

“LORD, TEACH US TO PRAY: (#2) ME, PRAY?”

(Hebrews 10:19-23; Hebrews 4:16)

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**[PROP NEEDED: “Wizard of Oz” Video Clip]**

[Cornerstone U.M.C.; 3-16-25]

--I--

1. Read CEB Texts: Hebrews 10:19-23; Hebrews 4:16 and Pray.
2. **[WATCH “The Wizard of Oz” VIDEO CLIP (1:08:34-1:10:07, Total Time: 1:33)]**

A--So, how do you approach God in prayer?

B--Unfortunately, what we see here is something like what many people think about when they think about praying: a powerful and mighty God who is to be feared.

C--And because we feel insignificant and perhaps even unworthy in His presence, we wonder if He’s approachable at all, and if prayer is really something that *we* can do without feeling anxious and awkward.

3. Well, this is a mind-set that I want to address as we continue our series “Lord, Teach Us to Pray” by looking today at the “WHO” of prayer.

A--*Who* is prayer for? Is it really just for “professionals” like clergy and others trained in religious work? Or only for laity who work in a church staff position or ministry?

B--Who is it (really!) that God wants to communicate and interact with during prayer?

--II--

4. To answer this, let’s begin by acknowledging that there *is* a sense in which biblical prayer *does* need to acknowledge the greatness and power of GOD.

A--But as I mentioned last week, there's a paradox here... in that this great and majestic Lord of the *universe* is -- at the same time -- intimate and *approachable*.

1--And while God's power far exceeds that of the “Wizard of Oz,” He’s *not* a terrible and dreadful being who requires fear & trepidation to be approached,...

2--...But instead is a loving, compassionate being who longs for us to draw near to Him in a deep, abiding relationship -- praying being the main way to do this.<sup>1</sup>

B--We see this in today's two scriptures from the book of Hebrews:

1--I won't read all the verses again, but remember that in the Hebrews 10 passage, Vss. 19-20 say that "*we have confidence that we can enter the holy of holies by means of Jesus' blood, through a new & living way that he opened up for us...*"

2--And in Verse 16 of chapter 4 (CEB), it says "*Let us draw near to the throne of favor with confidence so that we can receive mercy and find grace when we need help*" (NRSV version says "*Let us therefore approach the throne of grace with boldness...*").

C--Both of these describe a God who longs for us to commune intimately with Him, and who uses prayer to invite us to a *relationship* with Him... To receive from Him grace and help for the challenges and obstacles of our lives.

D--They are verses which tell us that we're *all* invited to pray as a way to build & deepen our relationship with God, and through it to receive the *benefits* of that relationship: hope; joy; peace; forgiveness; and freedom from anxiety and fear.

5. Now, I *will* acknowledge that while it's easy to say that prayer is "for everyone," we need to understand exactly what that means in practical terms.
6. So let's briefly talk about what I call the "**Two Contexts for Prayer**" -- two biblical "settings" (if you will) in which we are asked and encouraged to pray.

--III--

7. The first of these is what's often called **INDIVIDUAL / PERSONAL PRAYER** (at times its even called "private prayer").

A--It's the idea that every one of us can and should have our own *personal, individual* prayer time with God that includes no one else but God and us.

1--Jesus himself prayed in this kind of context on many occasions. For example, where he went apart from his disciples and the crowds to pray alone with God -- sometimes silently, sometimes out loud -- but nevertheless *by himself*.<sup>2</sup>

2--And if Jesus (who was God himself) practiced this kind of praying, then why would we (who are *not* God) think we need anything *less*!

B--In my own life, some of the most meaningful encounters I've had with God have been having my own personal prayer time -- whether it was praying each week in my church's Sanctuary, on my back porch at home, doing a prayer walk around in my neighborhood, along the beach on vacation, or even marveling at the beauty of the night sky<sup>3</sup> -- I value the experiences when I've had my own intimate time with God.

1--A pastor one day saw a little boy going in and out of their church sanctuary several times, and (suspicious of what He was doing), he asked the boy, to which the boy simply replied, "*Oh, I was just in there loving God a little.*"

2--Well, that's what personal prayer is: "*loving God a little*" in our own personal, intimate way. So, how are *you* taking time to do that?

8. But in addition to personal prayer, our prayer lives also need to include **CORPORATE / GROUP PRAYER** -- what we sometimes call “*public prayer*,” or (depending on the context)... “*family prayer*.”

A--These essentially are opportunities for us to pray *with others*,... sometimes *out loud*, in groups like Sunday School, in a Bible Study group, Choir/Praise Team, Youth Group, or even with our spouse, children, parents or other family members. <sup>4</sup>

1--Corporate Prayer can take the form of one person praying “on behalf of” everyone else (like a Pastor/Worship Leader does in worship, or like a parent does in a blessing at a dinner table),...

2--...Or it can take the form of everyone praying aloud *each in turn* (going around a circle, each praying a phrase or two), and still other times it can be an entire group praying *in unison* (like we sometimes do in worship, as well).

B--Again, we find examples of *this* kind of praying also in the Bible -- where people prayed out loud in groups or assemblies, and we find there a *power* in this context that’s *different from* the power found in our personal prayer time. <sup>5</sup>

1--For instance, for many years in ministry, one of my practices was to pray privately in my office each Sunday morning for that day's worship services... that God would bless them and each attendee; that God would use me (and all of our worship leaders) to touch lives and help people to hear and experience something new from God that day!

2--But at several churches, I had groups who invited me to come and pray along *with them* before worship for these same things. And when I did this, while I enjoyed my personal prayer time, I discovered an even *stronger* power of God at work when I prayed *together with others*.

3--And as a result, today I try (if at all possible) to take time to pray at least with our Praise Band, A/V team, and Choir each and every Sunday before worship.

4--Each Friday morning, our church's Prayer Group comes together to pray for our church and its mission, specific prayer needs from our members & friends, and to offer thanksgiving & praise to God for the wonderful things He has done -- they will attest to the power of group/corporate prayer!

6--And several examples of *family* prayer include:

- (a) The meal blessings that Trish and I always share together, whether we are at home or eating out in a public restaurant.
- (b) And our family Advent wreath ritual each December, where Trish & I (& it used to be our daughter when she lived with us) will use the ritual from The Upper Room devotional to read provided scriptures and prayers as we light the candles on our family Advent wreath -- as we do this, we find ourselves drawn closer to each other.

C--You see, there is special power present when God's people pray *together* -- not only are we drawn closer to *God*, but we're mystically also drawn closer to the people we're praying *with*, as well. <sup>6</sup>

--III--

9. The Bible shows us, you see, that prayer is an invitation for *everyone* to come openly and unashamedly into the presence of God, so that in both its *personal and corporate* contexts, we can connect and interact not only with *GOD*, but also with *EACH OTHER*. <sup>7</sup>

A--Think of it like arriving at a party/banquet, where the host welcomes you in person, and starts talking with you, one-to-one.

1--And in the middle of that very personal, intimate conversation, the host says, "*Oh, and have you met (so and so)?*" and he/she takes you over and introduces you to someone else.

2--And from that point on, there's a new dimension to your conversation, because the host has helped you to open *your* circle and include fellow guests in *your* sharing and conversation.

B--Well, that's what prayer does: it invites us into a personal, intimate dialogue with *GOD*, but one in which (sooner or later) God introduces us to *OTHERS*, as well -- ...

C--...And in this case, the other "guests" are merely imperfect people who -- like us -- have also first been invited, and then adopted into God's family, and with whom God invites us to share the conversation. And *that* is the WHO of prayer!

10. [PRAY]

### ENDNOTES:

<sup>1</sup> A primary example that I read last week is Jesus' words in Luke 11 where he was teaching his disciples to pray, and you may remember that in Verse 3 he said... "*When you pray, say: 'Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name...*" The word "*hallowed*" simply means "*holy*" or "*set apart*" (e.g., a reference to the majesty and the power and the "otherness" of God. But I mentioned that the word "*Father*" in the original Aramaic language (that Jesus spoke) was the word "*Abba*," and it was a term that implied great intimacy and familiarity -- in fact, a more contemporary translation might be "*Daddy*" or "*Dad*." In other words, when Jesus taught his disciples to pray, He was saying, in effect, "*When you pray, remember that even though God is 'holy,' you can and should pray to Him as if you were talking to your own earthly Daddy (or at least to someone that you love and cherish and care for very deeply).*"

<sup>2</sup> Examples of Jesus praying alone include Matthew 14:23; Mark 6:46; and Luke 6:12. Notice, too, that in this context, we most often pray SILENTLY (i.e., to ourselves). However, many Christians have found that there a great power and openness to God's Spirit and direction when we choose to pray ALOUD, even in our personal/individual prayer times.

<sup>3</sup> Even so, the famous scientist Sir Isaac Newton is said to have once written, *“I can take my telescope and look millions and millions of miles into space. But when I lay it aside, go into my room, shut the door, and get down on my knees in earnest prayer, I see more of Heaven and feel closer to God than if I were assisted by all the telescopes and material [things] on earth.”* (cited from <https://christianquote.com/power-of-prayer-2/>). Note that is highly debated as to whether or not Newton ever said this quote at all -- <https://fauxtations.wordpress.com/2018/08/03/isaac-newton-finding-answers-in-prayer/>)

<sup>4</sup> The scriptures give numerous examples of families who followed God’s ways and were obedient to various disciplines of faith, which certainly included the discipline and practice of prayer (For example, read Exodus 12:3-13; Joshua 24:15; 1 Samuel 1:21; Acts 10:2; 16:15; 18:8; 1 Timothy 3:4-5; Titus 2:5). You’ve heard it said before: *“The family that prays together stays together”* -- and even though it’s a cliché, there’s a good bit of truth to it.

It may seem a bit awkward at first, but we should all develop ways and times for us to pray with members of our family: with our spouses; our children; and even our parents. And we need to also find ways to include our family member’s prayers in our family prayer times. For example, instead of always letting adults pray the family prayer, we should allow our children to do so from time to time -- we’ll often get a blessing out of their simple, child-like faith. (Read Matthew 18:2-3 and Matthew 19:13-15).

<sup>5</sup> For example, last week’s key scripture of Luke 11:1-3 tells us that one day one of Jesus’ own disciples asked him, *“‘Lord, teach US to pray, as John taught his disciples.’ [Jesus] said to them, ‘When YOU [plural] pray, say: ‘OUR Father in heaven, hallowed be your name...’”* Notice this disciple didn’t say, *“Lord, teach ME to pray,”* but *“Lord teach US...”* And not only did Jesus use the plural tense of “you” when he was answering, but began what has come to be called “The Lord’s Prayer” with “OUR Father” (not “MY Father”). It’s almost as if Jesus wanted to say by his own answer that biblical prayer should never become *merely* a private act of personal devotion and piety.

<sup>6</sup> Perhaps that’s why 19<sup>th</sup>-century prayer evangelist Andrew Murray once said that *“The [one] who mobilizes the Christian church to pray will make the greatest contribution to world evangelization in history.”* Along the same lines, evangelist Dwight L. Moody once said *“I’d rather be able to pray than be a great preacher; Jesus Christ never taught his disciples how to preach, but only how to pray”* [--D. L. Moody, cited in James S. Hewett, *Illustrations Unlimited* (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc, 1988), p. 417]. In a similar vein, noted preacher Charles Spurgeon once remarked that *“I would rather teach one man to pray than ten men to preach.”*

<sup>7</sup> This is precisely why when we become a member of a United Methodist church, one promise we make is to become a person of prayer -- to support the mission and ministry of Christ’s church through our “Prayers.” It’s one promise we can *all* keep as we seek to grow in our relationship with God, for even if we can’t teach Sunday School or sing in the choir/praise team or do some other “public” kind of ministry, we can pray (I even remind our homebound members that this is one ministry that they can still perform, even if they can’t do other ministries -- they can pray for their church and for its ministries).

We can all pray for ourselves, for each other, for our community, state, nation, and world, and for our church (its vision, mission, ministry, and witness in our world). John 17 gives an example of Jesus praying for his people (the church). It is a prayer for their protection from evil, for them to have the complete joy that comes only from God his Father, for power to go out into the world and witness to His glory, for those who will come to salvation because of their ministry. And in fact, from the very beginning of its ministry, we find the church (the people of God) praying for God’s will, for people, situations, and power to witness (See for example, Acts 1:14; 6:4; 12:5; 13:1-3; 14:23; Romans 12:12-13; and James 5:14).