

WHY PRAY?

Psalm 42

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WATCH/LISTEN: <https://www.fbcjc.org/sermon/prayer-why-pray/>

There is an internal logic to the order of the sermon series. For the past four Sundays, we have explored the theme “Your God Is Too Small.” God is big enough and personal enough for us to share a relationship and that relationship is through prayer. I can’t think of a better Bible passage to consider than this psalm. It contains everything we will expand in the next few weeks: God, the source of our lives, the hope and trust we find in prayer, the frustration of unanswered prayer, and the importance of linking our prayers with others.

The psalm begins with a longing and so does prayer (vv. 1-2). Water is necessary for all living things. The psalmist evidently wrote this at the headwaters of the Jordan River, way up near Mt. Hermon. The land of Israel is flowing with beautiful streams in places but in other places, very arid and dry. Have you ever thirsted, really thirsted for water? Maybe before surgery, when you couldn’t have any. I can remember working in the hayfield as a young man, reaching for the water jug when I was parched.

This is how we should think of prayer. Not as a Santa Claus wish list or as a heavenly version of Amazon.com. But first of all, as opening up to receive God’s creating, life-giving presence deep within us. A.W. Tozer once said, “An infinite God can give all of Himself to each of His children. He does not distribute Himself that each may have a part, but to each one He gives all of Himself as fully as if there were no others.” We pray because we were made for prayer. Rowan Williams wrote prayer is like sneezing—there comes a point where you can’t not pray [*Being Christian*, p. 8].

How do we get to know God? Go deeper with Christ? By reading a book? Listening to a podcast? Taking communion? Getting baptized? No. Prayer is the way we experience God, the way Jesus begins to sprinkle his life and values over every part of our lives. Richard Rohr has reminded us that you can go to church all your life and never find a fulfilling life with Christ. This is why I have a burden for people to come into a relationship with Christ. This is what we mean by our mission statement, “leading people into life-giving relationships with Christ...”

And speaking of that, how is your relationship with God? Is your progress steady, always upward? Or is it sporadic, roller coaster, up and down? Be honest. Well, guess what. The spiritual journey described in Psalm 42 is the same. Read vv. 5-6.

In prayer, something deep in the psalmist called out to something deep in the mystery of God (v. 7). There at the mouth of the Jordan, as water poured out, in the deafening thunder of waterfalls echoing, he said, “Deep calls to deep...” Though we have lots of big words for prayer and so much is written about it, the most primitive prayer is always, “Lord, have mercy.” Every

other prayer flows from this one. So even though he feels inundated, overwhelmed at times, the psalmist can confess this deep connection with God through prayer: read v. 8.

So here is why we pray. Prayer is turning what we know about God into a conversation with God. In God's presence, like the psalmist, we imagine life being different, we picture God rescuing us, we agonize, complain and praise. But most of all, we get real.

In 1862, President Lincoln signed the Homestead Act. Settlers who paid a filing fee of \$10 and agreed to live on a piece of land for at least five consecutive years were given 160 acres for free. By 1900, 600,000 claims had been made for 80 million acres. All because they appropriated what was there to be claimed. I wonder what relationship with God we're missing, what blessings and power we are missing because we do not pray.

No trouble can rob us of the right we have to pray. No trouble can rob us of the privilege of prayer. No trouble can rob us of the power of prayer. "My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. Deep calls to deep."