

Chat Room

“Prayer is being with God.”

Psalm 25:1-5

First in the series: Lights! Camera! Action! (“Church” is a verb, you know.)

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Searching for Conversation

The phone rang *again* and I looked at the read-out for a caller ID. It was name of the school I attended to earn my bachelors degree. The best school, to be sure, but I knew what this was about. “Oh,” I said to my wife Laura, “it’s school again. It’s a student working for the development office.”

“Well, maybe it would be good to answer it,” she said. “They’ve been calling every week for I don’t know how long.” So I answered the phone and I was right. It was a random call, the kind you know will eventually end up with a request for money, and the conversation went something like this:

Student: “Hi, I’m Rebecca from Michigan State. How are you?”
Me: “Fine.”
Student: “How’s the weather where you are?”
Me: “Hot and off-and-on rain; it’s the same here as where you are.”
Student: “Oh. I’m not from Michigan. Are you near-by?”
Me: “Just about a hundred miles to the east...”

And she continued this friendly, chit-chatty conversation that wasn’t going anywhere; and I was beginning to feel it was taking up my time. I finally told her I had just made a contribution. She told me she didn’t know why they hadn’t taken me off the computerized list, thanked me and we said our goodbyes.

I couldn’t help but analyze what had just happened. So much friendly fluff: she was apparently coached to make the small talk and she was good at it. But why?

It occurred to me: my life is filled with relationships and talk that ranges from small to deep. For me, the call was an interruption. Yet, I realized that if I were lonely – I would have eaten it up. She would have sounded warm and caring and could have drawn me to make something of a donation in response. Maybe even a generous one.

Connection: all this was for that. If there’s something people need more than anything beyond sustenance, safety, and shelter, it must be connection. Perhaps that’s what sometimes attracts people to blogs and chat rooms on the Internet. If you’re

lacking for community close at hand you might experience something of the touch of another even if it's just on the computer. Random or not, at least a chat is connection.

Being with God

*Unto you, O Lord, I lift up my soul.
O my God, in you I trust;
do not let me be put to shame;
do not let my enemies exult over me.*

Prayer. Poets of the ancient Temple and the court of the Jewish king wrote the book on what it is. Praises and laments, pleas for help, celebrations for the crowning of kings, and songs of thanksgiving: prayer is anything but random. It is the very act of trusting God – the manner of being together with the Creator and Sustainer of the Universe.¹ So intense and intimate: sometimes you might not be able to confine it to silence or a polite intone; sometimes you have to shout; sometimes you have to sing:

*Unto thee O Lord, I lift up my soul.
Unto thee O Lord, I lift up my soul.
O my God, I trust in thee.
Let me be not ashamed, let not my enemies triumph over me.²*

This particular psalm is a prayer for help, yet in it is a declaration of who God is: loving and faithful and one in whom you can bet your life.³ Like all the other psalms, it is more than a petition. It's an affirmation of faith, a connection with the Lord of the Universe, the Ground of our being, the Source and Savior of our lives.

Real connection. Not just chit-chat.

Some people have observed over the course of debates whether prayer should be allowed in schools that there will always be prayer as long as there are tests.

O Lord, let me draw on all I studied to do well in answering these questions...

O Lord, would you please make me pass this, even though I never cracked a book...

Prayer is often thought of as what you do when you need something from God. *Heal me. Do this for the ones I love. Please give...* Jesus said to ask and you will receive... But what if, when you pray, your prayer is not limited to ordering up what God is supposed to do for you, as if you were ordering a meal off a menu. What if it were so much more?

Prayer can be time to remember how much you are loved by God and of times you have been blessed. Prayer times are moments when you can become real before God and say who you are and what you've done without reservation. You can give over even the things you can't stand about yourself or your actions to God who ever-understands and ever-forgives and ever-heals.

And prayer is not only time for you to talk or dance or sing before God. It is also time to listen.

It's for taking time to allow God's Word and Life to settle on you and settle in you to form you – make you more who God wants you to become.

Practicing Connection

Next time we have a service of baptism or receive a member in the church and you repeat the commitments of church membership, you'll say, "...we renew our covenant faithfully to participate in the ministries of the church by our prayers..." it means you will pray for the strength of the church and you'll lift up people on our prayer list for healing and care. But you will also be saying that you promise to be connected.

Connected to God to be shaped into the beloved servant God wants you and me and all of us to be. You'll be saying that this connection will be a discipline.

Nothing random about it.

May you make prayer a habit. May it be your habit of being connected to God.

*Unto thee O Lord, I lift up my soul.
Unto thee O Lord, I lift up my soul.
O my God, I trust in thee.
Let me be not afraid, let not my enemies triumph over me.⁴*

¹ J. Clinton McCann, Jr., "The Book of Psalms" The New Interpreter's Bible Commentary vol. IV. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press. © 1996. p 777.

² Unto Thee O Lord, words and music by Charles F. Monroe. © 1971 by Maranatha! Music

³ Op cit., McCann.

⁴ Op cit., Monroe.