

*“Learning to Pray, and Doing It”!**Learning to Listen for and Hearing From God**May 6, 2018*

Key Texts: I Samuel 3:1-11

I. Introduction: No Prayer-No Power, Know Prayer-Know Power

My favorite section of my library is the section on Prayer. I have found in 30+ years of ministry that’s where I go back to time and time again. Prayer changes things. Prayer invites God into the circumstances and situations of our lives. Prayer brings hope. Prayer brings healing. Prayer gives us direction. Most importantly, prayer is what helps us grow a relationship with God. It is impossible to grow a relationship if a couple never spends any time together relating, sharing, or listening to each other. And it is exactly the same with God. Our relationship with God will be in direct proportion to how much time we are spending with God in prayer and reading the Bible. So, judge for yourself as we begin this six-week series on prayer. How much time over this past week did you spend in prayer? 5 minutes a day? 15? Half an hour? Make a note of it. Write that down. Then think where would I like to be in 6 weeks? From 5 to 15, 15 to 30? Some of you will say, “All day. I’m engaging with God all throughout the day.” And that’s good that your awareness of God’s presence in your daily life is that strong. That’s something for all of us to be striving for. I do believe some intentional, focused time is necessary to refocus, renew, and to center ourselves.

Of the 75 surveys you filled out last fall, here is the amount of time you indicated you spent in prayer: 2 said “none”, 23 said 5 minutes a day, 33 said 15 minutes a day, 2 said 30 minutes, 3 said 60 minutes, 10 said “all day”. Where are you in those numbers?

II. Room to Grow in Prayer

I think it safe to say most of us have some room to grow in our practice of prayer. And here is the thing I believe to be true. Most of us know about prayer, most of us value prayer, most of us want to pray more. We just don’t make time to do it. So our series is called “Learning to Pray, and Doing It!” Be thinking about where you’d like to be in your prayer life 6 weeks from now. What steps can you take to get there?

We can provide you a [Draw the Circle](#) 40-day prayer challenge book and Lee Anne has 3 classes she will be facilitating for women.

The key is you setting your own prayer goal this morning. And with that I think we become more aware of those God-sightings God gives us each day. We’ll be more aware of the signs God gives us because prayer just makes us more aware of God’s presence in our lives each moment of the day.

III. God Speaks to Samuel

Our story to get this series going comes from the Old Testament. It is about God calling young Samuel to serve and of course, over the course of time, Samuel is used by God to help guide a wayward people back to God. He is used by God to transition a loosely governed people to a monarchy and he anointed the first two kings of Israel, Saul and David. He was the last and most effective and faithful of Israel’s judges and is listed in Hebrews Chapter 11 in what is called the “Hall of Faith”.

God calls Samuel at a very young age. Verses 19 and 20 from I Samuel 3 say, “The Lord was with Samuel as he grew up and he let none of His words fall to the ground. That’s like saying not letting God’s words fall on deaf ears.

IV. Learning to Listen for God in Prayer

So much of prayer is us telling God what we want or need, when we want it or need it and how that would work out best for us. We begin to grow in our relationship with God and in our prayer life when we actually begin to spend as much time listening as we do talking.

E. M. Bounds was a Methodist pastor who became a chaplain in the Confederacy during the Civil War and was captured and put in a POW camp. He wrote volumes on prayer. In his sermon on Secret Prayer he writes: “Men ought always to pray and not to faint” from Luke 18:1. He says, “These words are the words of our Lord, who not only always sought to impress upon his followers the urgency and importance of prayer, but to also set them an example that they, unfortunately, have been far too slow to copy” (pg 46)

Samuel’s mother, Hannah, was not able to have to have children. She cried out to the Lord in prayer. The scripture says, “She poured out her soul to the Lord” (Ch 1:15-16). She drank no beer or wine the scriptures say, because the priest thought she was drunk. She was praying out of anguish and grief for a child.

Eli heard her prayer, as did God. Eli tells Hannah to “go in peace and may God grant what you have asked” (vs 17) And she left and was no longer downcast. She conceived and named the boy Samuel and her commitment to God was that if God gave her a son she would give him to the Lord “all the days of his life” (Ch 1 vs 11) And so she did.

In a sense, when we have our children baptized we, too, are giving them to the Lord. We think they are ours, right? But they are not. We have the responsibility to raise them, train them, love them, nurture them, instruct and discipline them, but they really belong to God. And one day they are like arrows in our quiver and we let them go to fly where God will lead them.

V. Eli’s Instruction to Samuel

In our story Samuel hears someone call his name “Samuel, Samuel”. And three times he gets up and goes to Eli and wakes him up saying “Here I am, you called me” “I didn’t call you, boy, go back to sleep”. You see, Samuel at that point did not know the Lord. Interesting, right? He was given by his mother in service of the Lord, he was in the temple sleeping by the Ark of the Covenant and yet at that point “he did not yet know the Lord” (vs 7).

That suggests that a person, to me a child, youth or adult might come to church all their life and not yet know the Lord. It’s not that you might not know about the Lord. I’m sure Samuel knew to do all the right things to help out there in the temple, but he did not recognize it was God speaking to him.

Eli, though he had many faults as Israel’s priest was smart enough to recognize something unique was happening. I mean after a third time of Samuel coming to him and saying, “You called?”, I might get clued in, too.

Eli tells Samuel, “Go back and lie down again, and if He calls you say, “Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.” (vs 9) So, Samuel obeyed and went back and laid down. Then the Lord came and stood there, calling as at the other times, “Samuel, Samuel”. And Samuel responded as instructed, “Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.”

And God proceeds to tell Samuel how he is going to do something in Israel “that will make the ears of everyone who hears it tingle.” (vs11)

Of course, that “something” was to be judgement upon Eli and his family for disregarding and disrespecting God. Eli’s sons are killed. Eli neglected the responsibilities he had in his own home. Eli served God faithfully but failed his family.

VI. How Can We Learn to Listen to God?

I want to encourage you during this 6-week series to do what Samuel was instructed to do. As you focus more on prayer, make sure you take some time to listen to God. Maybe you can write it down in your prayer journal or notebook—“Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening”, then listen. Tune in to God.

Try to limit the distractions. Turn off the TV or radio, or iTunes. Find a quiet place. A deck, a porch, before the kids get up or after they go to bed. And spend some time trying this with your family.

E. M. Bounds said, “Intimacy requires development. We can never know God by brief and fragmentary and thoughtless repetition of intercessions that are requests for personal favors and nothing more”. (pg 40)

That is not the way we communicate with heaven’s king. “The goal of prayer is the ear of God”, said Spurgeon and this is a goal that can only be reached by patient and continuous waiting upon God, by pouring out our hearts to him, like Hannah, and permitting Him to speak to us. “Only by doing so can we expect to know Him and as we come to know God better, we will spend more time in God’s presence and find that presence to be a constant and ever-increasing delight.” (v 4)

My hope and prayer is that God will draw close to us as we draw close to God during those 40 days. We will celebrate Pentecost Sunday with a possible reenactment of E. M. Bounds. We will recognize and pray for our high school and college graduates and present many with scholarships, we will be baptizing more babies and dedicating them to God. We will be sharing in Pastor Jessie’s last Sunday on June 10th.

Let these 40 days be a time of focused prayer for yourself, your church, and your church family.

VII. Pray For Your Pastors, Please

Pastor Robert Murray McCheyne, a Scottish pastor, exhorted and charged people and I share this in thinking about Pastor Jessie in her last few weeks with us and Pastor Lauren as she begins her ministry among us. “Pray for your pastor. Pray for her body, that she may be kept strong and spared for many years. Pray for her soul, that she may be kept humble and holy, a burning and shining light. Pray for her ministry, that it may be abundantly blessed, that she may be anointed to preach good tidings. Let there be no secret prayer without naming Pastor Jessie and Pastor Lauren before your God, no family prayer without carrying your pastors in your hearts to God.”

And, if you would, I’d be glad to be included in that prayer as well.

VIII. Growing Deeper in Prayer

Church family, we are in a season of change. We not only sense it in our country, we sense it in ourselves. I think God is saying I want to do something in Culpeper. It could include judgement. It surely will include God’s people drawing closer to God and each other as we serve, share faith with those who do not yet know Jesus and as our hearts grow with an urgency to worship God in deeper and more meaningful ways. That’s going to happen because we grow deeper in our prayer life, as you pray for your pastors, each other, and even your own personal holiness.

As we commune today, as we remember all that Jesus did in laying down his life, as we thank God for the bread and the wine (grape juice), let us have this thought in our minds, this phrase on our lips, “Speak Lord, for your servant is listening”. Then let’s listen.

You might, then, write down what you hear so you can go and put it into practice this week.

IX. Closing Prayer

Let’s pray:

Gracious God, who knows each one of us and calls us by name. Help us be still enough to hear Your voice calling to us. You have so much you want us to know. And you want to be known by us. Lord, there

may be someone here today that knows about you, but does not really have a personal relationship with You. Call their name now Lord. Let them hear Your voice.

And maybe some of us have been neglecting our time in prayer. During these 40 days, renew or rekindle this passion within us to spend time with you. Help us set a goal and to stretch ourselves a bit so our next step will be to hear from you and walk closer with You. As we come to Your table, Lord, help us make this commitment to step out and step up to a new level in our prayer life.

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In Jesus' name, Amen.