Gravity - Part Two

# The Pull of Prayer

# (Matthew 6:5-7)

Welcome to Christ’s Community Church. We’re in a message series entitled Gravity, talking about obstacles to the presence of God. You know, those things that tug on our hearts like a gravitational pull keeping us from the presence of God. Last week we discussed the problem of a place, because a place can be a distraction, it can become a religious icon and a stumbling block to seeking the presence of God. And in the same way, today we’re going to look at the pull of prayer, because just like a place, prayer can either help us to get into the presence of God or be in obstacle distracting us and keeping us from seeking the presence of God.

You see, prayer can be a key to getting into the presence of God, but the problem is that prayer can become the point of prayer. You know, prayer can become the purpose of prayer. And I know that prayer’s not intended to be a stumbling block to the presence of God, but that’s part of the problem because everyone does it. You know, you want to become a Christian and you’re told to pray. Or maybe you’ve been a Christian for many years and it’s just what you do. You pray when you get up, you pray before the meal, you pray at church, and you pray before you go to bed. It’s just what you do, right?

But then on the other hand, don’t you also pray when your car breaks down on the side of the highway. Or you pray when you lose your job. Or you pray when the pilot gets on the intercom and says you’re returning to the airport because something is wrong with the plane. And so, people pray forgetting that they’re an atheist, agnostic, a Buddhist or whatever. You see people pray and yet prayer can actually become a distraction, keeping us from the presence of God if our prayer focuses on prayer instead of the recipient of our prayer.

In fact, if you have your Bible with you, turn to Matthew chapter 6, because Jesus pointed this out. He is teaching the people in what is known as the Sermon on the Mount. And in verse five, he warns his followers about religious prayer, prayer that is outwardly focused instead of being inward or upward focused. He said,

"When you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you” (Matthew 6:5-6).

And so, in verses five and six, Jesus teaches the importance of focusing on the who of prayer. As the people gather around him on the hillside, he redirects their attention, because their leaders had missed the point of prayer. He says, it’s not about being seen or heard by others, but go to a quiet place without distractions to seek the presence of the Father. In fact, the Bible says it this way in James chapter 1,

“When you ask him, be sure that your faith is in God alone. Don’t waver, for a person with divided loyalty is as unsettled as a wave of the sea that is blown and tossed by the wind” (James 1:6, NLT).

And this is so important, because sometimes we miss the point of prayer, we’re pulled away by the world, we’re divided, and we’re so close to God that we miss him. We get so involved in religious activities, in going through the motions, instead of just quietly seeking his presence.

Jesus says, “when you pray” don’t do it to be seen or heard. In other words, don’t make prayer the point of prayer, because you’ll miss God’s presence. You see, worship is the point of prayer, confession is the point of prayer, thanksgiving is the point of prayer, lifting up your petitions is the point of prayer, but above all else, the point of prayer is to be in the presence of God. And so, we want to use prayer to get into the presence of God, to be still and know the voice of the Father.

You could say, prayer is the vehicle with which we drive to the Father’s house so that we could spend time with him and enjoy his presence. And when you do, when you discover God’s presence in prayer, your prayer life will increase, your prayers will be deeper, and your life will be changed. You’ll pray more, not because you’re in love with prayer, but because you’re in love with the object of your prayer. You’ll pray more because of the presence of God that you’ve discovered in prayer.

And so, number one, I want to show you the freedom of prayer. I love the freedom with which David prayed and it’s so clearly illustrated in Psalm chapter 5. He’s just talking with God and he demonstrates the kind of honesty with which we too can speak with God. In verse one, David prays,

“Give ear to my words, O Lord, consider my sighing. Listen to my cry for help, my King and my God, for to you I pray. In the morning, O Lord, you hear my voice; in the morning I lay my requests before you and wait in expectation” (Psalms 5:1-3).

David demonstrates that we can talk with God honestly, with transparency, and even with sighs of frustration or disappointment, because he knows that God is good, he knows that he’s faithful, and so he prays and waits in expectation. In other words, he’s anxious to see what God is going to do, because he knows from experience that God may do exactly what he asked or he may do something even better. He may do something totally different but David knows the goodness of God and the faithfulness of God and so he waits in expectation.

You see, when we discover the manifest presence of God in prayer it actually releases the power of God into our lives, into our own personal struggles, and the power of God becomes our own personal victory. What I’m talking about is in your own personal life where you’re struggling with your flesh and where you have temptations, cravings, lusts and desires. Or maybe where you have panic attacks, those things that hurt, the habits, the hang-ups, and aches. You see, it’s all these different things that pull on our souls like gravity. And so, God wants us to have the freedom to talk to him honestly.

In fact, there are times recorded in the Bible when people are so honest with God it’s scary. It’s like you’d expect fire to come down from heaven, but the amazing thing is that God is secure enough to handle it. For example, we find Moses getting upset and you can sense that he’s a little snappy. In Exodus chapter 5, verse 22, you can hear the sarcasm in his voice as he said,

“Lord, why have you brought trouble upon this people? Is this why you sent me? Ever since I went to Pharaoh to speak in your name, he has brought trouble upon this people, and you have not rescued your people at all" (Exodus 5:22-23).

And so, Moses is frustrated, he’s confused, and he’s got doubts, but he’s just being honest. And that’s okay, because there may be times when you’ve just got to say, “God I just don’t get it, I’ve been trying to do what I thought you wanted me to do and nothing’s working out. Now I don’t even know how to pray.”

You know, the only time that Jesus was critical about prayer is when people weren’t being real, when they were putting on a show. And so, he doesn’t want us to be fake, pretending like we’ve got it altogether, and being more concerned about what other people think than about what he thinks. He wants us to have the freedom to be honest about who we are and what we’re going through, because it’s not like he doesn’t know it all anyway.

And so, we’re not going to shock him with our prayers, and then Jesus says this in verse seven,

“And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words” (Matthew 6:7).

In other words, just say what you’re trying to say, it doesn’t have to be beautiful, it doesn’t have to be perfect, you don’t even have to quote Scripture, but you just talk to God like you would a close friend. And I believe if we would embrace our freedom in Christ and just be honest with God talking with him face-to-face our prayer lives would take off.

You see, when you discover the presence of God for yourself in prayer, number two, it releases power into your personal life. It might not release power for you to cast out demons or to heal, but it will release power to beat the devil on a personal level. This is so important because we’ve seen countless moral failures of Christian leaders over and over again in America. We’ve seen men who ministered with power and God used them to perform great miracles, but that same power didn’t deliver them from covetous idolatry, adultery, materialism, and pornography. They may have had great faith, operating in the prophetic, praying powerful prayers of healing and deliverance. They may have been able to put together message and get up and lead hundreds of people to come to know Jesus, but they themselves couldn’t get free from a particular habit.

You see, the truth of the matter is, if we’re not prayerful, you and I may find ourselves like Samson crushing the Philistines, delivering the Israelites, and yet being conquered by Delilah in our personal lives. Or like King David who won many battles, but he was inconsistent later in life, falling into temptation, adultery, and murderous schemes. However, we can learn from him, because when he was younger, he discovered the presence of God and it released power in his life. In first Samuel he said it this way,

“When a lion or a bear came and carried off a sheep from the flock, I went after it, struck it and rescued the sheep from its mouth. When it turned on me, I seized it by its hair, struck it and killed it. Your servant has killed both the lion and the bear; this uncircumcised Philistine will be like one of them…” (1 Samuel 17:34-36).

Today, you and I don’t need power to kill the giants in our lives only to find ourselves overcome by the lion or the bear. We don’t want to have public victories and private defeats. And so, we need to avoid this kind of personal bankruptcy, going deeper in our walk with God by drawing power from his presence.

In Luke chapter 8, Jesus was pushing his way through the crowds on the way to the home of a man named Jairus to minister to his daughter who was dying. And the Bible says that,

“As Jesus was on his way, the crowds almost crushed him. And a woman was there who had been subject to bleeding for 12 years but no one could heal her” (Luke 8:42-43).

And so, this woman had spent all her money trying to find a cure for her disease, this hemorrhaging, this bleeding that wouldn’t stop. She’d tried all of her options and she’d come to the end of her rope, it appeared to her that her situation was hopeless until one day she encountered the presence of God.

In the same way, I believe Jesus is calling each of us into a new dimension of walking with him and drawing power from his presence. You see, your problem may not be with bleeding, but there’s something else that you can’t stop. Maybe your problem is with alcohol, or drugs, or smoking, or video games. Maybe the area where you’re hemorrhaging is an oppression, thoughts of self-harm or maybe you can’t sleep at night, the memories of the past keep resurfacing and you’re struggling with depression.

Wherever it is that you’re bleeding, whatever that area is, you need to follow the example of this woman. Because she knows what you’re going through, she’s tried everything and she got near to Jesus, but it still wasn’t enough. It wasn’t enough to just be close to Jesus and so she pressed through the crowd and touched him. Verse 44 tells us,

“She came up behind him and touched the edge of his cloak and immediately her bleeding stopped” (Luke 8:44).

You see, she drew near and touched the presence of the living God. She didn’t ask for healing, but she just touched his presence. She didn’t ask for power, but Jesus testified in verse 46 that,

“Someone touched me; I know that power has gone out from me” (Luke 8:46).

And so, power went out from him, not because of her request, but because of the desire and the faith of her heart. The power of God shot through her body, knowing exactly which part was broken, which part wasn’t functioning properly, and she was instantly healed. You see, because of the presence of God and the power of God, the woman immediately felt in her body that the bleeding had stopped and verse 47 says,

“Then the woman, seeing that she could not go unnoticed, came trembling and fell at his feet. In the presence of all the people, she told why she had touched him and how she had been instantly healed. Then he said to her, "Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace” (Luke 8:47-48).

In the same way, many of us would be healed, we’d be set free, if we’d just make Jesus the object of our prayers and come into his presence. Whatever it is that you’re experiencing, wherever it is that you’re struggling, you’ll experience personal breakthrough, personal victories, in his presence. The presence of God will touch your life, changing how you feel, changing how you spend your money, and changing how you live. The presence of God will change what you eat, what you drink, and what you think. The presence of God will change your personal story.

And I know that some of you are thinking that you don’t need to pray, and you’ve ignored that opportunity week after week, but you do need the presence of God, because you’ve got a personal hemorrhaging problem. There’s a struggle, a battle that you’re losing, something’s bleeding, and that hemorrhaging will be healed by the power released by the presence of God. The power is released through his presence to heal your smoking, your drinking, your eating, or your pornography. The power is released through his presence to heal your disease, your depression, and your anxiety.

You see, we need his presence because it’s the only thing, the only way that we can overcome sin. It’s impossible to do it yourself, that’s why it’s been 12 years, that’s why you promise God that you’ll never do it again, but then the next week you’re doing the exact same thing. There’s only one thing that keeps us walking in righteousness and holiness. And it’s not our religion, it’s not our standards, it’s not even our deepest held convictions, but the Bible says it this way,

“Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,' says the Lord Almighty” (Zechariah 4:6).

You see, we just don’t have the power on our own. The only power we have, the only power we get, is when we touch his presence. You see, when we touch his presence his power begins to flow, and the first thing that power does is it helps you and I to overcome our personal problems. This woman said,

“If I only touch his cloak, I will be healed” (Matthew 9:21).

And so, it’s reaching out to him in faith, and touching his cloak that helps me to overcome my personal problems. His presence helps me to be a better husband, a better friend, and a better person. His presence helps me to be holy and maintain a life of purity when nobody else is watching.

That’s what David said, “It’s the presence… It’s the Lord who delivered me from the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine” (1 Samuel 17:37).

You see, because God’s presence is here, his power is here, and he enables me to kill my lion and to kill my bear. And so, when I get up here or when I go wherever God has called me to go it’s easier to throw a stone at Goliath because God’s presence is here. He’s going before me and he’s fighting my battles for me.

In fact, when Jesus was baptized in the Jordan River and he experienced the presence of the Holy Spirit resting upon him, the power of God came upon him, but he didn’t do mighty miracles, instead the Holy Spirit led him into the wilderness. The Spirit of God led him into that place where there was a personal battle with temptation. And it was in that place, in the wilderness, where Jesus won his first personal victory.

You see, it was the power of the Holy Spirit, released from the manifest presence of God, that will lead you to your own personal victory. And so, if in your own personal life right now, you’re feeling defeated, it’s not because you’re bad, it’s because you’re weak. And because you’re weak, there’s only one solution, and that’s to get in the presence of the Holy Spirit. You just sit in his presence until power flows, you sit in his presence until things change, you sit in his presence until you begin to reflect his glory, like it was with Moses on Mount Sinai. It’s in the presence of God where your presence and God’s become the same.

And so, as we close, I want to encourage you to seek his presence, to humble yourself, maybe to get on your knees or bowing face down in his presence. You see, God wants to fill you with his presence, he wants to meet with you and fill you with his love. As you encounter his presence like that, you won’t want to do anything else but love him, and to live holy and live righteously, because your personal victory is found in the presence of the Lord.

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