

The Connected Prayer (Dear God #5)

Sermon by Todd Lester

November 29, 2015

John 15:7 But if you remain in me and my words remain in you, you may ask for anything you want, and it will be granted!

Matthew 6:7-8a (MSG) The world is full of so-called prayer warriors who are prayer-ignorant. They're full of formulas and programs and advice, peddling techniques for getting what you want from God. Don't fall for that nonsense.

HOW TO REALLY CONNECT WITH GOD

1. BE _____

Psalm 46:10, Psalm 131:2, Luke 5:16, Philippians 4:6-7

2. BE _____

Matthew 6:5-6

3. BE _____

Matthew 6:7, Matthew 6:9-13

4. BE _____ **GOD WILL ANSWER**

Hebrews 4:15-16, Hebrews 11:6

Connecting With God

Complete the following statements about how you connect with God or find inspiration. Be prepared to share one or more of your responses with the group.

I CONNECT WITH GOD BY...



Reading the Bible



Being Outdoors



Brainstorming With Others



Hearing Triumphant Music



Being Artistic



Reading an Uplifting Book



Attending a Worship Service



Seeing a Gorgeous Sunset



Taking a Walk



Praying

One time I felt especially close to God was when ...

This week I felt close to God when ...

This group helps me to feel close to God by ...

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Icebreaker/Introduction

The 'Connecting With God' activity is a warmup exercise that helps people get thinking about when and how they feel close to God. Give some time for reflection and then ask group members to share some of their thoughts (always is a good idea for the leader to go first to help set a level of expectation about how much to share).

Ask if there was anything from this week's message on prayer that stood out – either a point that was made that really resonated with them, or perhaps a question or difficulty that came up for them.

Read John 15:7

Try to recall some of the ways Todd said people try to connect with God. Can you think of other ways? What are some ways that have been meaningful or helpful for you?

Have you at times considered prayer to be 'a duty'? Did it bring guilty feelings, or did it help you to be more devoted to prayer?

What techniques or formulas or advice about prayer have you run across that you would consider 'nonsense'?

HOW TO REALLY CONNECT WITH GOD

1. BE STILL

Focuses on Psalm 46:10, Psalm 131:2, Luke 5:16, Philippians 4:6-7

Are you comfortable with silence? Where or when does it happen in your life?

Todd said that 'to have quiet in your schedule you have to schedule it.' Do you? Should you? What are some times of the day or week that might work for you to schedule time for quiet?

Do you agree with Todd's statement that prayer is the key to having peace of mind? If you struggle with worry or anxiety how could prayer help?

Luke 5:16 says Jesus often withdrew to pray. How often do you think He did that? How often would you like to do it?

2. BE SINCERE

Focuses on Matthew 6:5-6

Have you ever struggled with being honest with God in prayer? What can get in the way of honesty in prayer?

Compare corporate/group prayer with private prayer. What are the advantages and disadvantages of each? Are you comfortable participating in group prayer? If not, what holds you back?

What is your reaction to Todd's examples of clichés that get used in prayer? Can they become meaningless? How can we avoid that? Is it possible to adopt a phrase we hear and it still be sincere/honest?

How do we avoid overanalyzing our prayers and the prayers of others?

3. BE SIMPLE

Focuses on Matthew 6:7, Matthew 6:9-13

What keeps you from praying? Do you agree with what Todd said about needing to forgive others keeping us from prayer?

Todd pointed out that Jesus' admonition to keep seeking, asking, knocking is not to get God's attention but to help us to understand what is important to us. Does this help you better understand Jesus' words?

What do you think it means to ask for God's kingdom to come, for His will to be done on earth?

Todd said that what we should really call the "Lord's Prayer" would be Jesus prayer in the garden of Gethsemane. In this prayer Jesus struggled with what he was facing but in the end said 'not my will, but Yours, be done.' What prayers in your life have been similar to this?

4. BE SURE GOD WILL ANSWER

Focuses on Hebrews 4:15-16, Hebrews 11:6

How do you understand God's grace and your faith working together in your approach to prayer?

How have faith and doubt been part of your walk with God? Have you experienced seasons where one or the other of these have been especially strong? What has influenced these times?

What are practical ways that help you stay (feel?) connected with God?

Is there someone in your life who needs to hear this message of God's grace – that no matter what they've done or how little belief they can muster, that God still loves and cares for them?

Can you identify with the father in Mark 9:27 who asked Jesus to help with his unbelief? Can you think of a specific time when you prayed that prayer?

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HOW TO REALLY CONNECT WITH GOD

1. BE STILL

Psalm 46:10 Be still, and know that I am God!

Psalm 131:2 I have calmed and quieted myself, like a weaned child who no longer cries for its mother's milk. Yes, like a weaned child is my soul within me.

Luke 5:16 Jesus often withdrew to the wilderness for prayer.

Philippians 4:6-7 Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus.

2. BE SINCERE

Matthew 6:5-6 When you pray, don't be like the hypocrites who love to pray publicly on street corners and in the synagogues where everyone can see them. I tell you the truth, that is all the reward they will ever get. But when you pray, go away by yourself, shut the door behind you, and pray to your Father in private. Then your Father, who sees everything, will reward you.

3. BE SIMPLE

Matthew 6:7 When you pray, don't babble on and on as people of other religions do. They think their prayers are answered merely by repeating their words again and again.

Matthew 6:9-13 Pray like this: Our Father in heaven, may your name be kept holy. May your Kingdom come soon. May your will be done on earth, as it is in heaven. Give us today the food we need, and forgive us our sins, as we have forgiven those who sin against us. And don't let us yield to temptation, but rescue us from the evil one.

4. BE SURE GOD WILL ANSWER

Hebrews 4:15-16 ... So let us come boldly to the throne of our gracious God. There we will receive His mercy, and we will find grace to help us when we need it most.

Hebrews 11:6 Anyone who wants to come to Him must believe that God exists and that He rewards those who sincerely seek Him.