

# *Straight from the "Hart"*

March 20, 2022

Third Sunday of Lent



## **Apostles' Creed**

**Opening Prayer** Lord, we set aside time in our life for you, remembering your continued goodness to us and your world. Receive our praise. Praise is one of the reasons we gather here and at home. We also gather because we recognize our need for your power in our life. Power that you so graciously give to meet our every need. We have come to humbly and gratefully worship before you in your house. In Jesus' name. Amen.

## **Call to Worship**

Lay Reader: Come, find the quiet center. Clear out the chaos and the clutter of the crowded life we lead. Come, let's clear our eyes and see what really matters. Find room in our hearts for hope to enter. Find the frame of mind and spirit where we are freed to be at peace, and simply be.

(Adapted from verse 1 of "Come and Find the Quiet Center" by Shirley Erena Murray).



Music Leader: We continue to trace Jesus' journey to the cross, which went through the Garden of Gethsemane, through trials, and to the cross. Let's sing "Go to Dark Gethsemane"

## **Music (vv 1,2) Go to Dark Gethsemane**

Music Leader: The cross has become a symbol of great depth and meaning. Our next song refers to other biblical imagery as well -- We invite God the Fount (the Source) of all blessing to tune our hearts to sing heavenly music sung by angels (flaming tongues above). He then refers to a mount, which has a double meaning. The first is a stone memorial built by Samuel after God protected his people from the Philistines. That memorial was called Ebenezer, which means "Stone of help" and meant that "The Lord has



helped us until now”, and as we fix our focus on it, it reminds us we have successfully come to be where we are (hither) by God’s help, and it is by his help we will make it all the way home. We bind ourselves to his goodness like a fetter (a restraint) and that bond keeps us from wandering, as is our tendency to do.

Just as they saw the memorial mount Ebenezer and remembered God’s deliverance, so too, we see the cross of Mount Calvary, and we remember God’s deliverance for us in Christ, who has brought us this far, and will lead us home as we bind ourselves to him. Let’s sing Come, Thou Fount...

### **Music Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing**

**Theme** The temptation for some people, as it clearly was in the New Testament Times, is to begin de-emphasizing that God is the source of our help who gets us to where we are and leads us home; and pridefully over-emphasizing ourselves, and we begin to think we got there all by ourselves. Such is the problem in our two tales today. The first is a story that comes from Africa.

Once upon a time, the hippopotamus was the most beautiful creature of all the beasts of the bush. She had soft, shiny, fur, silky eyelashes, long slender ears, and her tail, which she loved to wave high in the air, was the thickest and bushiest tail anyone had ever seen. In those days the hippo lived on the land so all could see how beautiful she was. The only problem was, the hippo realized just how beautiful she was. She used to sit by the river’s edge all day long and look at her reflection in the water.

Then one day an awful fire rose from deep in the bush, and the hot winds spread the fire in every direction. All the animals fled toward the river where the hippo sat. Elephants thundered by, giraffes galloped, lions bounded by, roaring the alarm.

The hippo heard all the commotion, but assumed they were all rushing out to admire her beauty as she continued gaze at her reflection, modeling for herself, twisting and turning to see all her beautiful features. She did so with such intensity that she did not see, hear, or feel the fire heading her way -- until a spark caught hold of her proudly waving bushy tail. She screamed for help as she hopped around trying to blow out the flames before it moved to the rest of her fur. Finally, she did the only thing she could to save herself -- she jumped in and sank to the river bottom. She held her breath as long as she could. When she finally came up, the bush fire had burned itself out. Hippo dragged herself out of the river and sat on the riverbank. *That was awful*, she thought to herself, *I’m soaked to the bones, and there is mud all over my fur coat. I must look a mess.* She leaned over to look

at her reflection in the water. She gasped -- she didn't even recognize herself, the bald, wrinkled creature staring back at her, fur coat burned away, her eyelashes singed, baring two beady eyes. Her slender long ears shriveled to two small stubs, and her thick bushy tail was gone. Hippo was so ashamed that she jumped right back into the water to hide herself from the other animals, and she continues to stay in the water till this day -- poking only her eyes and nose above the surface and coming out only at night when no one can see.

Our second story is built around the idea that in some cultures, "bread" symbolizes home and family, (which, by the way, there is a "cake" at weddings). Once upon a time, there was a modest and humble widow who had a beautiful daughter. Her name was Marienka. Unfortunately, she was the embodiment of pride itself. Many people sought to date, court, and marry her, but they could not satisfy her.

One night, while Marienka slept, her mother lovingly prayed over her. The daughter laughed in her sleep. The mother thought she must have had a beautiful dream to laugh like that. She asked her about it the next morning. Marienka said, "I dreamed that a nobleman came for me in a copper coach, he put a ring on my finger with a stone that sparkled like the stars. When I entered the church, the people had eyes for no one but the blessed Virgin and me." The mother warned her that that was a prideful dream." But the daughter went out singing.

That afternoon, a handsome rich farmer came on a nice wagon and offered to share common bread with her (meaning, to marry her). The mother was pleased with this man and offer of marriage, but Marienka said, "If you came in a copper coach and put a star sparkling ring on my finger, I would not have you as a husband, and the man went away mad because of her pride.

The next night the same thing happened, the mother's even more earnest prayer, the daughter's sleeping laughter, and in the morning the new dream was recounted. It was like the first, except this time the coach was silver and instead of a ring it was golden diadem. And the daughter concluded, "and when I entered the church, the people looked at me more than they looked at the blessed Virgin." The mother said, "Hush, that is sacrilegious - that's blasphemy! Pray, daughter, that you will not fall into temptation." To which the daughter ran away to escape her mother's sermon.

That afternoon, a young lord came on a carriage and offered to share a nobleman's bread with her. The mother thought this was a great honor. But

Marienka said, "If you came in a silver coach and gave me a gold diadem, I would not have you as a husband, and the man went away mad because of her pride." The mother warned her that pride was a device of the evil one." But the daughter thought, "Mothers never know what they are saying." and went out shrugging her shoulders.

The next night the same thing happened, the mother's even more earnest prayer, the daughter's even louder sleeping laughter, and in the morning the new dream was recounted. It was the same, except this time it was a noble lord with a great train of attendants came in a golden coach a bought me dress of gold lace. "And when i entered the church," the daughter concluded, "people looked at nobody but me." Then the daughter rushed from the room to avoid the lecture.

That afternoon three coaches entered the yard, a copper one pulled by two horses, one silver one pulled by four horses, and a gold one pulled by eight horses. From the first two emerged smartly dressed attendants, while from the gold coach stepped a handsome nobleman dressed in gold. He entered the house and on one knee he asked the mother for the daughter's hand.

What an honor, thought the mother; while Marienka said "My dream has come to pass. You see mother, that as usual, I was right and you were wrong." She pledged her faith to the handsome lord, who then put a ring on her finger that shone like the stars, presented her with a golden diadem, and a dress of gold lace.

The proud Marienka ran to her room to prepare for the marriage ceremony. The mother, still anxious, asked the groom, "What bread do you offer my daughter?"

He replied, "Among us, the bread is of copper, silver, and gold. She may have her choice."

The mother wondered what that could mean. Marienka had no anxiety. She returned from her preparations and they set out for the church without asking her mother's blessing. The mother was left praying at the door while her daughter hopped into the carriage without even a glance back to bid her mother farewell.

The eight horses galloped a long way and did not stop until they reached a huge rock in which there was a hole as large as the gate of a city. They plunged into the darkness, the earth trembled, and the rock cracked and crumbled. Marienka seized her husband's hand who reassured her that it would again be light soon. In a moment a thousand lights were waved in the air by workers who had come to salute their lord, the King of the Mines. He told Marienka, "All you see is yours." She saw trees made of lead, meadows with grass made of silver, and beyond that

she was a castle made of gold, inlaid with rubies and diamonds. She saw all that wealth and she was delighted. But it was also a long journey, and she was beginning to get hungry. She was glad to see the workers bring in a table, glittering with gold, silver and precious stones. There were side dishes of emeralds, roasts of gold on silver trays. Everyone ate heartily except the bride, who asked for a little bread. The King of Mines said, "Bring the copper bread". But she could not eat it. "Bring the silver bread." But she could not eat it. "Bring the gold bread." But Marienka could not eat it either. The King of the Mines said, "My fair one, I am very sorry. What can I offer you? We have no other bread."

The bride burst into tears. The King laughed, for like his kingdom, the king's heart was made of metal. He said, "Weep if you like, it will do you know good. What you wished for you possess -- now eat the bread that you have chosen.

So rich Marienka lives in her underground castle, always hungry, always hunting in vain for a few roots growing down into the earth that she might be able to eat. Once a year, in springtime, when the ground opens up to receive the fruitful rain, Marienka returns to the earth, dressed in rags, pale and wrinkled, begging from door to door, happy if anyone throws her a crust. And thus she receives from a few kind souls what she lacks in her palace of gold -- a little bread and a little pity.

(Summations of "How the Hippos was Humbled" and "The Gold Bread" in *The Moral Compass: Stories for a Life's Journey*, ed. with commentary by William J. Bennet..)

## Responsive Reading

Pastor: That story contains prayer and pride, but not in the same hearts. Jesus warns that when those two things get into a combination, it is a dangerous, dangerous thing, as well as pride connected with any exercise of faith. Our first reading places a warning about excessive words beside another text that encourages us to never stop praying. On the surface, they may seem the opposite commands for the same activity of much prayer. But the difference is in the motivation and *heart* of the matter. In the warning, it is about private prayers being done publicly as a show for others rather than communicating with God, and a warning about many words and repeated words used because the faith is put in the power of words and praying person, almost like a magical formula to be uttered. Whereas with the persistent prayer that is encouraged, the focus is not on the praying person or the words said, but on the Person to whom we are praying in humble faith, and that is the kind praying we should always have.

(L - Lay Reader, **C - Congregation**)

L: When you pray, do not be like those who only pretend to be holy. They love to pray publicly in the synagogues and on the street corners.

**C: They want to be seen by others. They have received their complete reward.**

L: But when you pray, go away by yourself, all alone, and shut the door behind you. Pray to your Father privately.

**C: Then your Father, who sees everything, will reward you.**

L: And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like ungodly people do. They think their prayers will be answered because of their many words that are recited again and again. Remember that your Father knows exactly what you need even before you ask him! Instead, pray along these lines:

**C: Our Father in heaven, we honor your holy name....**

L: So here is what I say to you. Keep on asking

**C: and we will keep on receiving,**

L: keep on seeking,

**C: and we will keep on finding,**

L: keep on knocking,

**C: and the door will be opened to us.**

L: You who are [parents], if your children ask for bread, do you give them a stone? or if they ask for a fish, do you give them a snake, or if you they ask for an egg, do you give them a scorpion?

**C: Of course not.**

L: Then if even sinful persons like yourselves know how to give good gifts, giving children what they need; then don't you realize how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him?

**C: Everyone who asks receives, all who seek find, and to everyone who knocks, the door will be opened.**

Matthew 6:5-9, Luke 11:9,11-13,10 (NIRV, NIV, TLB, NLT)

## Video



**Words of Video** – A lot of us are intimidated by prayer because we have a misunderstanding of what it is. Prayer is not a religious transaction, it's a loving relationship between you and your heavenly Father. Jesus says, when you pray: focus on the Father, be yourself when you talk to God, God opposes the proud but

gives grace to the humble Invite him into everything in your life, he's trying to bless you because he loves you Pray all day as you go on your way Invite him in so he can redeem, restore, help you repent, and heal you.

Music Leader: Jesus invites us to get away with him and reflect on his grace, let's sing together

### Music

#### **Come Away with me**

Come away with me to a quiet place,  
 apart from the world with its frantic pace  
 to pray, reflect, and seek God's grace.

Come away with me, come away.

Come and say, in words whispered from your soul,  
 the feeling and actions you can't control.

Your spirit needs to be made whole.

Come away with me, come away.

Come away with me to a quiet place,  
 to God's loving arms waiting to embrace  
 all those who come in hope of grace.

Come away with me, Come away.

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Music Leader: As we come away with Jesus, we find ourselves very near God's heart. Let's sing

### **Music (vv 2,3) Near to the Heart of God**

Pastor: And when we get away, and find ourselves near his heart, we recognize our need for him. I invite you to close your eyes and breathe deeply. This week I came across a picture of a beach with water lapping on the shore. It was labeled

“power.” But I felt peace more than power. Imagine the hypnotic sight and sounds of the lake rhythmically lapping at the shore... sand easing up through curling and uncurling toes in beat to the waves, fingers moving in and out of the sand, enjoying the feel of the granules brushing, cascading, falling... peace. Think of the rhythm of our humble need for our gracious Lord, removing improper pride and defeating the power of temptation, knowing that without him, life becomes vain. Speak silently or listen to God’s Spirit as he leads you as you hear the music of I Need Thee Every Hour...

### **Special Instrumental Music I Need Thee Every Hour**

#### **Prayers**

God of infinite goodness, throughout the ages you have persevered in claiming and reclaiming your people. We seek you, for we are in deep need of your refreshing power. We see all around us your power and glory. You have been and are our help — in the shadow of your wings we sing for joy and cling to you for you uphold us. So, we will bless you as long as we live. We will never fail to call on your name. Continue to surround us with those who help us on our journey toward you. Form in us the space and time to allow you to progress us on the unending road to perfection.

In the depth of your steadfast love, you blessed us with your Son to show us how to humbly serve others. Renew us that we may renew others. In these moments, we lift the celebrations and needs, not only for ourselves, but for those around us and throughout the world. And offer these requests to you in faith and in love, seeking to share in your joy and strengthened in our weaknesses. **Praises and Petitions** \* We continue to pray for Jim Mallott (so good to see him here today) \* We continue to pray for the Gordonier’s cousins Ray & Kathie with various ongoing health problems, \* and for Jan Martin’s neighbor Pierrie Koudelka, who will have cancer surgery next month, \* and Bert Honour’s friend Dennis, who’s cancer has spread \* And Lord, we also pray for what is going on in the Ukraine, \* and we pray for those people and situations that may not have not been mentioned today but are still on our hearts and minds.

Now shape us and transform us by your grace, that we may grow in wisdom and in confidence, never faltering until we have done all that you desire to make your peace a reality, living as your Son taught us to pray... **LORD’S PRAYER**



## Series Review and Introduction to Bible Reading

Lay Reader: We continue the series on the foundational building blocks of establishing and maintaining a rock-solid relationship with God. First, we seek to receive a greater **vision** of who Jesus is and what he came to do. Then we soak up as much information as we can, so we will grow in **knowing** God personally. This happens as we set aside distractions that are within us and remove barriers that are between God and ourselves, enabling us to better recognize God’s voice, and carefully **listening** to what he is saying to us. Good relationships communicate both ways. Today, God becomes the listener, and we do the **speaking**. **[Pause while pastor places a brick on the table].**



We already heard Jesus warn us about running on with words for words sake, or speaking for the sake of putting on a show for others, and in the broader context he also warns of giving, doing good deeds, and fasting to receive human adoration. Now hear Paul encourage us to do these same things (without the show), the way God wants us to.

### Bible Reading 1 Thessalonians 5:14b-18

Encourage those who are disheartened and have lost hope. [Give] tender care to those who are weak. Be patient with everyone. See that no one pays back one wrong act with another, but always try to do good to each other and all people. Always be joyful. Pray continually. Give thanks in all circumstances. This is God’s will for you who believe in and belong to Jesus Christ. (NIRV, NIV, TLB, NLT)

Music Leader: We can joyfully, continually, pray in all circumstances because Jesus has proven himself to be a faithful friend. Let’s sing.

### Music What a Friend We Have in Jesus

### Sermon Established: By Speaking

If you were here last week, you saw this chart with just a small sampling of the types of “noise” that gets in the way of successful communication. For example, A child brings home a schoolwork assignment. The parent begins the conversation.



“You need to do your homework.” “I don't want to.” (Remember those days? 😊)  
 “I'll do it later.” “No. Now.” The reluctant child is frustrated and angry and the studying is hard - and all the harder because all the time their young brain is not saying, “This is how I spell, or this is how I add,” but rather, “I wish I was playing outside”, and the study becomes longer and more difficult. Despite this noise, these distractions, the student hears the parents, hears the experts who wrote the textbook, does their best, completes the work and later brings home what for that student was a good grade, and proudly shows his parents “Look what I did!” (Even though if it hadn't been for the teacher, the parents, the experts who wrote the book, it would have never happened!)

We give, do good works, read the Bible and pray -- sometimes wishing we were doing something else. But we struggle through the noise, hear the encouragements, fight to finish the spiritual disciplines, and then feel proud \* of what we have accomplished. (\* Note - this pride is not necessarily wrong -- we should feel good when we succeed at something). Spiritual disciplines, like homework, like disciplines in every field of life; help us understand, master and make the most out of life. Yet it is very normal that we will have days or times in our life when we will, like our young student, be filled with emotional noise and struggle to accomplish those exercises.

But if this is *always* the norm, if spiritual disciplines flow *only* from a desire to impress others, or for pride, or to fulfill another's expectation of us, or is a self-expectation as a religious “have-to”; then it is in danger of becoming a task we will *always* look forward to with distaste, perform with reluctance, and brag about afterward -- except we don't have many people to whom we can “show off our grade.”

People in Jesus' day resolved that problem. The broader context of our Matthew reading describes those who, (perhaps gradually over a long period of time, and probably at least began with very noble purposes) but over time they became more interested in being seen as spiritual rather than being spiritual. They gave to the poor, but only to demonstrate their generosity. They fasted in ways that others knew they took their faith seriously. They timed out their day so that the required private prayers had to be spoken in very public places displaying their alleged superior spirituality.

<p><b>Being spiritual versus being seen as spiritual</b></p>
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**Give to help, not to be seen as generous. Do good for compassion, not to be seen as good. Pray to speak to God, not to be seen as devoted**

But Jesus taught that we are not to be sensations, but servants. When giving, don't let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, when fasting, don't look like it, and when you pray those private prayers, do it in private. Spiritual disciplines are not a performance for God, for others, or even ourselves. It is an expression of love to God who loved us first.

Tony Compolo says, "It is this wild love for him that changes everything. Everything will be done differently because it will be felt differently. Objectively [externally], everything may look exactly the same, but subjectively [internally] nothing is the same.

Whether the prayer is public or private, read from a prayer book and other prayer resources, or spoken spontaneously: don't use a lot of empty words (or read them vacantly - without meaning) or to impress others. We pray the Lord's Prayer almost every Sunday and many of us we pray it more often than that. It becomes very familiar, and it becomes very easy to say the words without even thinking about what we are praying or applying it to our life. In essence, Jesus says keep it simple, to the point, and from the heart, and he concludes by giving an example of what we now call the Lord's Prayer.

Diana Butler Bass wrote that for her, Lent was 40 days of guilt -- whenever she ate chocolate. (Apparently, that was her Lenten exercise). But after years of struggling to keep Lenten disciplines, she finally quit. And then an odd thing happened. Freed from expectations (remember from the graph we saw earlier that one of the things that gets in the way is "expectations"). Freed from that "noise", suddenly sermons and scriptures began to speak to her. By the end of Lent, she found herself willingly attending extra services, and on Easter the resurrection broke over her with unexpected power. She concluded, "When we cling tightly to our own desire, we struggle and suffer. When we let go of these desires, God can move us toward deeper spiritual understanding and compassion... Lent urges us to let go of the false paths of self-deception [--] and [of] pleasing others to find our truest selves journeying toward God..." (Chicago Tribune, Diana Butler Bass (3/20/98)) She threw off expectations and guilt and moved to relationship.

It is not about whether we observe Lenten practices or not, but the motivation and attitude that lies behind *everything* we do. If our ultimate motivation flows from a desire, choice, or commitment to connect our heart with God's heart, then God will

grow our relationship with him, and we will more freely appreciate and respond to the beauty and grace of God and our privilege of being called his children.

And as his children, Jesus teaches us to pray. As our reader mentioned, last week we focused primarily on receiving, on the listening side of prayer. This week, we will focus on the sending, the speaking side of prayer, not so much about what words to say, but the heart behind those words - for prayer is a loving communication and is not a magical formula. Right?

So, if it is not magical formula, then why do we hear about so many “rules” about prayer wherever we go?

**Why “rules” of prayer?**

You know: bow your heads, close your eyes, fold your hands, in some settings, stand or kneel, just to name a few...at summer games camp, which we attended almost every year up north; during chapel, in addition to the bowed head and closed eyes, the prayer posture was to lean forward in your pew, put your arms on your legs and clasping your hands. There were reasons for that and I’ll get to that in a minute.

There is a connection between physical posture and mental, spiritual attitudes. They’ve made an art (even science) out of non-verbal

**Holistic connections between body, mind, emotion and spirit**

cues. Observe a person’s posture and gestures and facial expressions because they will reveal what they think or feel inside - even more than the words they say. I’m not sure I buy into that completely. [Cross arms] Everyone knows what this is right? Defensive! But for that person, it may mean -- “I don’t like my belly, I’m trying to hide it.” Or, “I’m cold!” It may not have anything to do with defensiveness. It is not a 100 % thing.

But to some extent, the body does reveal the spiritual/emotional/ mental life. And it works the other way too. The whole of our body is interrelated with our mind and heart and emotions. Exercise the body and the mind and emotions will respond to your body posture as well. That is why we tell people to “keep your head up” when you are trying to encourage them. It is a physical thing, but it is also a mental thing. It goes together. It helps them to not feel defeated by something that has happened. We tell people to “bow their heads” to show deference, to respect to someone else. Put the body in certain positions and it *may* help influence the attitude within that we are seeking.



Another reason is that rules of prayers are practical helps, especially for the young. If you fold your hands, you can't

**Practical, based on past experiences of what helps people focus.**

reach out and bonk others, disturbing them from their prayers, and if you close your eyes, you are not distracted by things around you such as others trying to bonk you during prayer. If you lean forward, it brings energetic expectation to your attentiveness - we are "on the edge of our seat", hmm? These are examples of practical helps that draw our focus to the prayer we are hearing or that is spoken or as we do our own prayers within us.

This is not to say that they apply in every situation. To quote fictional radio psychologist Dr. Frazier Crane as he responded to a caller, "Gee, I'm sorry, Blake. When I told you to close your eyes and visualize that you were on a tropical island, I didn't realize you were calling from your car phone." (*Frasier* 1:23 *Frasier Crane's Day Off*)

But more seriously, in my own past, some of the most memorable prayer times I have experienced were not following any of the rules or suggestions I just named. I was out on a walk at night, my eyes were wide open taking in everything that was around me, and it is through those things that I saw that God taught me. We are all built different. Different things work for different people, and I encourage you to explore many suggestions of methods and means and way of praying, so that you find one that works for you, but then don't stop with just one thing, keep exploring and finding others as well -- so that you have a broad base of ways to have effective prayer for you.

Therefore, rather than talk about certain methods, I'll talk about three attitudinal principles of prayer, the first of which is expressed in salutation of the Lord's prayer, "Our Father, who art in heaven", where intimate respect, love and lordship are equally combined.

**Principles (Attitudes) of Prayer**

First, focus on the Father. Like any loving relationship, our relationship with God thrives when both sides take time to focus on each other. When we listen (from last week) and speak (this week), God builds our trust in him and he grows us in faith, preparing us for our futures.

**Focus on the Father**

This kind of intimacy with the heavenly Father was new with Jesus. Before him, God's name was not spoken or written because it was too holy. They substituted a symbol for God's name. But Jesus tells his followers, "I'm the Son of God. The father and I are one. If you believe in me, you too can become his child and call

God your Father.” Calling himself the Son of God and addressing God as intimately as “Abba” (a word that is closer to “Daddy” than “Father” was shocking and offensive to the people in that day, and it is one of the reasons they crucified Jesus.

Yet Jesus tells us to pray, “Our Father.” Paul rightly tells us that fathers can exasperate, provoke, or make children angry and bitter about life (See Ephesians, 6:4) -- and perhaps even worse, and he encourages them to NOT do that. And we don't necessarily succeed in giving children what they need, much less the good gifts of life. The point isn't to compare God to earthly fathers with all their failures, but to imagine God as a Father as fathers are meant to be. And as we heard in the reading, our heavenly Father can do so much more and better than even the best fathers do for their children. He is someone to whom we can bear our soul and still be loved. One we can depend on, can gain insight into our life and who has our best interest at heart, helping us grow to face the world with confidence. Focus on God as a loving Father as fathers are meant to be.

Secondly, be yourself. Don't pridefully pretend you are more than you are (or worse than you are). You may fool others, but you will never fool God. You might as well be honest with him about everything because he already knows. Talk to him about your thoughts and your feelings. Express your gratitude, your joys, your frustrations and failures. He already knows them all. He knows you better than you understand yourself. He is not shocked by what we do, say, or think or feel. Therefore, Peter writes, “Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.” (1 Peter 5:6-7)

**Be yourself**

It is only as we become transparent before him, (and to ourselves) that he can begin to work with us and our trek through this life and bring the good work he began in us to completion. (See Philippians 1:6)

In the movie, Forrest Gump, Gump and Lt. Dan are on a shrimping boat. Dan is angry because he lost his legs in the war. He asks Forrest where God is. Suddenly a storm begins to throw the boat around. Forrest narrates that he was scared, but Dan was mad, and we see him at the top of the boat shouting at God in the storm. The next day is bright, sunny and peaceful. Lt. Dan thanks Forrest for saving his life in the war, and then with a smile he hops off the boat into the ocean and enjoys a back stroke. Gump narrates, "He never said so, but I think he made his peace with God."

Psalm after psalm is filled with raw emotions expressed poetically and musically, sometimes not politically correct or religiously proper -- but they are there, and when they are honestly expressed, God, the loving Father, can work with us just as we are.

Finally, invite him into every part of your life, and recognize his presence with you throughout the day. We heard Paul tell us, Do it always “Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God’s will...” (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18) Most of what we have been talking about so far are those quiet, intentionally created, as noise-free as possible, quality times (like we do on Tuesday and Thursday here). But in loving relationships, there is also a tendency to think of each other and talk to each other throughout the day, even in the midst of daily routine activities when there may be all kinds of “hub-bub” going on around you.

With each other, or with God, you can talk in the car, on a walk, as you shop -- it is not just about the “important stuff”. Do you only talk to your friends about the “important stuff” of your life? [You look like you don’t know 😊]. Do you only talk to your friends about the important parts of your life? No, you share everything with them, don’t you? And that is what God wants too -- this “conversational prayer” helps you intercede as things come up in the day. As you read the paper you can pray for what is going on in the world. As you are driving a child to school or a friend to the doctor is an opportunity to pray (eyes open, mouth closed) for that child as they go to school, or for your friend’s health as you take them to the doctor. Give him your attention no matter what comes your way. It reminds us that God is in the midst of our lives throughout the day, And as Paul goes on to say in the verses following our reading, even as we strive to do what is good for each other and everyone else, we can be aware that he is present during every activity, guiding us to good decisions, growing us in our relationship with him, faithfully keeping us blameless through and through -- body, mind, and spirit. (See 1 Thessalonians 5:19-24)

**Closing Prayer** So let’s --- pray. Lord, may our prayers, be they spontaneously communicated in the moment, sometimes they are carefully crafted, sometimes they are even written by others, But we ask that they may not simply be words, but words from our heart and words to live by. Remind us how you help us work through the everyday stresses of life, that we can bring our joys to you to share,

and we can bring our burdens to you, and leave them with you, and you will guide us through. In Jesus name, Amen.

Our final is song is leave it there. I quoted Peter earlier who talked about casting all our cares on him, and it always put in my mind the imagery of fishing. You cast, you throw your cares on God, but so often then, we reel them back in. This song encourages us to cast our cares on him and to leave them there.

**Closing Hymn (vv 1,2,3) Leave it There**

**Blessing** Now go - established in the rock solid love of God by [seeing, knowing, listening, and speaking], nurturing a growing relationship with our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, who leads our old lives to the cross, and through it delivers us to new and eternal life. Amen.