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SERMON TITLE: One-on-One & Short Prayers Please, says Jesus

SCRIPTURE: Matthew 6:5-8, Romans 8:26-30

DATE: September 2, 2018

Check out the service at www.fpcd.org.

Why Pray? Series. Read also Psalm 62:5-12

Do you ever feel like your world sounds like this?¹ (Listen to song “Noise”) It makes your head hurt doesn’t it. Noise makes Jesus’s head hurt, too. READ Matthew 6:5-8

David experienced a different kind of clamor when he was running into the desert. Probably it was the wild blast of his breath as he ran looking for a safe place. Ever feel like that? When he stopped for a moment perhaps he prayed this Psalm:

“Let all that I am wait quietly before God, for my hope is in him. He alone is my rock and my salvation, my fortress where I will not be shaken. My victory and honor come from God alone. He is my refuge, a rock where no enemy can reach me” (Ps 62:5-7).

You see the contrast.

On the one hand our culture inundates us with noise, and we expect to have a public audience in much of our lives and on the other hand Jesus calls for utter quiet and privacy. We are to be alone with God, one-on-one.

Contrast Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat—with going in your closet by yourself, shutting the door, and talking only to God.

We are throwing out there for all to see the things we are thinking and doing, so we have a large audience in mind versus taking those thoughts into the most private place we have and sharing what’s on our mind with God alone.

Mark the contrast.

How much time do you spend with noise compared to the time you spend in a very quiet place with God alone?

Mark the contrast.

What if you would spend 20-30 minutes in a closed door room praying? God says, “You’ll be rewarded.” Twenty minutes is 1.5 percent of your day in luxurious calm with God. Not convinced?

Then your hope needs to be built in why you should connect with God. That is one of our missions at First Presbyterian. Take your bulletin. Let’s read the bottom together: *Connecting with God and sharing the good news of Jesus Christ with the community.*

To connect, Jesus said, “Go in your closet, close the door, then **pray short.**” That should be everyone’s favorite Bible verse! Get alone, look up, and pray short.

Prayer is not a horizontal look to others but a vertical look up to God. By going private, we learn to see God, whom we don’t see, as actually present and real. Praying short helps you get in perspective whose words are important. And you can begin to hear God’s voice but you have to develop the habit of quietness.

“O my people, trust in him at all times. Pour out your heart to him, for God is a refuge for us” (Ps 62:8). Something happens to us when alone and quiet before God.

When you get used to quietness and expect the Holy Spirit’s presence, then you can begin to hear God’s voice at other times.

This week I picked someone up from the airport. The plane was slightly late and I was slightly early so I parked. The first hour was \$4.00—I’d easily get out in an hour. So off to meet my party I went. The plane was delayed on the tarmac. Then the party I was picking up was sitting in the back of the plane. I am watching my watch—checking the arrival board again—texting my party—getting impatient.

The time was cutting close to my hour. I am irritated. It’s going to cost me \$8.00! Where are they? I keep looking at every passenger. Suddenly as I watched one passenger after another pass by, I heard these words in my head. *I know that person; he’s one of mine. And that one is far from me. That one has experienced some hard times. I’m really proud of that person. Look how that dad greeted his little boy. That gives me great delight.* The words were enduring, making me smile and enjoy the moment. And again,

Are you really going to be grumpy when your family gets off the plane? Is \$8.00 going to be reason for them to see unhappiness in your face? Wouldn’t you like to be free to enjoy greeting them with a big hug? I know every single

¹ Kenny Chesney, “Noise,” https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kAXRC_hxk

person coming down this hall and everything about them. There's not one thing that escapes me.

And then the divine words stopped. I stood silent, thinking about the exchange. As a result of his talk, my whole mood changed. I wanted to be like him, and the worry over the \$8.00 evaporated. As I watched people now, I realized I had just experienced a vertical link that was undeniable. How wealthy I felt hearing that conversation.

When I exited the parking garage, the charge was only \$6.00. I gladly paid. 😊

So what if when we pray, we do not know what to pray or we don't see God's will? Let's hear it. READ Romans 8:26-30

Not knowing God's will is part of the human experience. God knows that. But what a relief, the Holy Spirit does know God's will and He helps us. We do not have to be perfect. The Holy Spirit straightens out all our words and our motives so that our prayer corresponds with God's will.

In Brooklyn, New York a man became a pastor of a church with a dilapidated building and few people. His first offering was \$85.00 and the mortgage payment was \$252.00. The \$85.00 brought the checking account balance to \$160.00. The next day the pastor prayed, "Lord, you have to help me. We have to pay this mortgage." The following day he told himself, 'Maybe someone will send some money out of the blue like what happened with George Mueller—he just prayed and the money or whatever would arrive to meet his need.' But nothing was in the mail except bills and fliers.

The pastor writes, "I sat at my little desk, put my head down, and began to cry. "God, what can I do? We can't even pay the mortgage." He had no options. The midweek service would draw three to four people, and maybe \$10.00.

"I called out to the Lord for a full hour. Finally I dried my tears and had a new thought. *Wait a minute! Besides the mail slot in the front door, the church also has a post office box. I'll go across the street and see what's there. Surely God will answer my prayer!*"

But that again was empty. As he returned to the church, these thoughts crossed his mind: "Was God abandoning us? Was I doing something that displeased him?"

Can you relate? Have you had those times when you prayed and nothing happened? So you thought of another solution and it didn't pan out? Then you hoped something else would come through but the problem just goes on and on, bringing you to the end of your rope?

Returning to the church, as the pastor unlocked the door, there on the foyer floor was something that hadn't been there just three minutes earlier: a simple white envelope. No address, no stamp-nothing. Just a white envelope. He opened it to find ... *two \$50 bills.*

He began shouting all by himself in the empty church, "God, you came through! You came through!" He made the mortgage payment. Later he would write, "To this day I don't know where that money came from. I only know it was a sign to me that God was near--and faithful."²

Was it God's will that the church pay their mortgage? Certainly! Was it God's will that a church of fewer than twenty people should survive? Yes! However, the pastor did not know or have the faith to believe it.

God helps us have faith when we pray. God helps us experience the fact that God is truly a rock to lean on when we are in distress.

Today that church has 10,000 people. It has been built on prayer. People pray every hour of the day in that church.

Where is your quiet place? Is it your desk or the side of your bed? We have a sanctuary here that is a quiet place. How many of you have stopped here to pray? Do you have some things to pray about? Some overwhelming cares? Family members who need prayer? Finances that are pressing? Do you need more faith?

What about the church? What are our church's needs? Open your bulletin to the finance report. This is of concern to all of us. Have you been concerned enough to pray about it? You might notice other things. A short few years ago we had twelve men in the choir. Now we have four. Would it be God's will to have this choir loft filled again? Who is willing to pray and ask God to supply more singers?

Someone said, "Why pray if God already knows about our needs?" God loves dependency. God loves to answer our prayers. God loves active relationship with you.

Don't settle for noise. Go into your closet, close the door, and ask God for help. God wants to mold you to be like Jesus, and Jesus prayed. "Pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus" (1 Thes. 5:17-18).

AMEN

² Jim Cymbala, *The Promise of Answered Prayer: Personal Encounters with a Listening God* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 8-9.