

“Jesus’ Secret Weapon”

Jesus had gone to synagogue that morning,
and afterwards was looking forward to a relaxing lunch at Simon and Andrew’s house,
but when he gets there, nothing is as they expected – no warm greeting at the door and no food ready to be served.
Instead Simon’s wife greets them with the news that her mother is burning up with fever,
and she has been so busy tending to her that no one has had time to get dinner ready.
Jesus, who had just come from worship, goes to her,
and does something men in that culture do not usually do to women unrelated to them –
he touches her, taking her by the hand, and lifting her up.
It is such a powerful action that the Greek word here for “lifting up”
is the exact same word used to describe what God did to Jesus in the morning of the 3rd day after his death.
Jesus raises her, if not from death, then from something close to it, and not only does the fever immediately leave her,
but she is so completely restored to health and normalcy that she begins to put dinner out and serve them.
It is such a remarkable act of God that the household just can’t keep it to themselves;
they tell their friends and neighbors, and word spread like wildfire through the city,
so by evening all who were sick or possessed with demons are being brought to Jesus
until it seems like the whole city is gathered at their door!
And Jesus cures many who were sick with various diseases and casts out many demons.
By the time he had taken care of all who had come, he was drained, physically, psychologically, emotionally, spiritually.
Gratefully he went to bed, and fell asleep immediately.

He woke quite early, and immediately sensed that this day might be a repeat of the day before.
But was that what his ministry was to be? Non-stop healing of diseases and the casting out of demons?
Is that what God wanted him to do?
Well, if he wanted to know God’s will, he’d need time to pray, & if he stayed here, there’d be no time or place to do that.
And so he got up and made his way out to a deserted place to spend time with his heavenly father, with his creator,
with the one he had promised to love with all his heart and soul and mind and strength,
with the one who had a plan and purpose for his life,
with the one who would guide him & lead him, one step at a time, by faith & not by sight.
And so it was that when Simon and the others came to get him to come back and continue
where he had left off the night before, he knew that was not what God wanted.
“Let us go on to the neighboring towns, so that I may proclaim the message there also; for that is what I came out to do”.
And he went throughout Galilee, proclaiming the message and casting out demons.”

Think about that for a moment: Jesus took time to pray.
In a way that’s strange, isn’t it?
I mean, Jesus is God’s beloved child, the one we believe is not only 100% human but 100% divine.
So you would think that Jesus would already know what God wanted, right? But he doesn’t.
That human part of him can get so easily distracted,
so easily tempted to think that he can use his brilliant brain to figure out things on his own,
or, on the other hand, be so easily dissuaded by doubts and fears.
That human part of him must have constantly been reminding him of all the things on his plate,
all of the people who needed healing of their diseases,
all of the people who needed demons cast out,
all of the people who needed to hear the message
that they no longer had to wait for God’s kingdom – because it was right here!
And all they had to do with step into that spiritual realm,
into that dynamic relationship with the living God, and their lives would be transformed!
So many people and so little time.
And yet. Jesus took time to pray.
And if Jesus took time to pray, how much more should we?

The reason Jesus took time to pray, and why he started his day off in prayer,
was because out of the million and one things he could do,
he wanted to make sure that he was doing not those things that he wanted to do,
& not those things his family or friends or disciples wanted him to do,
& not those things that everyone who was coming to him wanted him to do, but what GOD wanted him to do.
In other words, prayer enabled Jesus and it enables us to get our priorities straight.

I learned that decades ago when Mark was always on the road,
and I had 2 young children to take care of, and all their activities to get them to,
and I had my work at Tabor as co-pastor, and my work at their arts center as piano teacher,
and I was feeling that I was being pulled in a million directions.
And that was when I discovered a book whose thesis was
that instead of listening to the many voices clamoring for my attention,
I only had to listen to one voice – the voice of God –
who would order my priorities for me, so that I would know which task to attend to first.
Just understanding that spiritual principle of putting God 1st immediately decreased my stress level.
Not only did I find that God helped me get my priorities straight,
I also discovered that when I relied upon the strength of God's grace to get things done,
I became more effective and more efficient.
So, for instance, instead of me deciding I needed to write my sermon first
and then find myself struggling to do so in the midst of distractions,
God would lead me to take care of certain distractions 1st & then the sermon seemed to write itself.
And **not only did I become more effective & efficient, I realized that it wasn't just me who was at work –
God was going ahead of me, clearing my path and guiding my way.**

But that's not the only reason to pray.

**A few years ago, I preached a sermon series on "Y PRAY?"
& the answer to "Y?" was that prayer enables change – prayer changes situations, it changes us, & it changes God.**

Prayer changes situations.

First, we learn from scripture:

- * Joshua prayed like it would stop the sun from going down (and it did!) [*Joshua 10:12,13*]
- * Elijah prayed like it would actually change the situation (and it did!) [*James 5:16-18*]
- * David prayed like it would stop the plague (and it did!) [*2 Samuel 24:25*]

And second, we learn from our own experience.

I prayed that God might lead me to fulfill the desire he had placed in my heart
to build relationships with people different from me, and within no time, I had been asked to be on the boards
of both the Interdenominational Ministerial Alliance & the Council of Churches.

Prayer changes us. Prayer can change our bodies, minds, hearts and souls.

Again, we learn from scripture:

- * Hannah prayed like it would result in her having a child (and it did!) [*1 Samuel 1:27*]
- * Jesus prayed like it would raise Lazarus from the dead (and it did!) [*John 11:41-44*]

And again, we learn from our own experience.

In order for me to fulfill that desire to build relationships with people different from me,
God had to change me from a shy, introverted person with a cultural heritage that kept me from sharing my faith,
into someone who can't wait to share my faith with anyone who will listen!

Prayer changes God.

From scripture we hear that:

- * Moses prayed like it would actually change God's mind (and it did!) [*Exodus 32:11-14*]
- * God planned to destroy Nineveh,
but the people prayed like it would actually change God's mind (and it did!) [*Jonah 3:10*]

And I know from my own experience, that when I do something that causes me to deserve God's punishment,
my prayer of repentance and confession causes God to relent and forgive.

Then, too, in James 4:2 we read, "*You do not have because you do not ask God.*"

and that seems to indicate that if we don't ask, we will not have, and so we ask in order that God may act differently.

I pray because in my life I have discovered that prayer works.

It works in huge ways like thousands of dollars coming to me from a virtual stranger.

It works in middle sized ways like giving me signs to confirm that I'm still on the right path.

It works in small ways like helping me find my lost keys or lost phone.

I pray because prayer changes my life.

But there is one even greater reason to pray –

because it draws us into an intimate relationship with God and with one another.

I participate in 6 different prayer groups and I do so because they have changed my life.

Through listening to the prayers of others,

I get to know their sorrows & joys, their fears & faith, their struggles and victories.

I hear the prayers that they pray for themselves and others.

I hear the doubt and depression and despair as they struggle with uncertainty or illness or grief,

and then I hear their cries of victory and shouts of praise when God answers their prayers –

sometimes in just the way they had hoped and in other times in a way they had feared

and sometimes in a way that is totally beyond anything they had dared to imagine.

And through it all, I hear how each person in the group is growing in their faith and hope

and they hear how God is growing me, too.

We see how God is using prayer to shape us & mold us & transform us into the people God has called us to be.

We begin to see how we are being led from one point to the next and the next

which makes us excited to see where we will end up!

And not only do we get to see and hear how God is working in each of our lives,

we are getting to know that God better and better.

As the prophet Isaiah said in our first reading,

God is the Source of all Creation, and compared to that, we are but grasshoppers!

Even the most powerful person alive, is as nothing compared with God.

But the one who created the stars, calls us by name.

The God of boundless power is also the God of endless love,

who renews our strength so that we shall run and not be weary and walk and not be faint.

**And when we commit ourselves to a life a prayer, to that intense, intimate relationship with God,
our lives will be totally transformed.**

As we ask and it is given, as we seek and then find, as we knock and the door is opened,

our eyes and ears and minds and hearts will be opened and we will be enabled to see how God is at work.

Sometimes it will be in the little things, like when God helps us find lost keys or a misplaced phone.

Sometimes it will be in the signs God sends to let us know we are on the right path,

or simply to let us know he is there beside us.

Sometimes it will be in miraculous ways like thousands of dollars coming from out of the blue.

But through our prayers and God's answers, we will come to know God more –

we will come to know more of his infinite might

that gives God the power to do ALL things throughout ALL of creation;

and we will come to know of his infinite grace

that gives God the love to want to do ALL things for even us lowly grasshoppers.

And when we get to know THAT God, we will find ourselves in the kingdom of God,

that spiritual realm where we have life and have it abundantly,

that amazing place where we will experience the signs & wonders & miracles of God. Amen