

Pentecost Sunday School Lessons

Sermon Series: "Psalms of the Spirit"

Date: June 28th

Topic: Prayer

Open with prayer

Before reading...

When was the last time you prayed other than during a meal, before a meeting, or during worship?

Main Scripture: Psalm 143:1-11

(Reading is attached)

Opening Questions:

- Why is prayer important to our walk of faith?
- How can or does the spirit move during prayer?
- Why does prayer calm out hearts and minds?

What is the purpose of prayer?

The purpose of prayer is multifaceted and nuanced. Throughout scripture, prayer is used in many differing ways including as a greeting, praise, lamentation, confession, benediction, and in worship (and numerous other ways). For many of us today, prayer becomes something that is relegated to worship, meal times, and when there is a major concern or worry; however, the main purpose of prayer is much deeper and important. Through prayer the things of God can be revealed and guidance offered. Prayer also becomes a time of peace and reflection. In a 24/7 world, prayer is one of the few times in which persons can let go of the outside and give their heart over to the power of God's spirit. More than anything, however, prayer is the best and most effective means by which the people of God can commune with their Creator and with each other.

Scripture commentary:

The Psalmist for the 143rd Psalm is seeking relief from something lurking over him/her. Whether it is because of some sin or other action (or worry regarding the "wrath" of God) the psalmist seeks to ensure God's judgment does not come against him/her. In typical human fashion the Psalmist seeks immediate action. The language is pointed and direct, wanting immediate relief from the seemingly imminent judgment of the Lord. Yet, as the psalm continues the anxiety of the Psalmist slowly fades and the focus becomes the work of God that can be worked. Instead of lamentation, the psalm shifts to deliverance and salvation. Through the work of God's spirit, the Psalmist knows that relief can come. The final line entreats to God that the life of the Psalmist be saved through the very righteousness of God.

- How is the Psalmist's plea a prayer?
- How can you identify with the Psalmist's need for "immediacy"?
- Where is the Holy Spirit in this prayer/Psalm?

Reflection:

Far too often prayer becomes an afterthought in our walk of faith. It becomes relegated to worship and daily moments of repetition rather than being an intrinsic part of one's daily practice of faith. The Psalmist exemplifies this tension by wanting an immediate answer to the prayer. However, we must reign in our need for instant answers and delve deeper into the Holy Spirit. As the Psalmist shows, patience and listening are the most important aspects of prayer. We must set aside our need for the "now" and allow God to work to shape the "yet to come". Instead of always speaking, God calls us to take the time to intentionally listen and reflect. It is in this search for a response that the Holy Spirit begins to take over. When the noise of the present has passed away and the clutter of our daily lives been cleared, then we can see the revealing of the new things of God.

- Why is listening for God so difficult?
- When have you found yourself speaking *at* God rather than praying to God?
- What is the danger in our prayer life becoming an "afterthought"?

Closing:

Consider this question again:

When was the last time you prayed other than during a meal, before a meeting, or during worship?

Close with prayer.

Psalm 143:1-11

¹Hear my prayer, O LORD; give ear to my supplications in your faithfulness; answer me in your righteousness.

²Do not enter into judgment with your servant, for no one living is righteous before you.

³For the enemy has pursued me, crushing my life to the ground, making me sit in darkness like those long dead.

⁴Therefore my spirit faints within me; my heart within me is appalled.

⁵I remember the days of old, I think about all your deeds, I meditate on the works of your hands.

⁶I stretch out my hands to you; my soul thirsts for you like a parched land. Selah

⁷Answer me quickly, O LORD; my spirit fails. Do not hide your face from me, or I shall be like those who go down to the Pit.

⁸Let me hear of your steadfast love in the morning, for in you I put my trust. Teach me the way I should go, for to you I lift up my soul.

⁹Save me, O LORD, from my enemies; I have fled to you for refuge.

¹⁰Teach me to do your will, for you are my God. Let your good spirit lead me on a level path.

¹¹For your name's sake, O LORD, preserve my life. In your righteousness bring me out of trouble.