

Media and Graphics Notes

Sermon Starter Video?	Yes
Sermon Notes?	There are several sermon notes and scriptures
Other Notes	

Key Questions

What is this sermon about?

This sermon is about prayer and what it means to pray constantly.

Why is this sermon important?

It is important because prayer is not about the words that we say or don't say, it is being attentive and responding to God's word in our life.

What is the context of this sermon?

This sermon is essentially one of the chapters of Steve Harper's book, "Five Marks of a Methodist." I used the iBooks edition as the basis for this sermon, which can be found online at https://itun.es/us/_NnO3.l

What are the next action steps?

Pray from the heart.

There is no one-size-fits-all style.

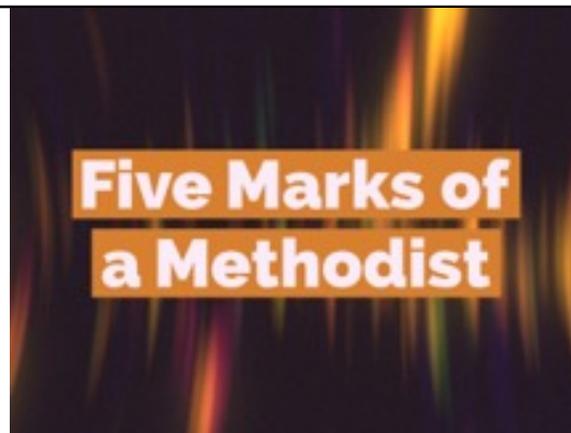
Silent prayer is as holy as spoken prayer.

Praying a prayer from a prayer book is as sacred as praying in tongues.

Prayer is the disposition of our heart toward God.

What is the good news (bottom line)?

The good news is that prayer is not about the words that we say or don't say, it is attentiveness and a response to God's word in our life.



Metadata

Topic(s)

1. Change Lives
2. Grow

This content is adapted from Five Marks of a Methodist by Steve Harper.

12th Sunday after Pentecost
Five Marks of a Methodist - A Methodist Prays Constantly
First United Methodist Church of El Dorado
Text Online at <http://bit.ly/28O4ffi>

August 7, 2016
1 Timothy 2:1
Preaching Target Word Count: 1,843
Audio Online at <http://bit.ly/2aSas7m>

3. Worship

Sermon Books of the Bible

1.

Tags

sermon, worship, church, Methodist, UnitedMethodist, UnitedMethodistChurch, FirstUnitedMethodistChurch, Eldorado, Kansas, GreatPlains, AnnualConference, GreatPlainsAnnualConference, prayer, pray, attention, attentiveness, God, Jesus, vine, branches,

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Transition

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1 Timothy 2:1, CEB

First of all, then, I ask that requests, prayers, petitions, and thanksgiving be made for all people.

Response to Scripture

One: The Word of God for the People of God.

All: Thanks be to God!

Introduction

Sermon Starter Video

Play sermon starter video.

Series Review

Buildings last because they sit on a firm foundation. Without a good foundation, buildings may exist for a while but they can't stand for long. John Wesley, founder of the Methodist movement, understood that this is also true for our life of faith.

In 1742, he wrote *The Character of a Methodist*, which describe the "distinguishing marks" of a Methodist person. His original document remains a gift to us today. This sermon and series are adapted from the book *Five Marks of a Methodist* by Steve Harper.

Sermon Notes and Scripture Study

Take Notes - Bulletin

I invite you to take notes during the message today. You can find a place in your bulletin or if you have a mobile device you can open the Bible App and use the Events feature to take notes

God Speaking

Listen for God's word for you – something that helps you live as a disciple of Jesus Christ. Whenever you hear it, write it down.

Tool for Spiritual Growth

Then, take it with you so that you can grow in your faith outside of worship by reflecting on what you heard today, praying for others connected with our community and reading scripture

This content is adapted from *Five Marks of a Methodist* by Steve Harper.

Prayer

Will you pray with me? O God, use these words to speak good news so that as individuals and as a congregation we will fear nothing but sin, desire nothing but you and live as part of your kingdom on earth as it is in heaven. Amen.

Vine and Branches

Discipleship as Relationship

Discipleship is first and foremost a relationship between Jesus and us. It is a living reality described in John 15 as the connection that exists between a vine and a branch. We follow, learn from, and serve Christ as his dearly loved brothers and sisters.

Key Scripture: John 15:15

To make this clear, Jesus told the apostles, in John 15:15, "I don't call you servants any longer, because servants don't know what their master is doing. Instead, I call you friends, because everything I heard from my Father I have made known to you."¹

Servant to Son

John Wesley described this shift in terms of his own experience, referring to it as the movement from being a servant to being a son. He didn't mean that servant hood is abandoned but rather that it is put into a new context. The entirety of discipleship moves from regulation to relationship, from the impersonal to the personal.

Keeping Faith to Following Jesus

Obedience is no longer marked by keeping the faith but by following Jesus - remaining in him as a vine remains in a branch. This doesn't diminish our faith, it transplants it into new soil.

Transition - Communion and Communication

Every relationship is established and maintained in communion and communication, so it comes as no surprise that Wesley describes the Christian life in relation to prayer, making it his fourth mark of discipleship.

Prayer creates and sustains our relationship with God

Prayer is the way we create and sustain our relationship with God. John Wesley viewed prayer as a means of grace, saying that "the chief of these means is prayer,

¹ John 15:15, CEB.

whether in secret or with the great congregation.” His view reflects the revelation of scripture and the witness of the Christian tradition, a view that draws from the words of Jesus himself in John 15, where he said that he heard from the Father and passed on what he heard.

Jesus hears from God; We Hear from Jesus

How did Jesus hear from the Father?

Surely it was in his own times of prayer.

How does Jesus make known to us what he has heard?

Surely it is in those times we spend in prayer with him.

Personal Example: Communication in a Relationship

[Tell a story of the importance of communication in a relationship]

“Use your words.”

Transition

Prayer creates and sustains our relationship with God

Prayer is a response to God

There is no fixed order to the marks, but it makes sense to put prayer after

- the love of God,
- our rejoicing in God, and
- our thanksgiving to God.

If nothing else, putting it here reminds us that prayer is a response to God. This is mystery, but the fact is whenever we pray, we are in some way responding to a prior movement of the Spirit in us.

Attentiveness to God

We often say, “I need to pray more,” but the truth is, we need to respond better. God is constantly speaking and showing; we are the ones who move in and out of connection with God. The heart of a disciple is a heart of attentiveness, and devoting ourselves to prayer is the main way we confirm our desire to hear from God and then put what we have heard into action.

Personal Example: Listening in a Relationship

[Tell a story of the importance of listening in a relationship]

I can't just use my words, I have to listen and respond to Nicole's words.

Transition

Prayer is a response to God.

This content is adapted from Five Marks of a Methodist by Steve Harper.

Prayer has many patterns

Example: John Wesley and The Book of Common Prayer

As a priest in the Church of England, John Wesley did this within the infrastructure of *The Book of Common Prayer*. Far from being a sterile ritual, it is filled with words that we *pray*, not just say. And as we do this, day after day over the course of our lives, the written prayers become living prayers.

A look at *The Book of Common Prayer* quickly reveals that the prayers in it

- arise from the Bible itself,
- guide us into prayers we wouldn't think of on our own, and
- enable us to pray formally and informally with both structure and spontaneity.

They give us an order for daily prayer, weekly prayer, and prayer that follows the salvation story of the Christian year. From childhood, John Wesley's spiritual formation was shaped by this kind of praying. And as we have already seen, he made use of liturgical prayers when others asked him to teach them how to pray.

Essentials of Prayer

You may or may not be drawn to liturgical prayer as your preferred way of praying, but we must all be taught to pray in ways that

- keep us rooted in scripture,
- open us to ideas and intercessions that aren't limited to our own experiences,
- establish a pattern while still permitting our own needs to find expression.

This kind of praying, whatever the style, can help us deal with wandering thoughts, and it can sustain us with true prayers when we go through times of spiritual dryness.

Variety of Prayer

Wesley's prayer life was formed for decades by the pattern of liturgical prayer which provides a way to pray all the time. But it is clear that formal prayers were only the infrastructural underpinnings for a larger life of prayer that expressed other kinds of praying.

- John Wesley prayed with words and in silence.
- He prayed alone and with others.
- He prayed when he felt like it and when he felt his prayers were making no difference.
- He prayed with the inspiration and guidance of the Bible and with the instruction of tradition.
- He prayed with the full range of emotions.

Clearly liturgical prayer isn't all Wesley has in mind when it comes to prayer.

This content is adapted from *Five Marks of a Methodist* by Steve Harper.

Key Quote: John Wesley

For he went on to write about prayer in a way that isn't bound to fixed formats and formal times:

"Not that *one* is always in the house of prayer – though *one* neglects no opportunity of being there. Neither is *one* always on *one's* knees, although *one* often is, or on *one's* face, before the Lord *our* God. Nor yet is *one* always crying aloud to God, or calling upon him in words. For many times "the Spirit *makes* intercession for *us*, with groans that cannot be uttered." But at all times the language of *the* heart is this: "*You*, brightness of the eternal glory, unto *you* is my mouth."

This kind of praying combines formality and spontaneity, fixed times and all time, times we are conscious of God and times when the Spirit prays for us.

Transition

Prayer has many patterns.

Prayer is putting all our attention on God

Focusing our heart on God

Key Quote: John Wesley

Wesley summarized prayer in these words:

"This is true prayer, lifting up the heart to God. This is the essence of prayer, and this alone."

Here Wesley is drawing upon the scriptural imagery of focusing our heart on the Lord. We put all our attention on God, so that we can allow Jesus to remain in us as he remains in God.

Key Example: Spiritual "Law of Gravity"

The imagery of focusing, or, as the King James Version reads "inclining" our hearts gives us a picture of prayer as a spiritual "law of gravity." With our hearts directed upward, whatever God wants to send our way will roll directly into our minds and hearts. The primary disposition for this is listening, giving attention by faith that God will send into our lives whatever instructions and inspirations God wants to us have. The key element in prayer isn't what we say to God but rather what God says to us.

Transition

Prayer is putting all our attention on God.

Conclusion

Good News

The good news is that prayer is not about the words that we say or don't say, it is attentiveness and a response to God's word in our life.

You don't need to say, "I don't know what to pray for," or "I don't know what words to use," or "I get stage fright at the thought of praying out loud, so I avoid prayer groups."

All these obstacles are overcome when prayer is a disposition of our heart. And because we are made in the image of God, with both the capacity and the desire to relate to God, that disposition is already present. The challenge of learning to pray is to connect with this disposition and move with it.

Call to Action

There is no one-size-fits-all style.

Silent prayer is as holy as spoken prayer.

Praying a prayer from a prayer book is as sacred as praying in tongues.

Prayer is the disposition of our heart toward God.

Wesley knew that by praying from the heart, it is possible to be fully engaged in the affairs of life while simultaneously being attentive to God. In this understanding of prayer, he stands in the line of those who, like Brother Lawrence, practiced the presence of God in the midst of daily routines.

Invitation

Your invitation today is to be fully engaged in life, while at the same time being attentive to God in prayer.

A disciple prays constantly.

Closing Prayer

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