



ENTER God's presence

I call on you, my God, for you will answer me; turn your ear to me and hear my prayer. Show me the wonders of your great love, you who save by your right hand those who take refuge in you from their foes. - Psalm 17:7

Heavenly Father, we come to you now, knowing that you hear our prayers. We ask that you would renew your Holy Spirit within us as we gather together to listen to what you would say to us through your word. Help us to still our own voices and listen more closely to you. Amen.



SHARE life together

1. **Share your highs and lows with each other?**
2. **Share how you went with your living purposefully from last time?**
3. **Where have you seen God at work or heard him speak into your life this week?**
4. **In what situations do you find it easiest to clearly discern God speaking directly to you?**

Being spread too thin is a reality for many of us. Competing demands. Overwhelming needs. High or unreachable expectations. It's burdensome trying to be all things to all people. It's exhausting when we feel stretched to capacity. It's demoralising when our best efforts end in failure. It's frustrating when we can't find a solution to fix the problems that confront us. When the margins are gone and you are running on empty, the "demons" just won't budge. That's what we discover today. It's difficult to live "in-between" success & failure, certainty & doubt, faith & unbelief...where fragile faith becomes desperate faith. But in all things, Jesus does not leave us alone in that in-between space. He comes to be with us so that our daily experience is one of less noise, more hearing as we walk the thin line between fragile faith and desperate faith in his presence and with his power.

Week beginning:
Sunday 14th March 2021

Worship series:
**Addition via Subtraction:
Deliberate Discipleship**



VERSE for the week

“If you can’?” said Jesus. “Everything is possible for one who believes.”

Immediately the boy’s father exclaimed, “I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!”

Mark 9:23-24



REMEMBER this week

Prayer is an act of faith that draws us personally to the heart of God who alone can make the impossible possible



LISTEN attentively

Read Mark 9:2-10

5. **What key words/thoughts/ideas/questions arise for you as you hear this text?**
6. **What do you hear this scripture saying to you right now?**
7. **What is the biggest request you have ever brought to Jesus? Have you ever felt like you could not bring a certain request to him? Why?**

Prayer, for many it serves simply as a celestial wish list, an opportunity to tell God all the things we want him to do for us or to give us. For others it is simply another avenue to come before God and acknowledge all our broken sinfulness and to confess again all the ways we fail to live as God directs us. Others use it more altruistically, bringing the needs of other before God and interceding with God on the behalf of others. For yet others, it is a private chat room where you can continue to praise God for how good he is. In prayer we can do all of these things and more. Prayer is one of the greatest gifts God has given us. In prayer we have direct access to him through his son Jesus, but prayer has always been a dialogue and often we can treat it as though we are the only ones who have anything worthwhile to say.

8. **Have a look at the direction of the speech in this gospel passage. Who has the first and the last word? Who gets the first and the last word in your prayer time?**

What is described in this passage of Mark's gospel is first and foremost, a life transforming encounter with Jesus. In the background we have disciples and Pharisees arguing about a situation which neither group seems to have an answer to. With the disciples' position and proximity to Jesus, and the Pharisees' education in the Scriptures, these should be the first two groups of people to identify Jesus as the answer to this problem. However, it seems even with their familiarity with Jesus and with Scripture these guys still don't get it. They are too busy talking at each other and arguing among themselves to recognise Jesus as the solution.

9. **Have you ever seen Christians trying to "argue" people into faith? How well have you seen that work out?**

Instead, it is the father of this possessed boy who recognises Jesus as the solution to his greatest need. And so this father comes forward and proceeds to have a conversation with Jesus. A conversation which when looked at closely has more to do with the father than with his demonically afflicted son. Have a careful look at the form that Jesus discussion takes with this concerned father. First, in verse 16, Jesus asks a question, in the following verse the father responds. Then in verse 21 Jesus asks another question and again the father responds. Once more in verse 23 Jesus asks a question (albeit slightly rhetorical) and again the father answers. As this concerned father's encounter with Jesus unfolds, Jesus is the one directing the conversation, he is the one asking the questions. The questions Jesus asks help the father realise what his greatest need really is, not deliverance for his son, but a strong and unwavering faith in Jesus.

10. **When you pray, who usually sets the agenda and does all the talking? How is prayer different when we let Jesus take the lead?**



GROW deeper

Read Mark 11:20-25

In Mark 9, the father of the possessed boy brings Jesus a need which no one else has been able to address. Only a few chapters later in Mark's gospel, we hear Jesus again talking to his disciples about prayer, this time in the context of telling a mountain to get up and go jump in the sea. While this may sound ridiculous, part of the point Jesus is making here is that none of our requests are too big for God and if we are prepared to bring him our requests just like the father did in chapter 9, and completely trust him with the outcome, then we can be assured that however things turn out, God will come through with whatever he knows we need.

Now, that is not to say that God will give us exactly whatever we asked for in exactly the manner that we expected, but Jesus does seem to be telling his disciples that once they have placed their concerns before God, that they should carry on with confidence that God will take care of it. Unfortunately, that kind of faith is sometimes difficult for us. As Martin Luther put it, ***“it is easier for us humans to believe and trust in everything else than in the name of Christ, who alone is all in all, and more difficult for us to rely on him in whom and through whom we possess all things.”*** Because of this, we often pray in such a way that we leave ourselves or God wiggle room to explain away the times when we don’t get what we want from God. We pray, “if it is your will” allowing us to rationalise that it obviously was not God’s will if our prayer is not answered as we expected. Or we bargain with God saying, “God if you would just do this (insert petition here) then I will do” and so we decided that God didn’t need us to do ... and so he didn’t do what we wanted. The real question is, how do we know what God’s will is if we do not allow him to have the first word? The reality is that it is easier and more comfortable for us to pray in a way that leaves us with some sense of control over our problems than to completely place them in Jesus hands. God knows what we need more accurately than we know for ourselves, why not start your prayer by asking him, what he wants to do with you today?

11. The father came to Jesus concerned for his son, Jesus saw the man and was concerned by his doubt. If you were the father in this story, what would your reaction be to Jesus questioning your faith before addressing the need that you thought you had?

12. How big are your prayers usually? Do you pray audaciously asking God to do amazing things in your life and the lives of others, or do you keep your prayers small so you can’t be disappointed by God’s response?



LIVE purposefully

Prayer is not an exercise in trying to convince God to change his mind. It is an encounter with Jesus in which he has the opportunity to change and transform our hearts and conform them more into his likeness. We make prayer something other than what it was intended to be if we do all the talking and deny God the chance to speak to us and redirect our thinking. When we allow God to realign ourselves with him as we listen to him through prayer and scripture, he promises that we will see incredible things – even see mountains jump into the sea. Why not try letting God speak to you in your prayers this week and see what happens.

13. What is the most outrageous thing (that aligns with what you know of God’s will for his creation) that you can pray for this week?

14. What are some ways can ensure you give God the first and last word in your prayer time?

15. What is something you have always been to scared to pray for? Try praying for it this week.



PRAY intentionally

- Praise God for his faithfulness and relentless love.
- Thank Jesus for his life among us and example to us.
- Ask the Holy Spirit to help you be still and to know more deeply all that God has done for you.



BLESS one another

You might like to address one person in your group and make the sign of the cross in the air as you say...

[Name], in Christ, all things are possible. Amen.