

Tom Coop
Mark 1:35-39
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Too Busy NOT to Pray

Bill Hybels is the Pastor of Willow Creek Community Church in South Barrington, Ill. In 1998, he published a book entitled, *Too Busy Not To Pray*.

In it, he stressed the importance of prayer for those whose lives are overly hectic, stressed out and scheduled to the max – those who, like us sometimes, complain:

“I have so much to do, I just can’t seem to find time to pray.”

This led to his thesis: The more you have to do, the more you need to pray. The less time you think you have, the more time you need to spend with God.

Hybels says if you’ll first take time to pray, you’ll actually have more time for everything else – that it’s not a matter of time, but a matter of priorities and a matter of trust.

When you put God first and rely upon the strength of God’s grace to get things done, you become more effective and more efficient.

Most importantly, you realize it’s not all up to you – if you ask him, God will be up ahead, clearing the path and guiding the way.

I thought about that when I read the Gospel lesson for today. Jesus was busy healing people and casting out demons.

By the time Jesus went to bed, he must have been exhausted. You wouldn't blame him for sleeping in the next day or taking the day off.

But, no, according to Mark, *"Early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus rose up and went out, and departed into a deserted place, and prayed there."*
(Mark 1:35)

We all intuitively know that prayer is something we ought to do. If we need something, if we are confused about something, if we need guidance or direction, we have been taught to pray about it.

In fact, most of us have heard well-meaning friends ask us, "Have you prayed about it?"

Quick true story. After church last Sunday I ran some errands and then came home. I changed clothes and ... lo and behold ... I couldn't find my phone. I looked everywhere – car, downstairs, upstairs, even the trash ... no luck.

Since we don't have a land-line, I went over to Mike's and asked if he would come over and text me repeatedly to see if we could hear my phone. He did, but still no luck.

I finally decided it was lost or stolen and I called the insurance company to get a new phone sent to me.

When done, I thanked Mike for his help and drove him home.

On the way back, I realized I hadn't done one very important thing. Any guesses??? Right, I hadn't prayed about it.

So, I did. And when I arrived home, I looked through the car and house again ... no luck. I sat in my recliner depressed, when suddenly a thought came to me.

I had bought some AA batteries at Walgreens – maybe I put my phone in the drawer where all the batteries are – I looked, but didn't see it.

So, I moved them around and ... there was my phone
UNDERNEATH the batteries.

God came through. I never would have thought to look there. But, I have to be honest – there have been many more times when I prayed that I didn't get the answer I was hoping for.

Can you relate? You know that prayer is important but maybe you struggle with prayer because you never seem to get the results you are looking for.

Or, you know you need to pray but maybe you just don't seem to get any answer at all.

Maybe this frustrates you because you hear people talk about the power of prayer like God is eating cornflakes with them at the breakfast table every morning and when you pray it feels like you are ringing the doorbell to an empty house.

Maybe you are someone who has a heavy burden or a serious issue in your life and you have prayed repeatedly about it and you wonder if all your prayers are falling on deaf ears.

Maybe you have prayed for a troubled child, a sick relative, a job, a better marriage, or some other serious issue and you don't seem to be getting the answer you need.

And so, you wonder, "Is God listening?" Maybe you feel you are not doing it right and you think if you buy the latest book on prayer or attend a conference you can find the right prayer technique that will "open sesame"!

Perhaps you find the act of praying difficult because you get easily distracted and bored. Or like me, suffer from ADD.

"Okay God, here I am, I have this need and.... Is God really listening or am I just talking to myself? ... I do need to get to the grocery store... There is that email I need to return.... Well, I can always pray later.

"After all, this is God. He knows me. He knows my thoughts before I think them. Why do I have to pray when he knows what I am going to say? I can be doing something more productive with my time..."

Some of you may be skeptical about prayer.

You think the whole idea of the Creator of the world listening to one prayer among billions is ridiculous.

"Really? God has to listen to so many prayers! How does that work?"

Is prayer religious magic? Is it giving a cosmic Santa Claus a list? Is it putting our order into the universe? Is it crossing our fingers Christian style?

Maybe, the best way to understand prayer is to look to ... Jesus.

In our text, when Jesus woke up – he did what? He snuck off to a quiet place and prayed.

Last week my mouse died (computer mouse) and I had to buy a new one. However, when I set it up and tried to get it to work ... it wouldn't.

I tried and tried and tried. I was about to take it back to the store, when I realized that I had ... (I'm just a little embarrassed to admit this) ... I had neglected to turn on the computer.

So, I turned it on and all was fine.

Prayer is the “on” button that connects us to the power of God. Life without prayer is like life without power.

When Jesus got worn out, he knew he needed to step away. He needed to plug back into His purpose and position.

He needed to plug back into servanthood for and through God, his father. He needed to plug in and listen to God through prayer.

If Jesus needed a quiet place to talk with God and listen for the voice of God's Spirit giving him comfort and strength and direction, to get turned on and connected, don't we?

It's a crowded, hectic world for most people. Opportunities for time alone, much less for prayer, are limited.

Life has its immediate demands, its already scheduled priorities lined up to overwhelm us and keep us forever playing catch-up—jobs,

housework, yard work, kids, church, health problems, car problems, home repairs, accidents, ants, traffic, crowds, lines, appointments and, oh yes, sleep.

Of course, there might well be a considerable amount of time that we could devote to prayer that we use on other things — things that don't really have the kind of priority that prayer should.

For example, most of us have our favorite television show, and that's fine.

But, how often do we find ourselves sitting in front of the television — watching shows we don't really care about — just because nobody got up and turned the darned thing off?

The truth is, we make priorities out of things we care about.

It isn't that we don't care about prayer, it's just that it often seems like just one more chore on top of all the other chores.

And so, we tend to put prayer farther down the priority list. So, let me ask, "How's that workin' for you?"

I know that it is hard to pray when we think that God isn't paying attention. But in Luke 11, Jesus tells his disciples:

⁹ "So I say to you, Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. ¹⁰ For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened."

Sounds like Jesus is telling them that God always answers our prayers. Whenever we ask, God will answer. Whenever we search, we will find. Whenever we knock, God will open the door.

Ah, but, notice what Jesus did not say in this text. Jesus did not say everyone who asks receives the answer they want, finds what they are looking for, or has the door they want open opened.

God always answers us, but we may not always like the answer or expect the answer we get. What we want from God and what we receive from God, are often two different things.

God loves us too much to always give us what we want because sometimes what we want is not good for us or what is best for us, but God will always answer us.

Still, Jesus clearly states that there is something we can always count on to receive from God when we pray.

Jesus says that whenever we seek God in prayer, God will always give to us the Holy Spirit. A spirit to love us, mold us, shape us, guide us, empower us, and direct us.

This means that prayer is not putting our order in to God. It is not rubbing a magic lamp or giving a Santa Claus in the sky our list. Prayer is not getting our phrasing right so we can unlock the God machine.

Prayer is not “getting” from God; prayer is *intimacy* with God. Prayer is developing a relationship with God. That’s why it must be a habit.

The truth is that most of the time we don't want a relationship; we want a road map.

We pray, "Okay God, I don't need much of your time. You don't need to get too involved. Just give me some direction here. What should I do?"

And what does God do? God replies, "Just hang out with me for a while. Let's spend some time together. I want to show you some things."

We persist, "Lord, really. I don't need that much of you. Just give me a yes or no."

God replies, "Just abide in me and my love from day to day and you will find what you are looking for."

If you desire intimacy with God through prayer, I have a simple suggestion for you.

If you do what I am about to suggest you will experience the difference that prayer can make in your life.

For the next seven days, start your day with prayer. It doesn't have to be a long time, just five to ten minutes. You can stay in your bed, sit in a chair, or do it at the breakfast table.

Get a devotional or turn to your favorite passage of scripture. Read the devotional or scripture passage.

When you find that you are quiet on the inside, pray something like, “Lord, I want to get to know you better. I want to know your love. I want a relationship with you.”

Then, share with God what is on your mind and heart. Don’t hold back. Just share it. Believe me, he is listening and wants to hear from you.

Now, be sure to include not only your own needs, but the needs of others.

Then, before you end your prayer time, pray words to the affect: “Lord, I want to please you. I want to do your will. Whatever it is you want, that’s what I want too. I want to fit into your plans. So, show me the way.”

That’s it.

Jesus knew the power of submitting to God’s will. Perhaps Jesus’ most important prayer was the one he prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane.

His capture and crucifixion were close at hand. He was emotionally and spiritually exhausted. He was tempted not to go through with God’s plan.

And so, he pleaded with God to let the “cup” pass from him. He then prayed the prayer that changed everything — “Lord, not my will, but yours be done.”

Of course, this was not Jesus’ first prayer to God. He had been praying his whole life and ministry.

It was only because he had developed such love and trust for God, that when it came to the moment of truth, he was prepared to surrender to God's will.

Just imagine how close you could feel to God, if you prayed more. Imagine what God could show you, if you prayed more. Just imagine what God could do through you, if you prayed more.

Imagine the strength and wisdom you could have, if you prayed more. Imagine the opportunities from God that would open for you, if you prayed more.

Imagine the person you could become, if you prayed more. Imagine the relationships that could be healed, if you prayed more.

The kids were putting on the Christmas play. To show the radiance of the new born Savior, an electric light bulb was hidden in the manger.

On cue, all the stage lights were supposed to be turned off so that only the brightness of the manger could be seen.

But, the boy who controlled all the lights got confused. You see, ALL the lights went out!

It was a pitch black, tense moment. All of a sudden, out of the dark, the voice of one of the shepherds said in a loud stage whisper, "Hey! You switched off Jesus!"

Prayer is our connection to the source of power in life, God.

Jesus knew that. And if Jesus, the Son of God, needed to refuel, to reconnect, to plug in and recharge, what makes us think that we can get along without it?

You and I have a source of power and energy just waiting to be tapped. And all you have to do is plug in. And stay plugged in, today, tomorrow, and the day after that.

So ... are You Plugged In?

Amen!