

Series: **STAPLES - October 4, 2009**

**TALKING WITH GOD**  
**Matthew 6:5-13, 7:7-11**

1. When we lived in Pennsylvania, the place where we banked had a pre-ATM drive-through system that was quite different than anything here. You would drive into one of the lanes, and a voice from a speaker would ask you how they could help. In the distance, through thick glass, you could see the outline of the person talking.  
-Next to your car window was a little receptacle attached to a vacuum tube. There was a sliding door—and a cylinder. To deposit or withdraw money, you would put all your stuff into this cylinder, and put the cylinder in the receptacle—where it would immediately get beamed up. Disappear! And then it would come back. The little door would open, the tiny space-ship capsule would re-appear—with your money or your deposit slip inside. Then this nasally, mechanical voice, “Thank you. Click!” ***I love this country!***
  - a. Whenever I went through this procedure, I made a ***transaction***. I came at the right times. I pulled my car up—and opened my window. I told the mysterious voice behind the glass what I wanted. Sometimes I put money in the cylinder and it got beamed up; sometimes I received money from the cylinder. Sometimes the cylinder had good news; sometimes it had bad news.  
-But there was really no relationship with the person behind the glass. Just a voice. An outline. A transaction. I gave them what they wanted; they gave me what ***I*** wanted. Sometimes. Connecting us—wires and a Plexiglas tube.
  - b. I get the feeling that many people in our world view prayer kind of like that—or ***hope*** it will be like that. That prayer is the ***transaction*** God requires in order for us to get what we want and need. And that there is a procedure you must follow in order for the process to work. And if you do it right—you get what you want.  
  
-What happens when you ***don't*** get what you want? Well, over time—you lose hope. You sit in your living room, or your car—or wherever—and send these pleas off into space, wondering if they maybe get stuck in the rafters or insulation—or sunroof. And you think, ***What's up with prayer?***
2. Just a little about prayer in our world. It is ***extremely*** wide spread—if polls are telling the truth. Apparently more people pray everyday than drive, exercise or make love. Larry King, who describes himself as an agnostic, has written a book on prayer—and the list of people he's interviewed on how ***they*** pray is both surprising and impressive.  
-According to Jesus, the Father is good to both the just ***and*** the unjust—and prayer is a kind of inner instinct to thank Someone for good things—and give us Someone to complain to when good things ***don't*** come. Sometimes prayer is this desperate cry for help—when life gets relentless and grim.  
  
-And every faith has a form of prayer. Muslims will spread out their prayer mat and pray five times a day—wherever they are. It's a law—a duty. Other faiths see prayer

as a form of magic. What's strange is that even a large number of atheists say they pray.

- But what people **say** about this time in prayer—averaging about 5-7 minutes is revealing. When asked if their time praying is **satisfying**, most say, “Well, not really!” When asked if they sense the presence of God when they prayer—the most common response is, “Not all that often.” In fact, people tend to describe prayer as more of a burden than a pleasure. They feel **guilty** about the amount of time they spend praying—and about their lack of faith. Has anyone here besides me ever felt **guilty** about not praying enough?

-So what is prayer? Well, at the **basic** level, prayer is simply **talking with God**; it's a personal conversation—or a community conversation--with Someone who has always existed, holds all power—and has the answer for **every** question that's ever been asked. It's an ongoing conversation that Jesus made possible—and that the Father has made himself available for—24/7.

-The second really important thing to understand about prayer is that it is **not** a **transaction**; it is a **relationship**. All good relationships that work and have intimacy and love at the core are based on **communication**. And that's why prayer is not an obligation, not a ritual, not a duty, and not magic—it's part of a relationship. All relationships have their exciting, thrilling moments when things are **happenin'!** But relationships also have their, **not much is happenin'** moments—and their tough moments. And that's why prayer--like all relationships—takes time, patience, faith and perseverance.

3. The fascinating thing about Jesus is that **He** connected with the Father through prayer—even though He was God with skin on. His teaching is powerful because not only did He prayer—He is the receiver of prayers! Let's look at His teaching:

**When you pray, don't be like the hypocrites who love to pray publicly on street corners and in the synagogues where everyone can see them. I tell you the truth, that is all the reward they will ever get. But 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, will reward you.**

**When you pray, don't babble on and on as people of other religions do. They think their prayers are answered merely by repeating their words again and again. Don't be like them, for your Father knows exactly what you need even before you ask him! (Matthew 6:5-8 NLT)**

- a. Jesus corrects some common misunderstandings on prayer that people tend to fall into. The worst form of prayer abuse is using it, not to talk sincerely to God—but as a way to enhance your spiritual profile.

***It's what God expects. And if you work it right, you'll be seen as a truly spiritual person!***

-Imagine a friend doing that to you. Only talking to you when it makes them appear cool, or like a good friend or a good Dad. It's not about friendship—it's

about **them**. “Boy, I wish *I* had a friend like that!” Well, God’s not crazy when people who claim to be his friends do that to Him, either. In fact, when pride becomes a part of doing **anything** that’s good—whether it’s prayer, knowing the Bible, helping the poor, talking about Jesus—it totally contaminates it.

- b. The second thing Jesus deals with is a magical or ritualistic view of prayer. This view focuses on results—getting what you want from God. In other words, there are specific techniques you can use to make your chances of “win” with God better. We hear this all the time—that God likes certain techniques better than others. Special phrases, special people or formulas, fasting, postures. This isn’t prayer—it’s **magic**.

-Magic is the attempt humans make to manipulate spiritual forces to get what you want from them. Sometimes it’s subtle. Like the thought that the **more** people you get praying, the **more** likely God is to answer it. Please understand; we are encouraged to pray for and with each other—and it’s a **good** thing for a lot of people to be involved. But prayer is **not** a vending machine—where if you push the right buttons and put in the right amount of change—you get your miracle. Prayer is a **relationship**—not a transaction.

- c. The third thing Jesus mentions is that prayer is **not** us telling God something He doesn’t know. He says, “Your Father knows what you need before you even ask Him.” That frees us from thinking that we have to give God a detailed explanation of what’s going on or how life works on planet earth.

-There’s something I see sometimes among Jesus’ followers sometimes that fits this magical view of prayer. It fits into the **jinx** category. It kind of goes like this: “Whatever you do, don’t express any doubt—because that could cancel out the miracle God wants’ to do!” In other words, the miracle we need is **dependent** on the quantity or quality of our faith.

-My understanding—and it comes from Jesus—is that His love is the driving force in the relationship we share. That He is able to work **even** through my doubt. That His nature is to **give**—not withhold. That my pain and worry and doubt do **not** change the fact that He **leans** toward me in love. Does that make sense?

4. The next thing Jesus deals with is **how** to pray. We call it **The Lord’s Prayer**. Jesus has just said, “Don’t babble mindlessly.” Based on that—I believe that Jesus intended this prayer as a pattern for how we pray—not as an incantation we mindlessly repeat over and over.
- a. Maybe before we look at the specific prayer He taught, we ought to look at how Jesus prayed. Sometimes people think, “Well, if God already knows what I need and has a plan—**what’s the point? Does prayer actually change anything?**”

-If it doesn't, then Jesus wasted a whole bunch of His life doing it. Jesus prayed about **everything**. He often walked away from crowds of people who were sick or demon-possessed or lost in life—to pray.

\*He prayed for direction. Before he chose the 12 disciples who would be His closest friends—he went up to a mountain and prayed all night. Our take-away on this is that having a place—or space—to be alone with God away from the **thousands** of distractions--l-pods, cell phones, computer screens, TV—even people—is important.

\*Sometimes Jesus broke out in spontaneous thanks for what His Father did. Prayer was kind of the overflow of a full heart.

\*And sometimes prayer poured out of Jesus as an agonizing stream of fear and inner pain. The night before he died, Jesus was in the Garden with his disciples and was in this cosmic battle with Satan where his prayers are described as **loud cries and tears**. And when He was done? He faced the torture and the cross with unbelievable peace!

\*And Jesus interceded for others. He blessed children, raised the dead—and even prayed for us! For Jesus—prayer, talking with the Father, was an ongoing dialogue--as normal as breathing.

- b. When Jesus' followers **saw** this conversational relationship--they wanted Him to teach them how to pray. And this is what He said—and I'm reading from the New Living Translation—so it will sound different:

**Pray like this: Our Father in heaven, may your name be kept holy. May your Kingdom come soon. May your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today the food we need, and forgive us our sins, as we have forgiven those who sin against us. And don't let us yield to temptation, but rescue us from the evil one. (Matthew 6:9-13 NLT)**

\*The first thing Jesus says is, "Remember **Who** you're talking to!" My temptation when I pray is to back up the truck and dump out all my worries and concerns—then **whine** about them for most of the time I have left. What Jesus tells us here is brilliant. "Remember your **relationship**. Talk to Him as a **Father**—not as some distant impersonal Deity. He has the perspective and the power of Heaven!

-God has revealed Himself to us by the Names He's give us. As our Sanctifier, He has the power to change us and repair the damage sin has done. He's the One who dwells with us—and the One who brings peace and well-being and hope. He's revealed Himself as All-powerful; as the One who sees everything. He's showed Himself as the One who provides for us—who Heals us. He's the Good Shepherd of Psalm 23.

-It helps me to review these Names of God. See, I forget...that He holds all the power, that He has my best interests at heart. I **love** calling on Him as my Shepherd—telling Him that I'm counting on him to help me chill out and not be so wound up; to find me when I lose the plot in any given day; to calm my fears

when I'm scared; to prepare the way for me—and to help me leave love and mercy behind in my tracks.

-Jesus is saying, "Remembering **Who** God is—and that He **longs** for a relationship with you will help you get in the right frame of mind to have a conversation!

\*This next part, **May your Kingdom come soon. May your will be done on earth as it is in heaven**, reminds us that we just need to let God be God. That He has a plan—and what we're asking Him to do needs to align with mission of restoring, redeeming—and making all things new. Jesus says a few verses later, "Put the Kingdom—what God is doing first—and you'll have **all** you need!" -Friends, this is a clear call to bring our day and our plans into alignment with God. It's the prayer form of loving God with all your heart, soul, strength and mind—and loving others as you love yourself. **Father, I know that Your will being done all the time is what makes Heaven the place everyone wants to be; so let me fit into your plans!**

\*Once we align ourselves with the Father, **then** Jesus urges us to ask for our **daily** bread. **Daily!** Later he talks about this **daily** thing. He says, "Don't worry about tomorrow. Just be a kid. Keep the conversation going—and leave tomorrow to...well, tomorrow.

-I think of daily bread not just in terms of food and money—I think of it in terms of the strength, wisdom and assistance I need—and my family needs—in any given day. This is the space where I bring to God what's bugging me; what's eating me up, worrying me—about my wife, my children, my friends, my calling—everything associated with my life.

-To me, it seems like Jesus is giving his people a nudge. "Go ahead. Need something? **Ask!**" Just a little later on in his message, He says:

**Keep on asking, and you will receive what you ask for. Keep on seeking, and you will find. Keep on knocking, and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks, receives. Everyone who seeks, finds. And to everyone who knocks, the door will be opened.**

**You parents—if your children ask for a loaf of bread, do you give them a stone instead? Or if they ask for a fish, do you give them a snake? Of course not! So if you sinful people know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give good gifts to those who ask him. (Matthew 7:7-11 NLT)**

-It's like Jesus is saying, "Why not just ask? He's not a grump or a stingy old man. He's filled with kindness and grace. If He says "No"—it's not because He's having a bad day. It's a **loving** "No!"

\*The next part of the prayer talks about our **relationship** with the Father. Jesus urges us to repair what needs to be repaired. To ask for forgiveness. Part of this is the personal relationship with the Father that sin damages. When we defy what He has said to do—the relationship suffers.

-Let's say when you head to work tomorrow morning—you see that your neighbor's dog has messed on your lawn for the **5<sup>th</sup>** time—and he's still there doing it! So you pick up a rock and throw it at the dog. Bad decision—you see that your neighbor's watching the whole thing. You get in your car—and try to start the engine. The battery's dead—cause you left your lights on! Now. Is this a good time to go have a friendly conversation with your neighbor—and ask for help? There's a little something you have to clean up, right? See, prayer is ultimately about a relationship—not a business transaction! A broken or strained relationship with God makes conversations awkward. Make your relationships with God and others right—and the conversation will go a lot better!

\*The final part is a plea for protection. Given the fact that you've just asked for forgiveness—chances are you'll be tempted to do the same dumb thing again. What you're saying is, "Lord, now **keep** me from falling for the temptation when it comes!"

-How many of you have a pretty good idea of **where** you'll be tempted? Our weaknesses are in very different areas. Get specific! Say, "God, I **know—I know—I'll** be tempted in this area. Help me not to play games. Give me the inner courage to not think the thoughts, go to the places, say that things, pick the fight—that will suck me into getting defeated again! When you see me heading for the ditch, **remind me! Stop me! Help me!**

\*Of course, the final part of Jesus prayer is this recognition that life is not a battle between us and the others who are more evil and selfish than we are. This is spiritual warfare that involves evil powers in high places. My battle is not against little petty sins that will inconvenience my life; my battle is against deceptive powers that will cause me to **lose the plot in life...trade my future for a pot of stew**. And the bottom line—**I NEED GOD! I NEED TO MAKE SURE I'M FIGHTING FOR THE RIGHT SIDE!** And God is **delighted** to help.

-And that's Jesus' prayer. I have been praying, based on that outline, for 20 years or more—and I've found that it pretty much covers **anything** I want and need to pray for. It keeps my life in perspective! It keeps me from just whining and complaining and blubbering! You ought to try it on, if you haven't—and see what happens.

5. I want to try something on you—if you don't mind. The Markham Fair is on—and **this** year—they added fudge as a category. I brought a few pieces...!

-Has it ever seemed to you that having your prayers answered is a little like being in the right place at the right time to catch flying fudge? You see **other's** prayers being answered—and it's like they caught the fudge—you didn't! The question people ask is—"Why do the answers to my prayers seem sporadic?" And I'd have to say—**I honestly don't know**. I do know God hears—and listens—and is filled with compassion—but **sometimes** says, "No"—or "Not yet."

-Answers to prayer are sometimes so hidden and subtle that you can only see them when you look back and realize that, like Joseph said out of the years of pain his brothers caused, “You meant it for evil—but God meant it for good.” You get the feeling that God is hiding His identity sometimes. But He’s **brilliant**—and He is moving **all** things toward the restoration of all that’s been lost.

-And that’s why prayer takes faith. Not surges of ***I believe-I believe-I believe-I believe...*** But faith in the redemptive power of God—the character of God—to make good things come of out evil plans—and then make it look like coincidence! God is that big. Jesus says, “Remember who you’re talking to—the ***Mastermind of History!*** You have a plan—His is better! Higher! And ***way*** more powerful. Maybe there’s a better question than, “How can I get my prayer answered—***quickly!*** It’s—what is God looking for?

- a. Well, God’s looking for **honesty**. For people who will just be honest about how they are, what their expectations are, and what their sins are. He’s looking for people who, when they’re angry—will trust Him enough ***tell*** Him, “I’m ticked! I’m really, ***really*** disappointed!” Some of God’s closest friends have argued with Him, challenged Him the most! ***Just be honest! He won’t get offended and walk away!***
- b. God also wants us to really know Him—and trust His power and wisdom—and ***especially*** His love. Not only is He immensely powerful—He’s tender. He is ***already*** involved in what we’re praying for--and He is at work every time we pray. Even when it ***appears*** that nothing changes.

-And God is looking for us to **know** the danger of regularly ignoring a loving relationship with the One who holds all our dreams for meaning and hope—in His hands. The more we **know** Him—the more clearly we will see the amazing privilege Jesus made possible with His death; how He forever did away with religion and all it’s rules and ritual—and replaced it with a ***relationship***.

- c. God is also looking for us to hang on to Him and never give up when it comes to prayer. Jesus told two stories—one about a poor widow who kept bugging a corrupt judge until he couldn’t stand it any more and dealt with the bully who was making her life miserable. Jesus’ point was that our situation as the beloved children of a Heavenly Father is in total contrast to that. Out of love, He made His help available by sending his Son to a cross. Jesus’ point? ***Don’t give up! Don’t ever give up! Either God will change the situation—or He will change you!***
- d. Something else. God is looking for **partners**. Do you realize that when we look at the pain, the poverty, and the injustice in the world and think, “Why doesn’t God ***do*** something about that?” He would likely say, “Why don’t ***you?*** My Spirit lives in you. You have the cooperation of Heaven. I have called ***you*** to act, to give, to engage—in ***My Power!***” Yes, we ***are*** the small, frail part in this partnership. But when ***He*** pours on His power, His love, His life, His grace, His wisdom? Things happen. But we need to step out—even when our insides are quivering and our minds are spinning—and watch ***Him*** do amazing things!

- e. And there's a really, **really** important part to prayer among Jesus' followers that I haven't talked about yet. It's praying **together** with others. See, it's a **together** relationship that we have with Jesus. It's **together** that we are the Church. It's **together** that we are the Body of Jesus in this world. We are told to love one another, help one another, serve one another, be generous with one another—and **pray** with one another. Jesus said it like this:  
**"I also tell you this: If two of you agree here on earth concerning anything you ask, my Father in heaven will do it for you. For where two or three gather together as my followers, I am there among them."**  
**(Matthew 18:19-20 NLT)**

-When we pray with one another—we **learn** to pray. We have the chance to encourage—and be encouraged. In fact, praying with someone or for someone is a powerful, **powerful** thing. It is an act of supernatural love—and I have watched it melt people and draw people into a spiritual realm they didn't even believe existed.

We have a really cool e-prayer line here—where requests are emailed—and together we pray—and together we see what God does. Every Sunday after our services—we have people ready to pray with you or with **anybody**. Who are you praying **with?**

- f. But more than anything else—God is looking for a relationship. Not a relationship through a vacuum tube and speaker. Nope. God is looking for real, live, sinning, believing, hurting—sometimes disappointed—sometimes hopeful people—who talk to Him. Who pour out their hearts. Who are ready to lay it all on the line—believing that even though they didn't see God show up or give them a vision—He **can** be trusted.

-And that kind of relationship only happens over time. Praying when you **sometimes** don't feel like it. Taking time you don't have. Submitting when you don't get it—believing when the evidence is scarce. It's called **faith**—and it comes over time. And it **grows!**

6. I think for prayer to be a significant part of our lives, there are some things we will have to face:

-We will have to get serious about our micro-wave, IM approach to life. The stuff that counts in life will not get micro-waved into us or learned in three easy lessons. Prayer is an honest but powerful relationship—not a way to get good things painlessly and effortlessly. Prayer is how we a trusting relationship with God over time—even when we don't get what we want.

-We will have to confront our buy-in to busyness. It's funny—we talk about our crazy lives, how we're going 10 ways at once, our struggle with impatience, how we need down time and margin. Then we sigh--and schedule ourselves, our kids into one more thing, buy one more electronic device to talk into or watch—and shorten or cancel time with God. Busyness, friends—hear me on this—will **keep** you and I from God. We

**must** face it down and make some decisions about whether or not we want to finish life with an empty heart—and 3 billion emails successfully retrieved and sent.

-We will also have to confront our buy-in to the **it's all about me** philosophy. We don't *consciously* buy into it. But if that's what all the scorecards in our lives say—schedule, money, prayer—then we need to own—and repent of it. Prayer is not about me getting what *I* want—it's about a relationship—about being an active partner with the Creator of all to make all things right.

-And we will also have to confront this stubborn, independent streak in us. This thing in us that **thinks** that we can do life on our own—without much help from God, except, of course, when things get **really** bad. It's funny, we'll go to self-help book, call on friends—sometimes do almost anything rather than come to God and say, "God—today I **desperately** need you and believe that no matter how I feel in the process of talking to you—**you will be there! You promised!** So I personally invite you into this mess I call my life—and ask for your power!"

## Q & A

7. In the context once of talking about prayer, Jesus promised that when we pray in faith, God actively engages in all the things that concern us. And then he asked the question, **But when the Son of Man returns, will there be faith on the earth?**  
-My final challenge is this. See prayer as the development of a relationship with God—and **try** it. You don't have a thing to lose—and a **lot** to gain!