If only we'd do as He says.

The glorious gift of intimate connection with God Himself and with all of His resources Jesus has made available – if only we'd receive it.

That's what prayer is – the receiving of the gift. Connecting with God.

That's why the temple was called a house of prayer.

That's why the church, the followers of Jesus: we are to be a people of prayer.

¹ Jeremiah 7:21, Hosea 6:6, Psalm 40:6-8 and 10:8-9

That's why Jesus said of His followers not, "If," but "When you pray..." Jesus presumed that followers of His would *want* to have an intimate relationship with God.

Why would you follow Jesus if you didn't?

That is also why the Apostle Paul told the Thessalonians to "*pray without ceasing*,"² which does not mean walking around all day muttering prayers, or standing on street-corners displaying our spirituality for others to see.

To "pray without ceasing" means *understanding, embracing* and *using* this gift of constant, intimate access to God.

And this is why our church tries to emphasize prayer, both individual and corporate: because God intends for all of us to live close to Him. This is the life and the connection with God that Jesus died to make possible: this unprecedented and constant and powerful and useful ability to converse directly with none other than *El Elyon*, God Most High.

Now, of course, there are so many ways to pray.

God wants us to live in a constant state of connection with Him, so we can call to Him anytime. That's true.

In addition to that, there are schedules and mechanisms and guides published by all sorts of sources that can deepen and broaden our ability to hear God and to know how to pray.

The important thing is that everyone following Jesus is moving ever closer to God, becoming more and more intimate with Him, becoming more in touch with His will, and becoming more capable and powerful in prayer.

That's the goal.

But along these lines, as a church, we do identify some specific ways of prayer that we feel are important, in a corporate way, and so we're all invited to participate in some of these. They're listed on this insert in the worship folder. [Hold up yellow sheet.]

Would you take this out and look at it with me?

Now, if you've been a part of our church here for at least a year, you've seen something like this before.

We highlight this about this time every year because we want everyone to know about these opportunities. Also, for *some* of these, we *need* to know your interest so we can *include* you.

The second group with the heading, "I'd like more information or to join," lists a variety of church prayer groups that you're welcome to be a part of.

For men, for women, for teens, and some for specific purposes (grandparents, prayer for family members who need Jesus), we have a brief time of prayer each Sunday before the morning and evening worship services.

All the "where and when" information is there, so you can just show up at the time and place listed; or, if you want more information about how they work, just mark that line and we'll get that to you.

It's really the top part of that page, though, that we need to hear from you about.

That first line is first for a reason: we want every person and family "unit" in our church to be prayed for regularly, so if you would be willing to commit to pray for five or six or so other church people/families, (basically a page out of the directory that will be published in a couple months), would you mark that first line and we'll get that page to you.

On the next two lines, we'd like people to commit to pray for a teen or adult in our general youth ministry, and/or on our Bible Quiz Team. So, if you're willing to pray for one, mark that and we'll get that name to you so you can pray specifically and even get to know the person for whom you're praying.

The next line there, "Prayer Notes and News," refers to the e-mail that comes from the church office most weekdays with prayer needs and also with reminders of events that affect at least most of us.

So, if you're not on that list and you'd like to be, check that and we'll put you on.

The last one there is about receiving an email of all the praises and prayer requests that are shared at each Wednesday night prayer meeting. Let me say, it would be great if you can come on Wednesday nights. We realize, though, that some just can't, but if you're willing to share in the praises and to pray for the needs, then check that and the office will e-mail that list to you each Friday.

These are all ways to expand our practice of prayer and to engage with the Lord on behalf of our church family.

Of course, we know that all these are not for everybody; our spiritual maturity does not depend on how many of these we check.

These are just opportunities, but they're important opportunities, so would you take that sheet and mark it? We'd like to get one from every person, so if you're sharing a worship folder with someone, there are extra copies of this at the Welcome Center in the foyer.

Mark what you want to *continue* to participate in and also what the Lord is maybe asking you to add, and also any about which you'd like more information.

Mark those and then slip them in the offering boxes as you leave today. If you need more time to consider, or to pray about what you're going to pray about, you can turn this in anytime over the next week or so; however, I do encourage you to turn it in today, so you don't lose track of it.

We simply want to give all the opportunity we can to make this house, our church family, a house of prayer, and also to make this house, each of us individually, houses of vibrant, real, effective prayer.

What is God saying to you about expanding, deepening, broadening your prayer life?

He has more resources available to us than any of us are taking advantage of. He's always drawing us, as Lewis writes, "further up and further in" to Himself. It's

² 1 Thessalonians 5:16

a gift to be able to go deeper with Jesus and deeper with the Father in prayer, and so we just don't want to miss wherever He wants us to go.

Closing Prayer:

Father, help us to see – help us to realize – what a tremendous opportunity Jesus has made for us, by seeing what a glorious gift we have in prayer: to connect and converse with You.

Thank you for the intimacy You offer, for the wisdom that comes from listening to You and from being able to know Your mind, for being able to confide in You all our cares and frustrations, and for being able to hear Your solutions. Thank you for all the ways You're making us and those we love into new people.

Father, help us to be faithful, in every way possible, to open Your glorious gift of prayer and to use it to engage with You for our sake, for the sake of our world, and simply for the sake of Your glory.

Help us to willingly come to You and to go where You want us to go in prayer:
so that we might know You and Your will,
so that we might walk as closely with You as can be,
so that our prayers will be powerful and effective.

Closing Song: *What A Friend We Have In Jesus*

Benediction:

May we all, more and more, day by day, embrace the glorious gift Jesus has made possible for us: this gift of prayer, intimacy with God. Amen.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR PRAYER AT WFMC, 2023-24

"Continue earnestly in prayer, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving..." Colossians 4:2 NKJV

I'll Commit to Pray:

I will Pray Regularly for 5 – 7 WFMC People / Families.

I will Pray Specifically for a Teen or Adult involved in Our Youth Ministries.

I will Pray for a Bible Quiz Team Member or Coach.

Please add me to the church Prayer Notes and News (PNN) E-mail list.

Please e-mail me the Wednesday Prayer Meeting Praises and Requests.

I'd Like More Information or to Join:

Prayer for Family / Unbelievers / Nation Revival
(Second Mondays, Sept.-May, 7:00-8:30pm, Dargan home)

Men's Prayer
(Tuesdays, 6:30 – 7:30am, Room A200)

Youth Prayer Breakfast
(Tuesdays, 7:15am, Room C202)

Women's Prayer
(Tuesdays, 9:00-10:00am, Room A200)

Grandparents Who Pray Potluck Dinner and Prayer
(Third Thursdays, Sept.-April; 6:00pm, Roxberry home)

Sunday Morning and Evening Worship Pre-Service Prayer
(8:00 – 8:15am and 5:30 to 5:45pm, Room B106)

WFMC Prayer Team (planning prayer events and education)

Name _____

Phone _____

E-mail _____

**Please Place Completed Sheet in the Foyer Offering Box,
and Thanks for Committing to Pray for Our Church Family!**