



WEEKLY STUDY September 10-16, 2023

(Use this guide to individually or with a group dive deeper into this week's sermon.)

What in the Word: A Sermon Series on Questions

Our sermon series for September is: What in the Word: A Sermon Series on Questions. The Bible can be both wildly inspirational and completely puzzling. How can we understand it? What practical import does it have for our lives? In this series we will explore questions submitted by our church-goers. Did Jesus ever questions, "Why me?" Or say to God, "I'm not doing this?" Does prayer really work? Is Jesus the only path to God? Join us as we see to God and our neighbors by asking questions and seeking the Bible's wisdom.

Our scripture this week is:

"One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he finished, one of his disciples said to him, 'Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples.' He said to them, 'When you pray, say: 'Father, hallowed by your name, your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread. Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us. And lead us not into temptation.'

Then Jesus said them, 'Suppose you have a friend, and you go to him at midnight and say, 'Friend, lend me three loaves of bread; a friend of mine on a journey has come to me, and I have no food to offer him.' And suppose the one inside answers, 'Don't bother me. The door is already locked, and my children and I are in bed. I can't get up and give you anything.' I tell you, even though he will not get up and give you the bread because of friendship, yet because of your shameless audacity he will surely get up and give you as much as you need.

So I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.

'Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!'" **Luke 11:1-13**

- 1) The first question we considered in this series was, “Did Jesus ever question, ‘Why me?’ Or say to God, ‘I’m not doing this?’ Pastor Sam chose Luke 22: 39-46 as a way for us to reflect and ponder this question. She commented in her sermon that while there is nothing recorded in scripture that portrays Jesus saying, “I’m not doing this,” we do read of Jesus, saying to God, “If you are willing, remove this cup from me.” And this helps us see Jesus’ struggle. Our second question we are considering is, “Does prayer really work?” Sam reminded us that there are not always clear-cut answers to our questions, and that questions are good.

Question: Have you had questions about whether prayer really works? What has shaped your view of prayer and the reasons you see prayer as important.

- 2) During Children’s Time, Pastor Gracie told of her daughter asking if she really prayed for a friend because she hadn’t seen her kneeling and praying. Gracie reminded the children of all the ways we can pray. We can pray without kneeling. We can pray with eyes closed. We can pray with eyes open. We can pray by sending a card to someone. We can pray on a walk. We can pray in our thoughts. She then passed out a Prayer Bingo card to each child that included ways to pray. Did anyone else (along with me) wish you were getting one of those cards? I think seeing a multitude of ways to pray is helpful so that we are reminded it isn’t the way we pray, or using “church words”, it’s intentional turning ourselves toward God. It serves as a good reminder to pray in all the ways we can.

Question: What ways of praying are most helpful for you?

- 3) Pastor Sam quoted from one of my favorite books on Sunday: *Questions God Asks Us* by Trevor Hudson. Trevor says in his book that God asks us questions because God wants to enter into a conversational relationship with us. He says a questions has greater power to transform us than a straightforward answer. And Trevor also says that by allowing us to question, God grants us deeper sharing and greater dignity. With this in mind, Sam went on to ask us to consider that prayers are not always transactional. That God through prayer does not work within our quid pro quo culture. That answers are not related to how good or faithful we are.

Question: How does thinking of God as a conversation partner change your view of prayer? In what ways have you seen answers to prayer as a marker of not having enough faith? Or not being a good enough person?

- 4) In considering prayer this week, Pastor Sam moved us to look not just at Jesus teaching the disciples what we call The Lord’s Prayer, but to looking carefully at the larger picture of what follows to understand what God’s promise is through prayer. She called our attention to these words: “...how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!” She then told us Jesus didn’t say he would give us anything. He said he would give us the Holy Spirit. And she went on to say, “In that regard, God always answers our prayers. Prayers always work.” The Holy Spirit is our promise. This reminded me of Romans 8: 38: “And I am convinced nothing can ever separate us from the love of God.....”

Question: Think about God's love surrounding you. What in your prayer life keeps you centered in the knowledge of God's love? Who are the people in your life who remind you of that love?

Prayer: "Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil, for thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen"

Weekly Challenges: In your time of prayer, consider God as your conversation partner and, through prayer, have a conversation with God as you would a friend.

(Weekly study guide prepared by Rev. MaryJane Pierce Norton)