

“WIRELESS: II – WIFI”

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September 8, 2013

Matthew 6:5-15

A number of years ago, there was a television commercial for a cellphone whose catch phrase was this: “Can you hear me now?” Remember that? A person was trying to use a cellphone in all different locations – some with more success than others – and in each location, the caller would say “Can you hear me now?”

Well, when cellphones first came out that was a problem. Sometimes the connection just didn’t work. You had to be at the right place for things to work just right, and for clarity in the call.

The same was true for other electronic technology – like laptop computers and smartphones. I’m sure you know that back in the early days of the internet, your device had to literally be connected by dial up or later by cable to work. Remember the old days of dial-up, when you logged on to the internet, you actually heard the phone dialing and the connection being made with those strange sounds?

Then when we got to cable and broadband connection, we thought we were hot-stuff, because the connection happened almost instantly, with no sounds, on muss, no fuss. Still, you had to be hooked up with cable – which limited where you could use a computer.

Then, along came this thing called “WIFI” – wireless internet connection. Suddenly, you didn’t have to be sitting down in front of a computer connected by cable. You could carry your laptop around and use it, and use the internet through your phone. So now, as long as you’re in range of a WIFI network and can sign on, you’re in.

So, you can sit in a meeting here in this church, actually you can do it right in this room – you can connect to the internet through our wireless network here. And you can do it in restaurants and libraries and schools – just about anywhere. It’s all about connection.

This morning, I remind you that last week I used Twitter as a metaphor for getting to the heart of the matter, and the heart of the matter of faith is Jesus Christ. Today, I want to suggest that, when it comes to faith, WIFI is a metaphor for prayer – putting yourself in the right place to connect with God.

Prayer is all about being connected with God. It is, in fact, one of the ways we draw closest to God, and deepen our relationship with Him - simply by talking with Him, and listening to Him.

One pastor named William Tuininga, in a sermon on prayer, asserts that “Prayer is essential to having a relationship with God. You can’t claim to relate to or be a friend with someone with whom you don’t communicate.” (On-line, “Why Pray?”, Rev. William Tuininga)

He’s right, isn’t he? You know that human relationships don’t last very well if there is no communication between two people. They just don’t.

And oh, how God wants to hear from us. I read something really wonderful this summer in the book that we used in the summer Bible study by John Ortberg. He talked about prayer and how much God wants to hear from us, and how sometimes we’re reluctant to talk to God and be open with Him. He starts off by talking about something that the author Shel Silverstein once wrote. Here are his words:

“Shel Silverstein once wrote ‘The Prayer of the Selfish Child.’ ‘Now I lay me down to sleep, I pray the Lord my soul to keep. And if I die before I wake, I pray the Lord my toys to break. So none of the other kids can use ‘em. Amen.’”

And then Ortberg continued: “Children come to their parents with all kinds of requests: wonderful, foolish, generous, and selfish. What matters to parents however, is that their child comes to them. They know that they can guide the child’s growth – as long as their child speaks openly with them. It is the hidden heart, not the selfish heart, that is hardest to change.” (John Ortberg, *The Me I Want to Be*, p. 136).

“What matters to parents is that their child comes to them” . . . and what matters to God, my friends, is that His children, that we come to Him – in prayer.

Now, if you’re like most people, you may have struggled with prayer at times. You may have wondered how to pray, you may have thought you were “doing it wrong,” you may get frustrated because you try to pray and find yourself distracted, or that you find yourself always praying for the same thing, day in and day out.

Well, rest assured, that when it comes to struggling with prayer, you’re not alone. In fact, just turn to today’s Gospel lesson, and you’ll see the disciples don’t quite get the hang of it either. So they ask Jesus about it. Surely they know, from walking with him day by day how important prayer was in His life. They watched as He walked up mountains to commune with His Father in prayer. They watched as He prayed over meals they shared together. They watched as He lifted prayers of praise and adoration to God. They watched as, in His time of greatest testing, He turned to His Father in prayer. And they saw what those times of prayer with His Father did to Jesus, how after talking and listening, each time He got up knowing

what He should do, and having the strength to do it. The disciples watched, and as they did, they saw a man closely connected to God by prayer.

So, one day, they went to Jesus and said to Him, “Lord, teach us how to pray.” And so He did, by means of the prayer we have come to call “The Lord’s Prayer.” It’s simple, yet eloquent, and says so much, not only about how we are to pray, but it also tells us a lot about God.

First of all, it tells us that God wants to know our joys and our praise. Jesus prayed, “Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.” Begin with praise. God wants to know your love for Him, and likewise, He delights to know what delights you. What a wonderful way to begin your prayers – giving God thanks for the things that bring you joy!

You know, just as I sat and was working on this sermon, I was being bathed in sunlight and a beautiful breeze was wafting through the air, and I had just seen some beautiful pictures of my great-niece, and talked on the phone with a friend, and had lunch with my mother – all things I could bring to God in prayer – knowing He delights in knowing what He had given me that brings me joy. As Jesus did, begin your prayers by thanking God for Him and the things He has put in your life that bring you joy.

Next, Jesus said, talk to God about trust – about your trust in Him that He wants what is best for you and that you submit yourself to His will for your life. Take your decisions to Him and listen for the way He wants you to go. Take your problems to Him, and watch for the unfolding answers.

This might be the hardest part of praying for some of us. We’re so inclined, in this world of ours, to take things into our own hands, and define our own destinies, that it’s hard to trust someone else – even God – with our decisions. Yet, out of love, that what God wants us to do.

One of the most poignant prayers we ever hear Jesus praying is a prayer of trust at the most painful time of His life. He’s in the Garden of Gethsemane facing death on a cross within hours, and He kneels down and prays that the cup of suffering be removed from Him – but – then He adds – not my will, Father, but your’s.

I read another prayer of trust a long, long time ago that I have never forgotten about. It was at the tail end of a book written by Henri Nouwen called *Lifesigns*. The prayer is one of a Dutch Jewish woman named Etty Hillesum, who suffered through the Nazi persecution of the Jews in World War II. The suffering was terrible, and in the middle of it, Etty poured out her trust in and praise of God in these words:

“The jasmine behind my house has been completely ruined by the rains and storms of the last few days, its white blossoms are floating about in muddy black pools on the low garage roof. But somewhere inside me the jasmine continues to

blossom undisturbed, just as profusely and delicately as it ever did. And it spreads its scent round the House in which You dwell, O God. You can see, I look after You. I bring You not only my tears and my foreboding on this stormy, grey Sunday morning, I even bring you scented jasmine. And I shall bring You all the flowers I shall meet on my way, and truly there are many of those. I shall try to make you at home always. Even if I should be locked up in a narrow cell and a cloud would drift past my small barred window, then I shall bring you that cloud, oh God, where there is still the strength in me to do so.” (Henri Nouwen, *Lifesigns*, p. 126-127).

Oh, that we could trust God like that woman did – trust that even in the midst of struggles that God loves us and His will will be done.

And speaking of struggles, that the third thing that Jesus pointed out by way of His prayer – that God knows that we struggle, that we sin, so talking about that should be part of our prayer life with Him. “Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation.”

Maybe of all of the conversations we fail to have with God, this tops the list – our sins, our faults and failures. Yet, it is in offering them up to God and asking for His forgiveness, that we can move on to new life. Until we do that, they become a burden in our lives. Jesus invites us through prayer with our Heavenly Father to lay that burden down.

The Lord’s Prayer – just a few verses long – but, Jesus says, in it is contained all we need to do to be in prayer with God.

So, how is it with you? How is your prayer life? I read a paragraph once about how early African converts to Christianity were absolutely devoted to their prayer lives. Each one had a specific spot in the thicket where he or she would pour out their heart to God, and so, over time, the paths to these places became well worn. As a result, if one of the believers began to neglect prayer, it was soon very apparent to the others. When they noticed, they would go up to the person and whisper, ‘My friend, the grass grows on your path.’ (Sermonillustrations.com)

So, how is it on your path to prayer? It is well worn from regular visits with God, or does the grass grow on it, because your prayer life is lacking. If it’s the latter, don’t beat yourself up. Rather, remember how much God wants to hear from you, and how much He loves you. Just begin talking to Him, and remember you’ll never, ever have to ask “Can you hear me now?” because He is always there, always.

Still unsure how to begin? Start with the Lord’s Prayer. Or start by saying grace over your meals. Pray the words of a favorite hymn, write your prayers in a prayer journal. Sign up for the prayer chain, and use that as a catalyst for your conversations with God. Use written prayers like those in the Upper Room or other devotionals.

One way I really like to pray is something I call “sound prayers.” I just sit quietly and listen for the sounds around me, and then I pray. For example, I might just hear the sound of the air conditioner on a hot day, and I begin to pray for those who are working outside in that oppressive heat, that God will watch over them. Or I hear a siren, I pray for the persons in trouble, and those who are going to care for them. Or I might hear kids playing outside, and I will pray for them and their parents and teachers. You get the idea – whatever noise you hear, turn it into a prayer.

There are all sorts of ways to pray, to be in communion with God – including, of course, listening to Him, not talking, just listening. And as I have been wont to say on many any occasion – you can’t pray wrong. Just talk to God, for He waits to hear from you, and has something to say to you.

So let me finish with some wonderful words by the writer Richard Foster in his book called simply *Prayer*. May they serve as an invitation to you to deepen your prayer life that you might deepen your relationship with Almighty God.

He writes: “God is inviting you – and me – to come home, to come home to where we belong, to come home to that for which we were created. His arms are stretched out wide to receive us. His heart is enlarged to take us in.

For too long we have been in a far country, a country of noise and hurry and crowds, a country of climb and push and shove, a country of frustration and fear and intimidation. And He welcomes us home: home to serenity and peace and joy, home to friendship and fellowship and openness, home to intimacy and acceptance and affirmation.

We do not need to be shy. He invites us into the living room of His heart, where we can put on old slippers and share freely. He invites us into the kitchen of His friendship, where chatter and batter mix in good fun. He invites us into the dining room of His strength, where we can feast to our heart’s delight. He invites us into the study of His wisdom, where we can learn and grow and stretch . . . and ask all the questions we want. He invites us into the workshop of His creativity, where we can be co-laborers with Him, working together to determine the outcomes of events. He invites us into the bedroom of His rest, where new peace is found and where we can be naked and vulnerable and free. It is also the place of deepest intimacy where we know and are known to the fullest.”

And then, Foster finishes, “The key to this home, this heart of God, is prayer.” (Richard Foster, *Prayer*, p. 3)

My friends, you hold the key. I invite you to, like WIFI, put yourself where you need to be to make the clearest, most perfect connection to God. Pray. May it be so.

Amen.