

Two Words

Introduction

We are starting a new series today. This will lead us into the Christmas series....yes it is not that far away. I have been asking God how we can please Him more as a church. What are we doing well? What do we need to focus on. We study, teach and obey the word. We worship God faithfully and with reverence. We serve others and we welcome anyone to come to our church to receive help and guidance. We are frugal with what God gives us and I believe are very good stewards.

But there is one area where God has impressed upon me where we could improve. As a church, we are not praying the way God desires. Yes, we pray. But we have not reached the spiritual depth of our communication with God that He has planned for us. So we are going to spend the next 6 weeks or so learning what we can about prayer and about The Lord's Prayer in this series. We are in good company however, because the one area that the 12 disciples knew they needed to learn more was in the area of prayer.

Luke 11:1 (ESV) 1 Now Jesus was praying in a certain place, and when he finished, one of his disciples said to him, “Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples.”

These men had been praying their entire lives. They were Jewish. They grew up in the synagogue. They had learned about prayer like they had learned about Scriptures. Yes they were Fishermen, but every Jewish boy started out in the synagogue learning the tenets of the Jewish Faith. Jews spent a lot of time praying. The pictures that you see at the Wailing Wall continue every day 24/7. They gyrate, lay prostate, scream out, rock, and write out their prayers to give to God.

The leaders of the Jews in Jesus' day had made prayer a public show of their faith....they amped it up so everyone would see how pious they were. Jesus used them as an example of how not to pray...Jesus refers to the leaders of the Pharisees and Sadducees as hypocrites. They pray verbally but their prayers are pious and self-centered for public show.

Matthew 6:1 (ESV) 1 “Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven.

Matthew 6:5–6 (ESV) 5 “And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. 6 But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

Then Jesus teaches about those outside the Jewish faith. They were called Gentiles. They are pagans. But they too pray to their Pagan Gods.

Matthew 6:7–8 (ESV) 7 “And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words. 8 Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

So, Jesus was very vocal about false prayers. Praying to God for selfish reasons, selfish desires, or to be seen by others.

James 4:2–4 (ESV) 3 You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions. 4 You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.

James 1:6–8 (ESV) 6 But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. 7 For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; 8 he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.

So after hearing Jesus talk about how not to pray....the disciples had to be wondering where their prayers would stack up...I get that....I have that same issue in my life.

Over the years, I have tried many different methods of prayer. In seminary we studied how people pray. We looked at prayers shawls, prayer beads, prayer journals, praying scripture back to God, meditating in prayerful silence, praying with arms extended, eyes lifted, eyes closed, hands held out to receive, laying prone on the floor, sitting up, standing up, prayer walks, prayer runs...(do it long enough and you will pray)...

prayer groups, prayer partners, online prayer threads, praying myself to sleep, praying when I first wake up, trying to pray continuously, fasting and prayer, prayer labyrinths, silent prayers, singing prayers, prayer rooms, prayer ministries....and others I have probably forgot. So I began to ask myself....is prayer is simply communicating with God

....if we are created in God's image....and God's a relational God...and unlike those in the Old Testament, we have the Holy Spirit of God inside of us who is constantly urging us to connect....if we don't have the words, the Holy Spirit intercedes for us...

Romans 8:26–27 (ESV) 26 Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. 27 And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

And if that is not enough...Jesus Himself is praying for you right now....at the throne in Heaven to the Father.

Romans 8:34 (ESV) 34 Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.

Notice that verse is present tense. Jesus is right now interceding for you and for me. In the Old Testament in the Holy place of the temple, incense was constantly burning representing the prayers of the people being lifted up to God. In the New Testament, that concept is replaced with the spirit filled followers of Jesus praying constantly. When Jesus returns we will see the prayers of the people returned to earth answered by the power of God. God brings justice and judgment for all the prayers lifted up to him over all of human history.

Revelation 8:3–5 (ESV) 3 And another angel came and stood at the altar with a golden censer, and he was given much incense to offer with the prayers of all the saints on the golden altar before the throne, 4 and the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, rose before God from the hand of the angel. 5 Then the angel took the censer and filled it with fire from the altar and threw it on the earth, and there were peals of thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning, and an earthquake.

Main Topic

I know all of that and yet I must be honest and say that even as your pastor, I do not pray with the frequency or fervency that God desires. Often, I have experienced what I perceive as failure, disillusioned, confused, disconnected, and separated. There are days when it feels to me like my prayers don't get past the ceiling much less to the ear of God. I have a very hard time silencing my mind, staying focused, and pouring out my heart.

I can open the scriptures and feel God's presence, hear His prompting as I read His holy words, find guidance in scripture study, and discover the truth that He wants me to apply to my life. Studying the Scriptures constantly connects me to the heart of God. I can literally feel God giving me an insight into His word to share with each of you.

So I struggle with this....I want to hear from God desperately....yet my prayer life is a B-. And I am guessing that I am not alone. The disciples saw Jesus raised people from the dead, they saw leprosy healed with a touch, the blind now seeing, the lame and paralyzed now dancing. They saw Jesus calm storms, heal people far away, heal people who just touched his garment...They were walking with God every day and yet they too struggled with prayer.

They didn't ask Jesus to teach them how to do all of those things....Hey Jesus..teach me to calm a storm like that....No. Their request was much deeper. They realized that Jesus could do all of those things because of a powerful connection with the Father. They realized that when Jesus prayed He was connected to the source of all power. So one day they asked Jesus...

Luke 11:1 (NASB95) 1 It happened that while Jesus was praying in a certain place, after He had finished, one of His disciples said to Him, “Lord, teach us to pray just as John also taught his disciples.”

They realized that all of the power that Jesus had on earth came to Him through a powerful experience alone with the Father...Jesus is going to blow their minds with just two words... The key to transform our prayer life comes to us when we embrace and understand two words....

So you may hear about this series and think that our goal is to get you to pray more....Maybe that is what you are thinking right now...You know, I should pray more. I am going to leave today and pray more....If only I was a prayer warrior. If only I could be a person of prayer. That should be my goal. I need to be more disciplined. I need to get more serious and be more focused. Can I just tell you something?

I don't want our goal to be for all of us to pray more. Prayer is everywhere in our culture: Hindu's pray. Buddhists pray. Muslims pray. Catholics pray. New Agers pray to themselves, Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, and other cults pray. Yoga or Meditation

can involve praying to yourself. Worrying is just praying to yourself. Everyone running for public office says they pray. Look even congress prays. The Presidents say they pray.

If our goal is to become people who pray then our goal is too small...too superficial If we are satisfied with just praying...we are focusing on religious rituals like so many religions in the world.

Mount Carmel

Our Goal has to be bigger...Let's see if we can discover it. Elijah held a prayer meeting one day on Mt Carmel.

During time of King Ahab. "Ahab the son of Omri did evil in the sight of the Lord, more than ALL who were before Him." Married to Jezebel Worshiped Baal Elijah told them 3 years earlier- no rain unless it came from the hand of God. Severe famine People worshipped both Baal and the God of Israel.

1 Kings 18:17–19 (ESV) 17 When Ahab saw Elijah, Ahab said to him, "Is it you, you troubler of Israel?" 18 And he answered, "I have not troubled Israel, but you have, and your father's house, because you have abandoned the commandments of the Lord and followed the Baals. 19 Now therefore send and gather all Israel to me at Mount Carmel, and the 450 prophets of Baal and the 400 prophets of Asherah, who eat at Jezebel's table.") 20 So Ahab sent to all the people of Israel and gathered the prophets together at Mount Carmel.

1 Kings 18:20–29 (ESV) 21 And Elijah came near to all the people and said, "How long will you go limping between two different opinions? If the Lord is God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him." And the people did not answer him a word. 22 Then Elijah said to the people, "I, even I only, am left a prophet of the Lord, but Baal's prophets are 450 men. 23 Let two bulls be given to us, and let them choose one bull for themselves and cut it in pieces and lay it on the wood, but put no fire to it. And I will prepare the other bull and lay it on the wood and put no fire to it.

24 And you call upon the name of your god, and I will call upon the name of the Lord, and the God who answers by fire, he is God." And all the people answered, "It is well spoken." 25 Then Elijah said to the prophets of Baal, "Choose for yourselves one bull and prepare it first, for you are many, and call upon the name of your god, but put no fire to it." 26 And they took the bull that was given them, and they prepared it and called upon the name of Baal from morning until noon, saying, "O Baal, answer us!" But there was no voice, and no one answered. And they limped around the altar that they had made.

They tried everything. They do everything they can think to do to get the attention of their God

1 Kings 18:20–29 (ESV) 27 And at noon Elijah mocked them, saying, "Cry aloud, for he is a god. Either he is musing, or he is relieving himself, or he is on a journey, or perhaps he is asleep and must be awakened." 28 And they cried aloud and cut themselves after their custom with swords and lances, until the blood gushed out upon them. 29 And as midday passed, they raved on until

the time of the offering of the oblation, but there was no voice. No one answered; no one paid attention.

They prayed Hard. It looked like they really knew how to pray. 450 of these prayer warriors. It had to be a very impressive show. They shouted...danced...had ecstatic moments....slashed their bodies.... And they persisted all day long. Talk about a great prayer meeting. They tried to drum up an experience with their God.

Have you been there? I have? Praying and feeling like you have to get God’s attention. Wondering where God is and why He is not answering. You cry out but it seems God is silent. I wonder how many of us could be honest enough today to say...that’s me. When I pray it seems God is silent. I think over the next few weeks we will discover that our goal is not to pray. Our goal has to be bigger. Let’s keep looking for it.

1 Kings 18:30–37 (ESV) 30 Then Elijah said to all the people, “Come near to me.” And all the people came near to him. And he repaired the altar of the Lord that had been thrown down. 31 Elijah took twelve stones, according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Jacob, to whom the word of the Lord came, saying, “Israel shall be your name,” 32 and with the stones he built an altar in the name of the Lord. And he made a trench about the altar, as great as would contain two seahs of seed. 33 And he put the wood in order and cut the bull in pieces and laid it on the wood.

And he said, “Fill four jars with water and pour it on the burnt offering and on the wood.” 34 And he said, “Do it a second time.” And they did it a second time. And he said, “Do it a third time.” And they did it a third time. 35 And the water ran around the altar and filled the trench also with water. 36 And at the time of the offering of the oblation, Elijah the prophet came near and said,

“O Lord, God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, let it be known this day that you are God in Israel, and that I am your servant, and that I have done all these things at your word. 37 Answer me, O Lord, answer me, that this people may know that you, O Lord, are God, and that you have turned their hearts back.”

Elijah’s prayer is simple. Not very long...Not associated with gyrations or dances. He uses just 60 words in English. His prayer asks for 2 things: God demonstrate clearly that you are the only real God In response to that evidence, bring revival to your people Elijah doesn’t try to drum up the presence of God. He is already confident of God’s presence.

1 Kings 18:38 (ESV) 38 Then the fire of the Lord fell and consumed the burnt offering and the wood and the stones and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench.

There was no doubt. God heard and answered Elijah’s prayer. Elijah didn’t just pray...He connected to God when He prayed. Our goal cannot be to simply be people who pray more....our goal has to be much bigger....we have to become people who connect to God when we pray. When was the last time God showed up in your prayers?

The last time you realized you have not just prayed but connected? The last time you sat back in awe stunned that you have just connected to the God who created it all? That

He is interested in you....that He spoke to you in the midst of your prayer....and all you can do...is fall on your face in His presence.

1 Kings 18:39 (ESV) 39 And when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces and said, "The Lord, he is God; the Lord, he is God."

Main Topic

I don't want us to ever become a people who settle for prayers that never connect. People who never really expect to hear from God or know His voice. I want us to step into the intimate presence of God with the intent of listening, connecting, and obeying. Expecting to connect to Him. Let's don't settle for just becoming a people who pray more. Let's become a people who connect to God when we pray.

That's what the disciples discovered. They grew up praying...they were Jewish....They grew up in the synagogue and temple...they had prayer shawls...and rituals...But when Jesus prayed....He was different....No one every prayed like He did. When He prayed He was intimately connected to the Father. When they said Lord teach us to pray....they were really saying....Lord show us how to connect...Like THAT!

So I did the same....I asked God to help me understand why I was struggling in my prayer life....One thing. If you are going to ask God that kind of question, you had better buckle up for His answer. This is what I discovered about me.

I was going to God as if His advice was optional. I still wanted to be in control. Since I wouldn't really surrender, and I wasn't really willing to obey whatever He said, I couldn't really connect to God in prayer. Maybe you have been there too... You can't seem to release your death grip on control...A control that you never really had anyway...Why is it so hard?

Because you and I fail to understand a simple truth...A truth that Jesus teaches in just 2 words.....2 Words spoken by Jesus...radical words... never been used together before 2 Words that redefined our relationship with God forever. 2 Words that even 2000 years later we have a hard time believing . 2 Words that when embraced.... release our death grip on control ...2 Words that position us to finally connect with the Living God Have you ever had trouble connecting with someone?

Story of our Foster Kids

No relationship...difficult to trust...to communicate...Communication Flows from Relationships....First sign of Growing Relationship? We begin to communicate 1st Sign of a Strained Relationship...trouble communicating is the first symptom No relationship?....trouble talking to someone. Great Relationship...communication flows Communicating with Foster kids was awkward...because the relationship was awkward But as we spent time together....we began to learn together how to communicate Once the relationship was clear...communication flowed easily from it.

That brings us to... A key lesson about prayer In order to communicate with God we must understand our relationship with Him

What Jesus taught in 2 Words has taken me years to understand. .Once I understood these two words...it forever changed my relationship with God. And opened up communication...a connection with Him. I not longer became someone who just prayed.... I became someone who WHEN they pray....connects with God...And you can too...when you understand 2 Words from Jesus.

Jesus wanted them to avoid religious prayers. Repetitive babbling... Have you ever had your kids ask you the same thing over and over? When we pray we are not telling God something that He does not know.We are not making God do something He does not want to do. We are not impressing God with big words or long prayers.

The Purpose of Prayer: to connect with God and to make His agenda...our agenda

Prayer is about surrender God you know what is going on...But I don't know what you have going on ...God's Kingdom before our Kingdom Contrary to much emphasis in the evangelical church today, true prayer, like true worship, centers on God's glory, not on man's needs. It is not simply to lay claim on God's promises, much less make demands of Him, but to acknowledge His sovereignty, to see the display of His glory, and to obey His will. Jesus teaches the Disciples that the key to prayer...is to focus first on the Relationship Remember communication flows out of relationship.

Have you figured out what 2 Words Jesus uses to change everything? 2 Words that in this context had never been combined before? Are you ready? Hold on to your seats...here they come.

Matthew 6:8–9 (ESV) 9 Pray then like this: "Our Father

What 2 Words does Jesus use to transform your life? "Our Father" That's it? That is the big build up? I can't release control to God. I can't seem to connect to God. And your solution is "our Father"!

No...not mine...those words belong to Jesus. Those two words...until the moment Jesus spoke them had never been used to describe God. You have to understand how radical those words were to Jewish ears. They didn't even say the name of God except on the Holiest Day of the year And then...only the High Priest could say it. In the Holy Of Holies and only on the Day of Atonement. If he got it wrong...he died.

Prior to this moment in time... No one would claim a relationship so close to God... That they would call Him something as personal as Father... Notice that Jesus didn't say "My Father" He told them to pray...OUR Father...And the Word Jesus used was Abba...A word meaning Daddy...an intimate word...A word toddlers might use...Every time Jesus prayed with one exception...He started with the title Father...In the 4 Gospels Jesus prays to the Father 60 times Only once...from the cross...does He not use that title... My God My God why have you forsaken me? Reflecting His separation at that moment.

The Jewish People had never prayed this way. They don't even say the name of God because they consider it so Holy...But Jesus came to change the way we interact with

God. He turns to His Disciples and tells them.... He is not just My Father....He is OUR Father Jesus wasn't talking about a distant impersonal God... He wanted all of us to know that our relationship with God had completely changed

We have been adopted...and we should pray like it. Remember that communication flows out of our understanding of our relationship....The Key to connect with God in prayer is to understand our relationship with Him

Romans 8:14–20 (ESV) 14 For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. 15 For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!" 16 The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, 17 and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.

Jesus wanted us to know.... That God is not some impersonal force...He has a name ...He is not angry and judgmental...He is loving and forgiving...He is not far away...He is very close to us He is not negligent and unconcerned...He is Attentive and involved.

But many of us struggle seeing God as Daddy....because our earthly Daddy was horrible. Many think...My Dad was a jerk...so God must be a jerk...Don't judge God by your earthly father....Judge your earthly father by our Heavenly Father. Examine your earthly Dad through the lens of your Heavenly Father

God was a loving Father and there is no excuse for your earthly Dad to have been a jerk. 40% of Children will go to bed tonight without an earthly Dad...But in Psalms...God says He is the father to the Fatherless... No one goes to bed tonight without a Heavenly Father In order to communicate with God... we must embrace our relationship with Him

God is our Spiritual Dad. We are all brothers and sisters in a Spiritual Family...This is hard to embrace....God sees us as we see our children. My kids have taught me a lot about prayer...I have always loved the words "Hey Dad" Only 3 people on the planet can get me to stop everything with those two words...well 7 if we include granddad.

When I hear "Hey Dad" everything I am doing stops. Their agenda trumps mine. I will stop almost anything to attend to their needs I can't wait to do what they want if I can...because I love them. Even if I can't do what they want...I love to hear them express their hearts.... Is that how you think of prayer?

Our kids can exhaust us...we get a bit tired from time to time. But God has inexhaustible resources...He never gets tired of us...I can only give my full attention to one child at a time...but God isn't limited.

My Kids don't come to me with Flowery Words.... Oh thou most noblest Father could you hear a humble petition from your servant? Could you bend your ear to hear my request...albeit brief? NO...Hey Dad?...Yeah buddy what's up? Hey Dad?...Yes sweetheart... Then the request... I need help with something...I need you to explain something I need to tell you something...I need you to get me something I listen and love spending time with them in that moment. I

guide...direct...support...encourage...supply their needs Sometimes the answer is
yes...sometimes no...sometimes wait

But it is always with their best in mind...Is that how you think of prayer? God is a loving Dad
and you are His precious child...He loves you more than you have ever loved your
children...you can interrupt Him...you can make requests of Him... Prayer is what happens
when you finally realize your relationship with God

Our Foster Kids....Didn't start out comfortable in our relationship, but as they spent
more time with us...they began to trust us...the relationship became clearer Once they
saw me as a concerned Father...once they understood that relationship... They
developed the confidence to approach me...they stopped seeing me as an impersonal
judge...They had spent enough time in front of Judges...they needed a Father

The First two words of the Lord's Prayer...Changed everything forever. When Jesus
taught the Disciples how to pray...they were failing to connect...They didn't understand
their relationship with God...They didn't understand that because they had faith in
Jesus...they were adopted into God's Family Once they embraced that they had a
relationship with the Father...through the Son... They would never pray a religious
prayer again...

Those two words...Our Father Forever changed their perspective... They realized that
they are sons and daughters...cherished by their Heavenly Father When the relationship
is clear....communication and connection naturally flow... Everything in our prayer life
changes...when we understand....2 Words...let's pray... Hey Dad?