

McCabe United Methodist Church

Talking with God series Part 2

“Short. Simple. Honest.”

Sermon on Luke 11:1; Matthew 6:5-8; Matthew 18:1-4 (NLT)

(May 20 & 21, 2017)

Pastor Mark Ehrmantraut

Let us Pray: Holy and mighty God, may the words of my mouth, and the meditations on each of our hearts, be acceptable in your sight. You alone are our Rock. You alone are our Redeemer. Amen.

Lord, teach us to pray. It seems like a simple, easy request. One of the disciples in the Luke 11 says to Jesus: *Lord, teach us to pray.*¹

It sounds so simple, but, I don't know about you. Sometimes it just doesn't feel that easy.

Over these weeks we're thinking about prayer, we're thinking about our conversations with God. On the surface it seems so easy, yet even the disciples asked Jesus for guidance.

Lord, teach us to pray.

With that in mind, hear from our reading in Matthew chapter 6, Jesus said:

⁵ *“When you pray, don't be like the hypocrites. They love to pray publicly. They make a big show on the street corners and in the synagogues. They want everyone to see them. Instead, ⁶ when you pray go away by yourself, shut the door behind you, and pray to your Father in private. Then your Father, who sees everything, he will reward you.*

⁷ *“When you pray, don't babble on and on as the Gentiles do. They think their prayers are answered by saying the same thing over and over.*

⁸ *Don't be like them. Your Father knows exactly what you need even before you ask him!*

¹ Luke 11:1 (portion of)

Jesus teaches, don't make this a show. Don't make this harder than it needs to be. In fact, it's okay to have a conversation with God. It's okay to keep it short, simple, and honest.

Later, in Matthew 18:1, we hear:

¹ About that time the disciples came to Jesus. They asked him: "Who is greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven?"

It sounds short. It seems simple. It seems an honest question...

But keep in mind, these are adults asking and they're not asking in good faith. They're not seeking God's will in this question.

- ✓ They're seeking their own glory.
- ✓ They want to bend God's will.
- ✓ They want to bend God's will to fit their own personal preferences, their own personal desires, and their own assumptions about the world.
- ✓ Who's the greatest in the Kingdom of heaven because I want to be the greatest!

All of a sudden, it's not so simple. Matthew continues in 18:2 & 3:

²He [Jesus] called a little child to him and put the child among them. ³ Then he said, "I tell you the truth, unless you turn from your sins and unless you become like little children, you will never get into the Kingdom of Heaven.

Jesus is saying, don't make this harder than it needs to be. Just be faithful. It's okay to keep it short and simple. Just be honest.

Approach God with a humble, honest heart as he explains in Mathew 18:4

⁴ anyone who becomes as humble as this little child, they are the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven.

To the question of who's the greatest...

Well, the short, simple, honest answer is: it's not you or me...

Lord, teach us to pray...

Help us turn from our sins. Help us approach you God with humility.

Have you heard of praying using the ACTS format?

Do you know what I mean when I say the ACTS prayer format?

The ACTS structure is one way to frame a prayer.

There are times it can be helpful for me when I pray...

If you write out the word ACTS on a sheet of paper...

You're welcome to do it if you want...

I'd probably write it starting at the top and going down the side.

[It's started on the next page for your convenience]

You have A...C... T... S...

A The letter A in ACTS stands for **Adoration**. We begin by Praising God. We praise God because God is God and we're not. It might sound like "*Mighty and Holy God*" or it might sound like "*God, You're awesome!*"

C The letter C – **Confessing**. It might sound like: "*Forgive me*" or "*I'm sorry.*" I heard Rick Warren the other day talking about confessing. He said: Confessing to God is everything we need to do for forgiveness.

But, if we want healing to take place... If we want healing to take place we need to pray with someone we trust. We need to confess to a person we trust. We pray to God and we pray WITH other people too.

And confessing includes repenting. Honest confession also includes what we're going to do differently in the future.

Forgive me God for my gossip. I need help using only words that are helpful and healing.

T The T in the ACTS structure stands for Thanksgiving. Giving Thanks. Thank you, God. Thanks for the beautiful day. Thanks for my family. Thanks for food. Thanks for helping me.

S And the S stands for Supplication which means to humbly ask for something. We make our requests known to God in a humble, earnest manner. We're mindful that God says: Make your requests known. Don't worry. Instead pray. Tell me, tell God what you need.

You have A...C... T... S... So, putting it together it might sound like:

^A*God, You're awesome.*

^C*I'm sorry for passing judgment on that person I don't even really know.*

^T*Thank you for my family and for food and for loving me.*

^S*Help me be nice even to people who don't always bring out the best in me.*

It can be Short. It can be Simple. And it has to be Honest.

Who is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven?

The kids are.

- Kids don't make it harder than it needs to be.
- They Trust and obey.
- They Believe and Act.
- Kids talk to God.

Bishop Rueben Job took John Wesley's rules for living our faith and made them short, simple, and honest. He summed up living our faith with 3 Simple Rules:

- Do No harm.
- Do Good.
- Stay in love with God.

Do no harm. Do good. Stay in love with God.

Short. Simple. Honest.

This makes sense to kids. Children understand it. Yet sometimes we make it harder than it needs to be.

What do you mean by doing good?

Ask a child. They can tell you if something is good or not.

What do you mean by doing no harm?

Ask a child. They can tell you if something is hurtful or not.

When Jesus was teaching the disciples about prayer, he didn't say to make it complicated. He didn't say to justify your actions to prove you're right.

Jesus said to trust and obey. He said you might have to take up your cross. Just follow Him.

And he said: *When you pray, don't be like the show-offs. Don't be like the hypocrites who love to pray to draw attention to themselves. This isn't a show. This isn't a performance. Praying isn't an exhibition for everyone to judge and to see.*

Jesus did say: *But when you pray go away by yourself, shut the door, and pray to God.*

Back to the basics, like a child

It's okay if your prayer is short and simple. Just keep it honest.

Lord, teach us to pray.

In Matthew 6, after this, Jesus taught the disciples what we now call the Lord's Prayer.

It's A little longer, but it's still short, simple, and honest.

Or, there's a short, simple, honest prayer that is sometimes called the Jesus Prayer. It's a prayer to open the heart.

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.

It's short. It's simple, and it's brutally honest.

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.

Friends, I would invite you to pull out this cartoon bubble insert in your bulletin.² Pastor Jenny referred to it last week. On the top, it has the green

² More **#Talking with God bubbles** can be found on the McCabe website (<http://www.mccabeumc.com>) on the Messages page, Under the "Talking to God" Section)

cartoon bubble and on the bottom, it has some short, simple prayer starters. Last week I used the prompts and wrote 4 simple, short, and honest prayers.

My first one:

I love you God because you bring hope, healing, and peace into my life.

Second,

I need you.

Third,

Please help me to serve you with humility and boldness.

Fourth,

What do you have in store for us?

I'd like to invite you to take a few moments right now to talk to God. It's a few moments to spend in prayer. You can write or you can decide not to write. Please know it's okay to keep it short, and simple, and honest...

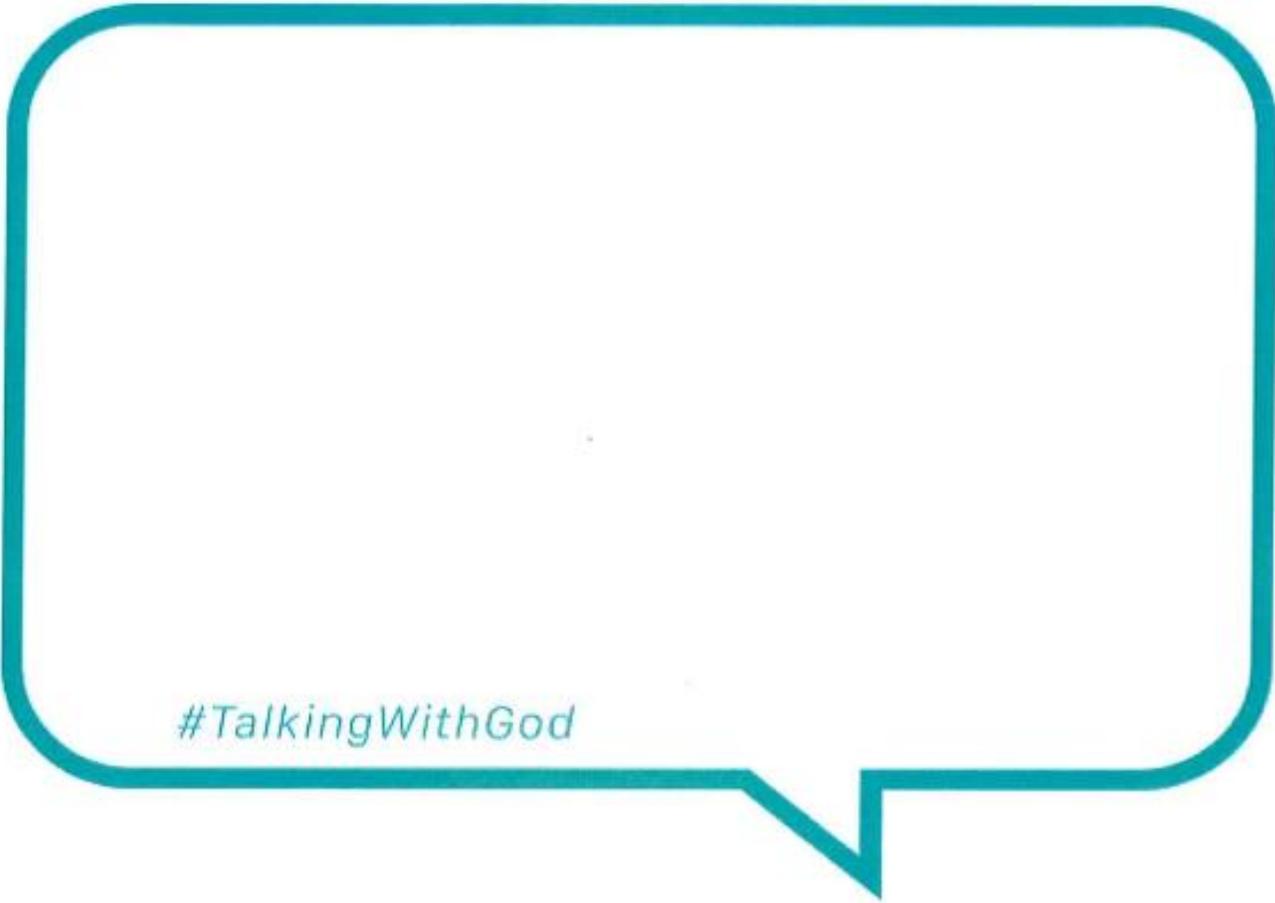
Let's pause to spend some time in silent prayer...

Adam Weber writes:

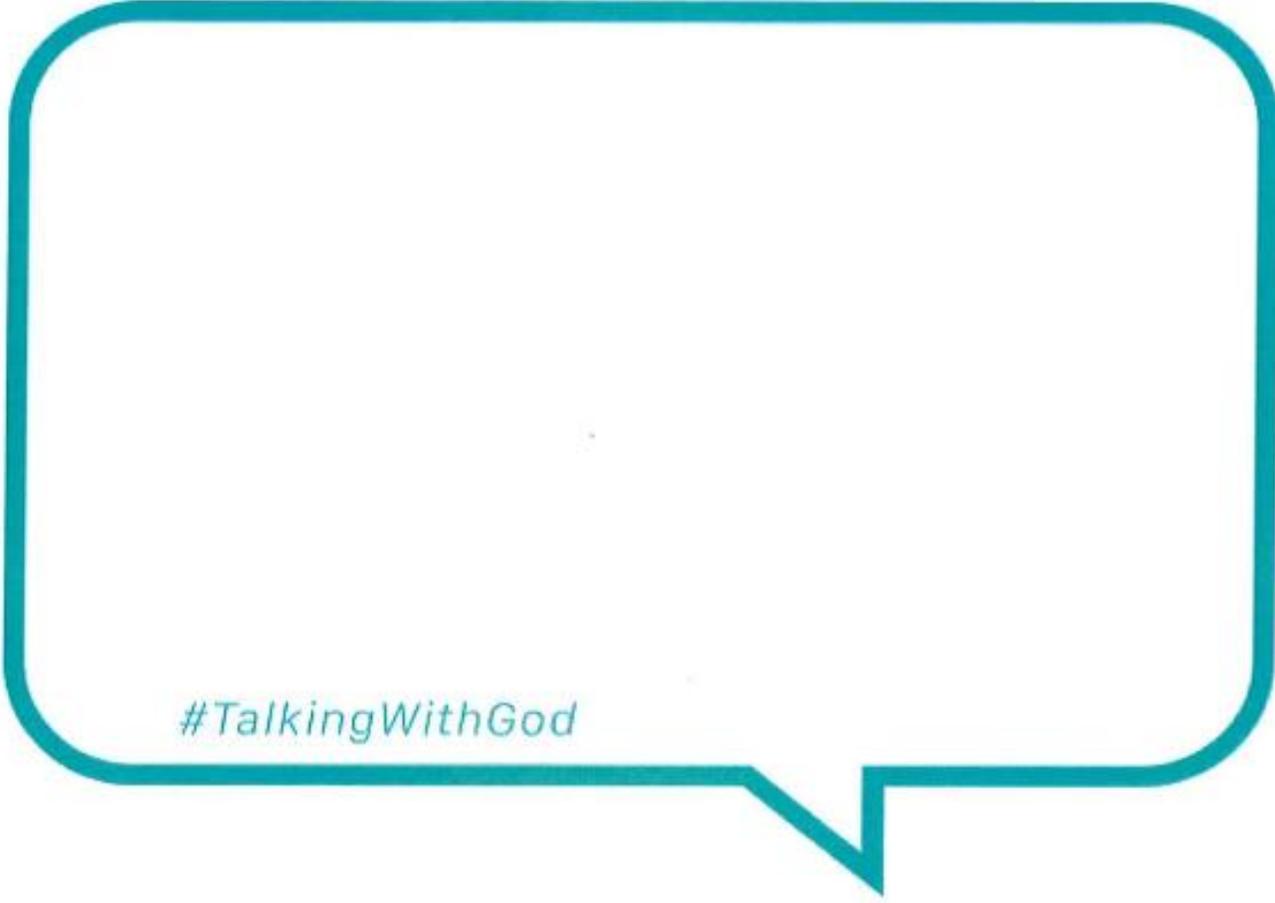
"Just talk to God. God just wants to hear from you."

Let's pray:

Jesus, we love you. Help us believe like a child. Help us talk with you and listen to you. Help us trust you. Forgive us. Heal us. Thank you. Amen.

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#TalkingWithGod

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