

## Family Link (part 4): “Prayer, talking to God”

Romans 12:9-13 & Matthew 5:43-48

9-29-12 & 9-30-12

Pastor Ray Baker

A little boy was overheard praying: “Lord, if you can’t make me a better boy, don’t worry about it. I’m having a real good time like I am.”

One blistering hot day when the family had guests for dinner, the mother asked her 4 year old son, Johnny, to say grace. “But I don’t know what to say,” the boy answered. “Oh, just say what you hear me say,” the mother replied. The boy bowed his head and murmured, “Oh Lord, why did I invite these people here on such a hot day?”

Today we’re here to talk about the fourth step in our family link: **Prayer**. We’ve already talked about sharing the best and worst part of our day, the importance of reading scripture and discussing scripture, and today we’re going to talk about prayer. As you know, we are asking everyone to participate in the Family Link. This time is for traditional families, blended families, singles, widows, and widowers. Everyone can participate. If you’re living alone you can call a friend or family member to participate with you.

I think we often treat prayer like it’s a remote control. We think we can pick it up when we need it...push the power button...and God will respond. Then we can push play to get what we want...or change the channel when we don’t like the way things are going...or rewind to ask for a do over...or record when we hope we can have the same great experience in the future. We hope our prayer remote will offer instant results.

The electronic age, and more recently the digital age, has changed the way we relate to the world and each other. Think about it...when was the last time you “DIALED” a phone, with a rotary dial? I imagine most of us haven’t “DIALED” a phone since the early 1980’s. When was the last time you “TYPED” a paper or a letter? I haven’t typed a paper or a letter since 1985. Now we send emails, texts, and tweets that are read and deleted...never to be seen again. And when was the last time you purchased a TV without a remote control? I don’t believe I’ve ever purchased a TV without a remote control. Now we sit on the couch and spend very little time with our friends and neighbors.

I can remember being a kid and standing up to walk across the room and turn the dial to watch “THE ONLY OTHER” TV station. Can you imagine turning the dial on your TV to number 600+ to see NBC in HD?

Today, it seems like we have a remote control for everything: TVs, VCRs, CD players, camcorders, cable boxes, satellite dishes,...and even gas fireplaces! I would be surprised if anyone born after 1990 has purchased one of these devices without having the option to include a remote control.

We love our remotes. They allow us to sit back and relax. We don't even need to change our position to change our channels. We love the convenience. We love simplicity.

**But, there isn't a remote control for our prayer life.**

Rabbi Harold Kushner wrote: "Prayer is not going to God with your shopping list. Save that for Santa Claus. Prayer for me is talking in the presence of God, not so much talking to God or with God, but talking in God's presence. Because when you understand that you're talking in God's presence, you become different." (Harold Kushner, "What Good is Prayer?" Questions of Faith [Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1990], 10).

We're a nation that prides itself on our "Religious Freedom," our spirituality (even when we're not religious), and on our ability to pray whenever and wherever we want. Of course, this freedom has been challenged. There are some limitations on being able to pray in public. For example, a teacher cannot pray out loud in their public classroom. But this doesn't mean the teacher, or a student for that matter, can't say a silent prayer in school. I have known a number of teachers and students who pray in school.

Speaking of school let me test your memories. Do you remember that in 1998 the members of Congress voted on a constitutional amendment to allow prayer in public places? The vote was 224 votes in favor and 203 votes against the amendment. A number of people were very upset the congress didn't reach the necessary 2/3 majority in both houses.

This seems to be a strange inconsistency, because there is an official chaplain for both the US House and Senate...and Morning Prayers are offered at the beginning of every day the congress is in session?

Here is another inconsistency. Do you know how many members were in the congressional chambers for Morning Prayer on the three days preceding the vote for a constitutional amendment to allow prayer in public places? There were 18, 8, and 18 members present on those three days.

There is a cartoon showing a man praying. In a series of frames he said: "Dear Lord, make me more aware...especially of the needs of other people...but not so aware that I'll have to change the way I live!" In the last frame of the cartoon he acknowledges: "Something tells me this prayer has taken a wrong turn."

A number of years ago a group of people had gathered to pray for a family who was in great financial troubles. While one of the deacons was offering a fervent prayer for blessings upon the family there was a loud knock on the door. There stood the son of one of the local farmers. "What do you want boy?" asked one of the elders. "Pa couldn't come to the meeting, so I brought his prayers in the wagon," replied the boy. "What do you mean asked the elder? I brought Pa's prayers. Just come and help me please and we'll bring them in. When the group of men followed him out to Pa's wagon they found that Pa's prayers consisted of potatoes, flour, bread, oatmeal, turnips, apples, jellies, and clothing. After bringing in Pa's prayers the meeting was dismissed. (Our prayers are often lived out in our actions.)

A woman named Susi Lockard wrote an article for the Upper Room magazine (May/June, 2008). "When my children were infants I rocked them to sleep, I sang to them and prayed for them. I remember holding my 14-month-old son and praying for his future relationships with his roommates, his friends, his wife. For years, I came back to the same prayer. I know I must have wearied the Lord with my prayers; but Matthew 7:7 tells us to keep on asking, seeking, and knocking."

When my son went off to college, I couldn't wait to hear about his roommate. He said: "Well, mom, he is a recovering drug addict. He was sent here for a year of rehabilitation and is studying art, taking part in sports, and trying to re-enter normal life."

Susi FELT as if God had let her down, and her disappointment came through when she said: "I don't understand. I have prayed for 18 years for you to have a good roommate who would be a good influence in your life." Her son offered a very wise response: "Maybe his mother was praying the same prayer."

Her son knew that he had been nurtured all his life and now had a chance to nurture a young man with serious problems. GOD answers our prayers with wisdom greater than our own. She thought her son needed a strong Christian friend; God knew her son needed to be a strong Christian friend.

Since I arrived at McCabe, two years ago, my prayer time has become much more regular. I'm more intentional about praying for my family, for this congregation, for the people who are sick, and for the families of those who have died. I also take more time to listen for God when I'm in my office, or the prayer chapel, or in the sanctuary; but then again it is just as likely that I will hear God when I'm with one of you, because I firmly believe that God is speaking to us and through us. So, it's important for me to listen.

Frank Laubach, an Evangelical Preacher, put it like this: "Prayer at its highest is a two-way conversation, and for me the most important part is listening...."

By taking the time to listen we are more apt to hear God speak in the silence of our prayers or in the conversations we have with each other.

I firmly believe God is calling each one of us, both you and me, to do greater things in and through this church. But in order to find our way we need to "go to the Lord in prayer."