

## Prayer: Partners with God

Message for Sunday, March 4, 2017  
by Bruce Fraser

**Scripture:** Ephesians 2:8-10

**Children's Message:** Read the Lord's Prayer, Matthew 6:9-13.

I can do something you can't do. And it's not because I'm bigger or stronger than you. It's not because I can reach higher than you. Even when you're grown up, you still won't be able to do this. In fact, you will never be able to do this.

But I can do it easily. I can do it with my hands tied up. I can do it with my eyes closed.

Any guesses what it is?

I can sit on your lap. You can't sit on your own lap; it's impossible.

Now here's something anyone can do: pray. Prayer is just talking with God. It's not hard. If you're old enough to walk and talk, you can pray.

This is a prayer that Jesus gave us, to use as a sample of prayer. Let's pray that together.

**Message:** "Prayer: Partners with God"

We're taking a few weeks this year to study what the Bible teaches us about prayer. I'm going to come at it today from another angle; I'm going to start by looking at something else altogether. I'll make the connection with prayer a bit later.

Erasmus was a leader of the church in the Middle Ages. He imagined what happened when after Jesus rose from the dead and returned to heaven. His story goes like this:

The angels gather around him to hear all that happened since he left. Jesus tells them of the miracles, his teachings, his death on the cross, and his resurrection.

When he finishes talking, Michael the Archangel asks Jesus, "But what happens now?" Jesus answers, "I have left behind eleven faithful disciples and a handful of men and women who have followed me. They will declare my message and express my love. These faithful people will build my church." "But," responds Michael, "Those humans are notoriously unreliable. What if they fail? What is your other

plan?" And Jesus answers, "I have no other plan!"

Of course that story is fiction, but there's a lot of truth in it. You and I are Jesus' plan for bringing the good news of his love to Stirling and beyond. There is no other plan. What an awesome responsibility!

Here's a famous passage from the Bible, one which summarizes the basic Bible teaching of salvation by faith, not by works.

**Ephesians 2:8-9, Today's English Version:**

**For it is by God's grace that you have been saved through faith. It is not the result of your own efforts, but God's gift, so that no one can boast about it.**

The message is clear: we depend upon the grace of God for our sins to be forgiven. God's love is poured into us, not because we are good enough, but simply because God is a God of love. There is nothing we can do to make God love us any more. It is all because of grace.

Now here's something interesting: verse 10 which comes immediately after that verse.

**Ephesians 2:10, Today's English Version:**

**God has made us what we are, and in our union with Christ Jesus he has created us for a life of good deeds, which he has already prepared for us to do.**

So, yes, we do good deeds. The reason that we do them is not to *earn* God's love, but *because* of God's love. God created us for the purpose of doing good deeds.

So, yes, we do good deeds. The difference is that we do them, not to *earn* God's love, but *because* of God's love. God created us for the purpose of doing good deeds.

Note this: "created us for a *life* of good deeds."

When I was in Cubs and Scouts, part of our promise was to "do a good deed for someone every day." God intends our caring for others to be a way of life, not just a once-a-day duty.

And note this: "*in union with Christ Jesus* he created us for a life of good deeds." Jesus living in us by the Holy Spirit gives us the power to love the unlovely, and the abundance to keep on caring even when we feel like giving up.

In other words, we work in partnership with God. Christians are not the strong, independent, I-can-do-it-myself type, but ones who readily admit our weaknesses. We do our part, and trust God to do his part.

You may be wondering, “What has all this got to do with prayer?” Here’s the connection: Prayer is part of our partnership with God, part of our working together with God.

We bring to God our hopes and fears, our needs and skills, our bodies and energies, and offer all that in worship. God receives our prayer offering, blesses it, and gives back to us all that we need. We then go and do our part in the Kingdom of God.

We see examples of this partnership over and over in the Bible. As the Israelite slaves were fleeing Egypt, they came up against the Red Sea, with the Egyptian army close behind them. Moses tried to reassure the people, telling them not to worry, that God will look after them, they don’t even have to lift a finger.

Exodus 14:14-16, Today’s English Version:

[Moses said,] “The Lord will fight for you, and all you have to do is keep still.”

The Lord said to Moses, “Why are you crying out for help? Tell the people to move forward. Lift up your walking stick and hold it out over the sea. The water will divide, and the Israelites will be able to walk through the sea on dry ground.”

In Acts 6, there was an issue of widows not having enough food. They prayed for God’s help, then appointed deacons to manage the distribution of food.

I’m reading Philip Yancey’s book titled simply *Prayer*, and he tells many stories of prayer; some are painful, some are poignant and some are powerful. In one chapter entitled “What Difference Does It Make?,” he tells of the upheaval in South Africa as the white minority was yielding power to the black majority. After decades of brutal and violent oppression, the blacks had their chance to exact revenge on their oppressors. Amazingly, the anticipated violence never happened, and it was largely due to the graciousness of the black leader

Nelson Mandela as well as the work of church leaders like Bishop Desmond Tutu.

Roy McCauley is a white Pentecostal pastor in South Africa whose weekly television ministry has a huge audience. That made him a valuable person to help with appealing for peace.

One day Mandela called on Ray for help. Forty-five black people had been murdered in a township, and Ray went with Bishop Tutu to visit and comfort the families. A week later the two returned to attend the funeral service at a sports ground filled with 15,000 people. As the service came to an end, anger surged through the crowd like a current of electricity. Impromptu speakers called for them to march together en masse and get their revenge. Ray noticed with some nervousness that he was the only white person present in that volatile crowd. Bishop Tutu turned to him and said, “Ray, don’t worry, I’ll take care of these marchers.”

Ray recalls, “I then saw one of the most moving scenes of my life. Desmond Tutu stood before the crowd of 15,000, motioned for silence, and in his high-pitched, melodic voice he began to speak. ‘I am your bishop, appointed by God.’ *Yes. That’s right! Preach it!* ‘I have been awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.’ *You got it! Yes, yes. Amen.* ‘And yet do you see that police dog over there? That dog can go on beaches in South Africa that would not tolerate my presence!’

“The crowd exploded. They were cheering and stomping and waving handkerchiefs. Tutu kept building momentum. He had them eating out of his hand. Then the most extraordinary thing happened. In the next thirty minutes, using nothing but words, this great man of God silenced the crowd, brought peace to that powder keg scene, and closed in prayer. And 15,000 demonstrators, many of whom were out for blood, simply turned around and walked home.”

In the next few years, Tutu was given the challenge to lead the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which went around the country hearing endless stories of torture, rape and murder. The leader of the rock group U2, Bono, visited and one day asked Tutu how he managed to find time for prayer and meditation. Tutu replied, “What are you talking

about? Do you think we'd be able to do this stuff if we didn't?"

That's a powerful example of a simple principle: God works with us to accomplish his purposes. What a wonderful privilege we have, that God trusts us with this awesome responsibility. Our prayer life is part of that partnership. In fact, how could ever do this stuff if we didn't have prayer?

### **Next Steps:**

- ) Prayer is a precious gift God has given to us. Yet we so often take it, and take God, for granted.
- ) Prayer is practical. Through prayer, we connect with God; we gain strength, hope, joy and love. In return, we give our love and our life to God.
- ) So take time for prayer. And then, filled with God's presence, we do the work God has given us.