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**Trilogy of Prayer:
(3)
The Adventure of Living Prayer**
Dr. Bruce Lancaster

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Psalm 138
Acts 1:9-14

Jesus had ascended into heaven. He had commissioned the Apostles to take his message of love, his life of love, to the ends of the earth.

They had returned to Jerusalem with a sense of joy, worshiping together, and they, along with other followers, gathered in a room to pray.

This first gathering of the followers of Jesus, note this; their first action following their commission to be witnesses of the resurrected Jesus was not to write a book of order, not to set a budget, not to organize committees...

They devoted themselves to prayer!

Before there was Twitter and Facebook and Snapchat and Instagram, before there was Texting and E-Mail and FaceTime and Skype, before any of the ways to communicate that we think we can't live without: There was prayer!

As I've developed this series, I have drawn from the writings of Henri Nouwen and Richard Rohr, Martha Moore-Keish's recent book "Christian Prayer for Today", and the wonderful book by Anne Lamott, "Help, Thanks, Wow".

Even more, for my own prayer life and the writing of prayers, I get inspiration from the prayers of the Old Testament scholar, Walter Brueggemann; and in recent years by the

writings of the Jewish Liturgist Alden Solovy: “Jewish Prayers of Hope and Healing” and “This Grateful Heart,” and his most recent work, “This Joyous Soul.”

But I have to tell you, the framework for this trilogy of prayer was set some thirty-five years ago when I participated in a prayer study written by the Methodist minister, Maxie Dunnam: “The Workbook of Living Prayer”.

Maxie Dunnam says it is “Living Prayer” because ‘living prayer’ describes how we live our faith, how ‘living prayer’ also describes prayer that is alive, fresh, a power that moves us.

I think the novelist Frederick Buechner captures this when he says of one of his characters: “Yet Godric prays the way he breathes, for else his heart would wither in his breast. Prayer is the wind that fills his sail.”

It is obvious that the Apostles thought of prayer as faith in action or as John Calvin says, “...the chief exercise of faith.”

As one preacher said, “Three realities launched the church: the resurrection of Jesus Christ, the coming of the Holy Spirit, and the people praying.”

They were inviting God to rule in their lives; and the rest of the story, the Acts of the Apostles, the history of the church, I see it as the adventure of living prayer.

First of all, this adventure of living prayer describes our relationship with the living God.

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Julian of Norwich, the mystic, says it well: “Prayer is the deliberate and persevering action of the soul. It is true and enduring, and full of grace. Prayer fastens the soul to God and makes it one with God's will.”

Sometimes I think we miss the dynamics of living prayer because it contradicts our own sense of self-sufficiency.

One Saturday night after a football game, a man was sitting in his truck in the parking lot when another driver came up to him, asked if he had a heavy tool, a wrench or hammer he could borrow.

The man said “yes” and watched this other man go back to his car and break the window out, reach in and get the keys, which he had left locked in the car.

The man in the truck said, “I wish he had told me his problem. I’m a locksmith and I had my tools with me!”

We are the same when we ignore the available power that God has for us, if we don’t have a prayerful relationship with God.

Roberta Bondi, a wonderful teacher and author said it this way, *“If I want a real relationship with God, I have to tell God what’s going on. As with any relationship, you don’t know in advance how it’s going to turn out, You just do it, you make yourself accessible so you’re prepared to receive grace when it comes.”*

Let me say it this way, “Our faith is not in the power of prayer, our faith is in the power of the one to whom we pray.”

The adventure of living prayer begins with our relationship to the living God.

Living prayer also describes our relationship with others, how we live with others.

Prayer can and will connect us to God and will strengthen our connectedness with each other.

I heard a wonderful story of a young husband and wife. He was looking for a new job. She tells him as he heads out for an interview, "I'll be praying for you."

He gets the job, and when he gets home, a beautiful table has been set, the aroma of a delicious meal fills the house, someone must have called and she's celebrating.

When she serves dessert, there's a note on the plate, "Congratulations! I knew you'd get the job. You know how much I love you!"

After supper, as he's taking the dishes back, he sees a note that had fallen from his wife's pocket. It read, "Don't worry about not getting the job. We can make it. You know how much I love you."

Friends, we cannot go through this life alone. We need support, emotional and spiritual. Living prayer gives us that support as we pray for each other and with each other.

That's why I suggest you pray in the language of how you relate to the world. The adventure of living prayer is to pray your life.

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For example, in my prayer life, I pray not just for the victims in El Paso, but I pray for a 69 year old Hispanic grandfather holding his 3-week-old granddaughter fearful of simply going to the store because of who they are...that's the prayer picture I offer to God, and in that picture I can see a real person in a real world with a real hurt.

Just look around you, praying the life of those around you. Instead of praying for the hungry, you could pray for the 6-year-old little girl who will only have one meal today; or as you say a blessing at the table, pray for the mother who has to decide how to divide 3 helpings for 4 children.

Or instead of asking God to heal the sick, you offer a prayer for the person who takes the same kind of medicines as you, only they have to choose which prescription to give up because they can't afford all of them.

As we pray for others, we become involved in their lives, and as we become involved in their lives, our prayers come alive.

One of the best things about that is like Jason Freyer has said, "So much of prayer is clearing the clutter."

And I know that being in constant conversation about the ordinary can be difficult, but praying your life understands that the ordinary is the arena for the extraordinary love of God.

I have always liked the prayer by John Baillie...

Teach me, O God, so to use all the circumstances of my life today that they may bring forth in me fruits of holiness rather than fruits of sin:

- *Let me use disappointments as material for patience.*
- *Let me use success a material for thankfulness.*
- *Let me use suspense as material for perseverance.*
- *Let me use danger as material for courage.*
- *Let me use reproach as material for longsuffering.*
- *Let me use praise as material for humility.*
- *Let me use pleasure as material for temperance.*
- *Let me use pain as material for endurance.*

Living prayer means to pray what we live, what we know, what comes into our life, being honest with ourselves and honest with God.

It is at that intersection where our thoughts and prayers must be honest with the tragedies of the day.

And let's be honest, we've heard so often in these past several days, "Thoughts and prayers are not enough", but I've also heard, "I need a prayer to make it through the darkness."

Alden Solovy, the Jewish Liturgist whom I mentioned earlier, wrote an essay this past week on prayer and action, saying that we need to do something to make a difference but also never to think that prayer is irrelevant.

I want to share a portion of what he wrote that I hope will be helpful as we conclude this series on prayer: *Prayer can give strength to activists. Prayer can remind us of our best selves, helping to galvanize action. It can comfort the wounded and the newly bereaved.*

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Prayer can remind us—when the moment of tragedy has passed—to continue our work. Prayer can unite faith leaders and political leaders with one voice.

Prayer helps us bury the dead and provide solace to their kin. Prayer gives our grief a voice and that voice should be a call to engage in bettering the world.

It's true that our prayers will not stop a bullet. Prayers won't keep automatic weapons off the streets. Prayers will not clean up in the aftermath of a natural disaster. Prayer will not feed the hungry or rescue women from sexual slavery.

Prayer will not build homes and will not pass legislation. But we have no business believing that about prayer in the first place.

Prayer can be a potent and important part of the solution. We shouldn't expect more of prayer. But we shouldn't expect less, either.

Pray for the strength to endure. And that will give us a bit more strength to endure.

What this means for me is that the adventure of living prayer is to transform us, not just a paint job on the outside, but evidence that God has spared no expense in the divine restoration work among people like you and me.

C.S. Lewis wrote: "I pray because I can't help myself. I pray because I'm helpless. I pray because the need flows out of me all the time, waking and sleeping. It doesn't change God. It changes me."

I close this trilogy of sermons on prayer with the same convictions I've shared in the first two sermons:

- One, when I pray and it doesn't seem as if God is listening, I will not surrender to the silence. God is listening.
- And two, when I pray, it is not with a perfect knowledge of God, but it is with a firm desire to seek God's will and have the faith and courage to walk in it.

Which is why I believe this is the prayer for the adventure of living:

Day by day, dear Lord, three things I pray.
To see thee more clearly,
To love thee more dearly,
Follow thee more nearly,
Day by day, by day, by day

TO GOD BE THE GLORY.



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