

Sermon ✝ July 3, 2022
James 5:13-20 & Luke 10:1-11, 16-20
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This weekend we begin a five week series on *My Faith Habits* which I hope will help each one of us to grow deeper in our faith.

This is a series where we will seek to explore and establish some biblically-grounded, practical, hands-on ways of growing as disciples and discover new ways of growing a faith that works in real life.

In my life, I've always needed a faith that works, a faith that is relevant to everyday life; a faith that works on Thursday afternoon, Monday morning, Friday night, as well as Saturday evening and Sunday morning.

What good would it do to talk about our relationship with God and not have honest, concrete, practical ways of living out that faith?

What good would it do to talk about faith and not have an understanding of how to grow it through disciplines like prayer, worship, scripture, discipleship, or stewardship?

This morning our focus is on prayer, which, for many, is the place to start. Today's gospel is the story in Luke where Jesus sends out the disciples two by two. While it doesn't specifically mention prayer, I'm sure that there was a whole lot of praying going on as they ventured forth to spread the good news.

Prayer is nothing short of both talking to and being talked to by God. Praying can be pretty intimidating. Most people have a hard enough time talking to each other, to say nothing of having a conversation with the creator of the universe.

What do you say? How do you say it? Where do you learn it? How long do you go on with it? How do you start?

One of the most helpful prayer models is a model that is used around the country if not the world. It is the ACTS model. A-C-T-S is an acronym for Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication.

Adoration is a way of acknowledging God's greatness. The prayer might be, *"God, you are an awesome and mighty God who continues to be faithful in our lives. Your power, grace and love are reminders of your love for us."*

Confession is simply admitting mistakes by saying, *"God, what's up with me? I can't believe I said that to my friend. When will I ever learn to get a handle on my tongue and my temper? Lord, I'm sorry I did that. Give me the courage to ask forgiveness from those I've hurt."*

Thanksgiving is saying thank you. We teach our kids from the time they can barely say their own name to say *thank you* when they are given something. This prayer might be, *“God, thank you. I Thank you for life today, my friendships, family and my job. Thanks for being with me through this whole thing. Thank you for leading me in this direction, to that decision, to those people.”*

Supplication is an old word which means "to request," "to plead," "beg," or "ask". We do this one a lot, *“God, if you get me out of this, I'll go to church every Sunday for the rest of my life,”* or *“If you get me out of this, I'll become a monk!”* Seriously, though, supplication is simply being clear to God about what is needed.

Do you pray? . . . How do you pray? . . . Why do you pray? . . . What things do you pray for? . . . Could this be the day, the hour that you begin to pray in a new way, to open up your heart and life to God in a way that you haven't done before? Could you begin today by just talking to God and then listening for God's VOICE?

However we do it, whenever we do it, we can trust, know and believe that God hears our prayers and that God answers them. *But* God answers prayers in God's own way.

It was my Sunday School teacher in about the 6th grade who first introduced *me* to the three ways in which God answers prayers: “Yes,” “No,” and “Wait”. The “Yes” answer is usually my favorite and is more proof that there is a God at all.

When God answers with “No,” I'm usually a little less impressed with God's ability. But it is God's “Wait” answer with which I struggle the most. God's timing is not my timing and in the long run that's probably a good thing.

Waiting on God can be a difficult task. That's why living in a relationship of prayer with God where we're talking to God and God is talking to us is part of a growing faith. And that is why living in community with one another strengthens the whole church.

The book of James is a call to pray; a call to talk to God . . . but it is also a call to pray for others. The writer of the book of James understood prayer as a community event. Prayer is something that goes beyond who I am and includes the wider community of believers.

Intercessory prayer is praying with and for others. This is how the writer of James puts it, *“Are any among you sick? They should call for the elders of the church and have them pray over them, anointing them with oil in the name of the Lord. The prayer of faith will save the sick . . .”*

For whom do you pray? . . . Who in your life needs your voice in God's ear on their behalf? . . . Who in your life gets in God's ear on your behalf? . . . Who can you pray for today? . . . Who needs you to go to the Lord for him or her? . . . Who needs to know that you're praying for him or her today? Think of the power of such a commitment.

When you go home after worship today, spend some time praying for that friend of yours, your daughter, your son, your parent, your sibling.

What a difference it would make if you called that person on the phone or got his/her attention and told them that you had asked God to touch their life with healing, strength, guidance, renewal, or whatever it is they need. Imagine what it would be like for you to get that phone call. There is power in praying for others . . .we are called to do it.

James also lifts up the power of praying for ourselves. I have to admit, I struggle with praying for myself at times. There's a nagging sense that God is so busy with the war in Ukraine, the homeless and the hungry that the things that weigh heavy on me seem to pale in comparison.

But, I've come to realize that the things that really matter most to me, well, I just think that God sort of has it under control, no matter how out of control it might seem to me.

So this sermon is almost over. When I'm done, I will sit down for a moment of silence and then we will all join together in saying the Nicene Creed. Next will come *The Prayers of the People*. This is when we're invited into the heart of God. We're invited to come into God's presence here in this place and to bring to God our needs as well as the needs of those around us.

This morning's *Prayers of the People* is Form 1 from the Book of Common Prayer. Yes, it's a long one. As we join in this prayer today, I would like you to really concentrate on the words . . . maybe just a bit more than usual. If closing your eyes helps, do so. When the images that we pray for connect with your life, make this prayer your own to God as you fill in and around the prayer with your own.

In the name of this very same God we pray, Amen.