

Making Prayer Your Second Language

“Touching The Heart Of God”

Luke 10:17-20

Henri Nouwen, a great theologian but a man who was mainly known for his deep spirituality, tells a story in his best-selling book *“The Wounded Healer”* that ought to cause each of us to just stop in the midst of our Christian journey and rethink what we’re doing and how we’re living.

Here’s the story. One day a young fugitive, trying to hide himself from the enemy, entered a small village. The people were kind to him and offered him a place to stay. But when the soldiers who sought the fugitive came and asked where he was hiding, everyone became very fearful.

The soldiers threatened to burn the village and kill every man in it unless the fugitive was handed over to them before dawn. So the people went to the village pastor and asked him what to do.

The pastor, torn between handing the young man over to the enemy or having the people killed, withdrew to his room and began to read his Bible, hoping to find an answer before dawn.

After many hours of reading and searching, early in the morning, his eyes fell on these words from John 11, *“It is better that one man dies than the whole people be lost.”* He had his answer. The pastor closed his Bible, called the soldiers, and told them where the young fugitive was hiding.

After the soldiers led the prisoner away to be killed, there was a great feast in the village because the pastor had saved the lives of the people. But the pastor did not celebrate. Overcome with a deep sadness, he remained in his room.

That night an angel came to him and asked, *“What have you*

done?” The pastor said, *“I handed over the fugitive to the enemy.”* The angel said, *“But don’t you know that you have handed over the*

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Messiah?”

“How could I know?” the pastor replied anxiously. Then the angel said, *“If instead of reading your Bible you had visited this young man just once and looked into his eyes, you would have known.”*

Now please don’t misunderstand the meaning of this story. **Henri Nouwen** is not suggesting that we ought to read the Bible less. He is not suggesting that we ought to forsake the pursuit of truth through Scripture. But what he is suggesting is that nothing, absolutely nothing, can take the place of spending time in God’s presence.

Someone has said it like this: **Worship comes before service, and the King before the King’s business.** One of the things we must guard against as Christians is this subtle tendency to become so busy working **for** Christ that we fail to spend much time **with** Christ.

Do you remember what Jesus said to His disciple after they returned one time from a very meaningful time in ministry? He had sent them out two by two into the nearby towns and villages to preach the gospel and to heal the sick and to minister to those who were in bondage to sin; and the disciples came back all pumped up and excited and enthused and said, *“Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name”* (Luke 10:17 NIV).

Jesus said, *“Do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven”* (Luke 10:20 NIV). The disciples were excited about what they were doing. And let’s face it! We live in the midst of a world that is obsessed with success, accomplishments, achievement. We want to be going somewhere. We want to be doing something. We want to be moving forward.

But Jesus says, *“Listen! The thing that ought to excite you is not what you’re doing but who you are. You are the children of God.*

You are related to God. Your names are written down in the Book of Life. What you should treasure above anything and everything else is your relationship with God.”

Do you know what touches the heart of God? It’s not what we do for Him that moves Him. That’s now what He rejoices over. That’s not

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what He longs for. He longs for our presence. **Even the heart of God thirst after love.** And what He wants from us first and foremost is our presence.

For the last 8 weeks we have been focusing upon prayer in our time together during Sunday worship. I’ve challenged you through a series of sermons to **Make Prayer Your Second Language**—to become proficient in conversing with and listening to Almighty God.

Why is that so important? Why have we spent 8 weeks talking about prayer? Here’s the reason. **The primary purpose of prayer is to experience the presence of God.** Prayer is not something to add to your “do” list. Prayer is not primarily a means to spiritual growth—although certainly we do grow closer to God through prayer. Prayer is not our way to get God to do something.

The chief end of prayer is not to seek God’s power but to experience His presence. And nothing, absolutely nothing, can take the place of spending time in God’s presence. Worship comes before service, and the King before the King’s business.

I’m reminded of a story that the great English preacher, **G. Campbell Morgan**, used to tell about a father and daughter who were great friends. He was a widower, she was unmarried. They lived together in a little house and would spend long hours together just sitting and talking and enjoying one another’s company.

But then the father suddenly noticed a change in his daughter’s

behavior. If he went for a walk, she excused herself from going and would stay in the house. If he sat in the den, she retired to the privacy of her bedroom.

He began wondering, *“What has happened?”* He grieved about it. He just couldn’t understand. *“What have I done? What’s the problem?”* And then his birthday came and she presented him with a beautiful sweater when she had created and crafted with her own hands. With an excited smile on her face, she said, *“Here, Dad, I made this for you.”*

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Suddenly he understood what had been happening the previous three months. He said, *“Darling, I like the sweater very much. It is beautiful and you have worked very hard on it. But the next time just buy a sweater and let me have your time. I would rather have my child than anything she could ever make for me.”*

You know, some of us work so hard **for** the Lord but spend little time **with** the Lord. We know His word but we miss the warmth and vibrancy of His presence. We carry His name but lack His Spirit.

The real secret of prayer is secret prayer. And so I want to encourage you this morning as we spend these next few moments in the presence of God in a time of Holy Communion to commit yourself a fresh and a new to be a person of prayer.

Jesus said, *“My house will be called a house of prayer”* (Matthew 21:13 NIV).

God longs for our presence. He thirsts for our love. And the primary purpose of prayer is not to seek God’s power but to experience His presence. You are His temple, His house, and He wants His house to be called a house of prayer.