

FIVE FORKS BRETHREN IN CHRIST CHURCH

9244 Five Forks Road

Waynesboro, PA 17268-9612

Tel: (717) 762-2991

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SUBJECT: Prayer

Series:

THEME: Learning to Pray

SERMON: "Improving our God Connection"

Introduction

<https://thethinplace.net/2019/01/21/5-prayers-incredible-women-of-the-old-testament-prayed/>

On social media, like Facebook or Instagram, there is an option for people to let you know that they want to become your friend or follow you even if they don't know you. That means they can communicate with you and you will communicate with them.

It is now a sign of prestige if you have a whole bunch of friends or followers. The number of friends you have, and who they are is very important to many people.

There is a relatively new show on TV called "God Friended Me." In the show, a young man has an account, and God asks to be his friend – to make this connection with the young man. What interesting about the show is that the young man says he does not believe in God, so he is sure there must be some person behind this "God account" just pretending to be God.

But what is also interesting is that this "God" connection keeps giving the young man information and leads that result in the young man assisting many people with their problems. And sometimes, the information the young man receives, seems so impossible, or incredible that it must have come from a supernatural source.

What do you do with that, if you don't believe there is a God?

But for those of us who do believe there is a God, wouldn't it be cool if we had such a God connection, that we would be led to all kinds of incredible helpful information, and even

participated in some extraordinary events, because of what we gained by having this God connection.

What I would like to talk about today, is that you and I can have a real God connection. We often call it prayer.

Have you ever wondered how you might improve your connection with God? Those times you talk to God about what is on your heart and you sense God's Spirit communicating with you?

Some women and men, who traveled with Jesus while he walked and talked here on earth, had this same longing. They recognized that Jesus had a special connection with God. They probably noticed he often spent time talking to God. They wanted what Jesus had, so:

Luke tells us what happened. [Luke 11:1-4](#)

11:1 Once Jesus was in a certain place praying. As he finished, one of his disciples came to him and said, "Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples."

2 Jesus said, "This is how you should pray:

"Father, may your name be kept holy.

May your Kingdom come soon.

3 Give us each day the food we need,

4 and forgive us our sins,

as we forgive those who sin against us.

And don't let us yield to temptation."

As I thought about this request, and Jesus' instruction, and also remembering our recent study in the Old Testament, I went looking for some other examples of prayers, prayers of people in the Old Testament times. Back in those days, before Jesus walked the earth. What was the God connection like then, and what can we learn from those heroes of faith?

We are going to look at the prayers of five people in the OT, and each one will emphasize a distinctive feature that can be part of our prayers.

MIRIAM – Thanksgiving and Praise.

Who is Miriam? We are first introduced to her, but not by name, in

Exodus 2 She is actually Moses' older sister.

We learn that a man and woman from the tribe of Levi got married. The woman became pregnant and gave birth to a son. She thought he was a special baby and kept him hidden for three months.

Why the need to hide a baby boy? Because Pharaoh, king of Egypt had decreed that all baby boys should be drowned in the river. But this mother had a different plan.

When she could no longer hide him, she made a basket made of reeds and waterproofed it with tar. She put the baby in the basket and laid it among the reeds along the bank of the Nile River.

4 The baby's sister (this is Miriam) then stood at a distance, watching to see what would happen to him.

5 Soon Pharaoh's daughter came down to bathe in the river, and her attendants walked along the riverbank. When the princess saw the basket among the reeds, she sent her maid to get it for her. 6 When the princess opened it, she saw the baby. The little boy was crying, and she felt sorry for him. "This must be one of the Hebrew children," she said.

7 Then the baby's sister approached the princess. "Should I go and find one of the Hebrew women to nurse the baby for you?" she asked.

8 "Yes, do!" the princess replied. So the girl went and called the baby's mother.

Miriam had been born into slavery. When she was just 7 years old her 2nd younger brother was born. And she was assigned the task of watching her 3 month old baby brother. It is not unusual in many cultures for older siblings to be given the task of watching over the younger siblings. Usually they end up carrying them around with them. But in this case, the older sister was asked to watch over her baby brother as he was placed very vulnerably, in a makeshift boat that was floated on the river. It was she who came up with a clever idea when the baby was rescued by Pharaoh's daughter.

How does something like that impact your life and what you might think about the God your family talks about, but who had been silent for 400 years?

Continue to put yourself in Miriam's shoes for a moment. It was her brothers, Moses and Aaron, whom while working to free God's people from slavery caused the people to suffer even more. What do you think the comments were about her family?

We know what they said. They cursed Moses and Aaron

"May the Lord judge and punish you for making us stink before Pharaoh." Ex 5:21

We don't often think about what life might have been like for Miriam – but undoubtedly it had been as harsh for her as it had been for all Israelites in Egypt, leading up to an event we read about in Chapter 15. This is when the Israelites cross the Red Sea as they escape from Egypt.

But apparently she had risen to the occasion. This is how she is described. "**Miriam, the prophet, took a tambourine and led all the women, and sang...**" a song of praise to God.

Do you recall from last week, the primary role of a prophet? It was to be the mouthpiece of God. Miriam spoke to the people on God's behalf. Miriam preached to the people. And here she is leading one half of the national choir in a song of praise.

Very likely the song that was sung in Exodus 15 was one of those where two halves of the choir sing back and forth. It's called antiphonal singing. Moses leads one half of the choir,

and Miriam leads the other half in a psalm of praise to God. The song's purpose is to identify God as the one who had saved the people by overpowering both the sea, and the whole Egyptian army.

Exodus 15:20-21

21 And Miriam sang this song:

**“Sing to the Lord,
for he has triumphed gloriously;
he has hurled both horse and rider
into the sea.”**

This is the account of the children of Israel being miraculously saved by God, from the Egyptians.

With what she had been through in life, she could have been angry and dejected. But instead of lamenting over the trials she had faced, she sought out areas of joy and triumph. When God destroyed those oppressing the Israelites using the Red Sea, but allowed the Israelites to walk to freedom on dry ground, Miriam responds by leading everyone in thanksgiving to the Lord for the Lord's great triumph. Miriam had come to recognize the hand of her God in the triumphs of life.

Like Miriam, may we recognize that each and every triumph in life is the Lord's and may we respond by leading others in thanksgiving and praise to God.

I believe prayer is best started this way – acknowledging to God, his hand in every triumph. I think this is what Jesus was getting out when He told his disciples, pray like this: Our Father who is in heaven – Hallowed be your name – Your kingdom come. This is praise to God for who God is and what God does in the universe.

Another prayer from the Old Testament– also recorded as a song. This time sung by:

Deborah – Attention to detail

Deborah was a judge and a prophet of her day. She told the people what the Lord would have them do and she had the task of ensuring that they followed His commandments.

When Deborah shared the Lord's instruction about how the people should go into battle against their oppressors, the men were too scared to go without Deborah, the Lord's prophet, with them. Because of that, God promised something unusual, a woman would receive the honor for a military victory.

When the victory was won, Deborah led the song of victory. In it she sings of God's God. It's a long prayer and I won't read all of it. It is also a prayer that sounds like those Imprecatory Psalms we learned about a few weeks ago. Those psalms of cursing that sound like we are supposed to gloat over the downfall of our enemies. Remember we said those types of psalms are not meant to tell us how to behave – rather they are an honest expression of our emotions. Deborah's prayer is found in:

Judges 5:1-31

It starts with a rousing call for praise to God.

On that day Deborah and Barak sang this song:

**2 “Israel’s leaders took charge,
and the people gladly followed.**

Praise the Lord!

3 “Listen, you kings!

Pay attention, you mighty rulers!

For I will sing to the Lord.

I will make music to the Lord, the God of Israel.

4 “Lord, when you set out from Seir

**and marched across the fields of Edom,
the earth trembled,**

and the cloudy skies poured down rain.

5 The mountains quaked in the presence of the Lord,

**the God of Mount Sinai—
in the presence of the Lord,
the God of Israel.**

The prayer goes on to mention amazing detail about the events under consideration.

It concludes with

**31 “Lord, may all your enemies die like Sisera!
But may those who love you rise like the sun in all its power!”**

This is a rather strange prayer to our ears. Even gruesome in some places. But again similar to some of the psalms we were introduced to in the Old Testament. These prayers do not condone the actions taken, but acknowledge them. But what we notice if we take the time to read the whole prayer, is that Deborah and Barak did several things.

They spoke of **God’s goodness** through time. They told the whole story of what God had accomplished. And they sang of God’s goodness in detail. **They saw God at work in each and every detail of life.**

Although the people mentioned in the song did some amazing things, it is really a hymn of celebration to God. Israel is rescued from her enemies by the acts of people, but the glory must go ultimately and primarily to God.

This prayer reminds us God deals with his people in mercy and grace, not according to what they deserve. God does act for the benefit of his people, but God is driven by his own sovereign power and the determination to preserve a people called by his name, and no one can stand against God when God appears – not even the pagan Gods.

The detail in this prayer reminds us that God notices and cares even about the smallest details in your life and my life.

When we are talking to our close friends about something that has happened, even if we were both there, don’t we often recount minute details?

Jesus, as he describes God the Father, comments that God knows even how many hairs we have on our heads. God is a God who notices small and big things going on in our lives and I believe this prayer of Deborah reminds us to talk to God using detail sometimes.

It's easy and faster to pray, "God, bless all the missionaries and be with everyone who is sick." But I believe God would have us often talk, in detail, about perhaps, the Roth's in Macha, or our coworker and their diagnosis at the doctors at two o'clock yesterday, and how that must be affecting their whole family.

In order to pray that way, we too have to **pay attention to detail**. We have to pay attention to what is going on in our lives and other people's lives. We must begin to notice God at work in the details. As we pay attention to detail in our prayers, we will learn to care more and intercede more for others. Pray in detail sometimes.

Hannah teaches us about:

Hannah – Perseverance in prayer

We find Hannah's prayer in I Samuel 1.

Hannah spent much of her prayer time and tears at the feet of the Lord begging God to grant her a child.

I Samuel 1:9-16

Once after a sacrificial meal at Shiloh, Hannah got up and went to pray. Eli the priest was sitting at his customary place beside the entrance of the Tabernacle. 10 Hannah was in deep anguish, crying bitterly as she prayed to the Lord. 11 And she made this vow: "O Lord of Heaven's Armies, if you will look upon my sorrow and answer my prayer and give me a son, then I will give him back to you. He will be yours for his entire lifetime.

12 As she was praying to the Lord, Eli watched her. 13 Seeing her lips moving but hearing no sound, he thought she had been drinking. 14 "Must you come here drunk?" he demanded. "Throw away your wine!"

15 “Oh no, sir!” she replied. “I haven’t been drinking wine or anything stronger. But I am very discouraged, and I was pouring out my heart to the Lord. 16 Don’t think I am a wicked woman! For I have been praying out of great anguish and sorrow.”

What a discouraging picture. And the bible says, “**year after year it was the same.**”

Praying like Hannah means pouring yourself out, unashamedly before the feet of God – and not giving up.

She boldly brought her requests to God and offered them back as a sacrifice of thanksgiving to Him. Hannah prayed and told God that any child He gave her would be offered back as a servant to Him. She laid out her grief in prayer, desperately pouring out her heart. It almost feels like she was bargaining with God. But that’s what we often do when we come to God in anguish.

We all have it. Those lingering things we beg God for. Sometimes they quietly ache in the back of our mind when we pray and other times, we may have the whole congregation begging God on our behalf. We’ve done the right things. Maybe we haven’t committed any of the big sins like murder or adultery. Don’t we deserve the blessing of God? Shouldn’t we be given what our good behavior has earned us?

Hannah knew our plight. She had begged God for years for a child while watching her husband conceive with another woman. Month after month, year after year, baby after baby, she waited and wondered and wept. She was a good woman and it seemed like a simple request. So year after year, she got on her knees in prayer.

Hannah’s story as we have it recorded for us in just one short chapter – a several minute read in our bibles, has a seemingly rapid and happy ending. She goes home and immediately gets pregnant and has a son – Samuel. True to her word, she takes her Samuel back to the tabernacle and as a young boy, Samuel serves in the tabernacle and becomes the prophet.

But make no mistake, Hannah’s prayer of anguish continued for years and years. I wish

I could be up here this morning and tell you that your story will have a rapid, happy ending soon. But I can't say that. I can encourage you to keep praying and not give up. But even that doesn't help much sometimes.

Sometimes I just need to be beside you in prayer, if not physically, at least in spirit. To pray with you and for you, being in anguish with you.

When Eli spoke God's blessing to Hannah, her spirit was revived. Can we learn to speak God's blessing to each other? This is part of the community life we have been talking about and leads us to our next aspect of prayer to consider. We need the prayers of others, and Esther teaches us this.

Esther, Queen of Persia – recognizing our Need of the Prayers of Others

Esther was called to go before her husband, the king, uninvited, to try and save the Jewish people from genocide. Unbeknownst to her husband, she was one of the people he had condemned to death. Appearing before him to plead her case meant that she could be executed immediately for appearing without his invitation.

What is interesting about the book of Esther is that neither prayer nor God are mentioned in the Book. But it does mention fasting, something almost always associated with prayer, and so I include her prayer here.

Esther 4:15-16

Then Esther sent this reply to Mordecai: 16 “Go and gather together all the Jews of Susa and fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. My maids and I will do the same. And then, though it is against the law, I will go in to see the king. If I must die, I must die.”

Esther recognized that she needed others praying for her. Fasting is always associated with prayer. Before Esther undertook the work the Lord had for her, she asked the entire city to fast and pray on her behalf for 3 days.

May we, like Esther, **recognize that we need the strength that comes from the prayers of others to do the work the Lord has for us.**

Time and again in the New Testament, the church is called to pray for each other. We talk often about the times we can pray together. I know many of you are praying for each other even as we are forced apart by the coronavirus measures. We had planned an All Church prayer night on April 3rd as we prepare for our Easter Celebration. We will most likely not pray in the same room, but we can still pray together.

While prayer has a very private aspect to it, part of our connection with God is together, as a group in community, praying with and for each other.

One more prayer from the OT.

Hagar - in despair and praying

Like Miriam, Hagar was dealt a rough hand in life. A slave, she had very little say in where her life was going. She obediently bore Abraham's son but when his wife, Sarah, had her own child, she ordered that Hagar and her young son be sent away to fend for themselves.

Genesis 15:14-19

So Abraham got up early the next morning, prepared food and a container of water, and strapped them on Hagar's shoulders. Then he sent her away with their son, and she wandered aimlessly in the wilderness of Beersheba.

15 When the water was gone, she put the boy in the shade of a bush. 16 Then she went and sat down by herself about a hundred yards away. "I don't want to watch the boy die," she said, as she burst into tears.

17 But God heard the boy crying, and the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven, "Hagar, what's wrong? Do not be afraid! God has heard the boy crying as he lies there.

18 Go to him and comfort him."

19 Then God opened Hagar's eyes, and she saw a well full of water. She quickly filled her water container and gave the boy a drink.

Hagar's prayer was simply a prayer of desperate tears. She had no words. She was beaten down, crushed, helpless and without hope. But even in her lost heart, God heard her cries and the cries of her son. Against the odds, God provided a way for her and her son to survive and made her offspring into an enduring nation. Even without words, she still managed to lift her broken voice to the Lord in despair.

Have you been, or perhaps you are a point of such desperation in your life, that your pain is too deep for words?

What Hagar's story reminds us is that **God hears our hearts, even when our mouths cannot say anything.** God desires a relationship with each one of us.

The Good news of the Gospel is that God initiated making a connection with humankind, us. God sent his Son, Jesus, so we could be reconciled to God and have fellowship with God, a relationship with God, and as in any relationship, it requires regular connection.

Prayer is the most intimate way we can connect with God. Whether you are offering up bold prayers of thanksgiving like Miriam, petitions like Hannah, or simply offering your broken sobs like Hagar, He hears you.

Prayer is most often an intimate, private conversation you share with God. Your words don't need to be perfect. You do not need eloquence.

He doesn't need dramatic words. And even when we are too broken to pray, He is interceding with us in groans deeper than can be articulated.

These Old Testament heroes of the faith show us in their prayers that prayer isn't just to acquaint God with what's happening in our lives. Prayer reminds us that God is desperately involved in each moment of our existence. May the prayers of these women from the Old Testament encourage you to open your eyes wider to see God at work in your life and world.

Pray