

Drawing Water

Isaiah 12

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Two weeks ago, we started a church-wide study on the *Treasures of the Transformed Life*. I hope all of you have been able to read the study book and be in a small group discussion focusing on the study. It's been powerful. As you know, the main metaphor for the study is water, so this past week dealt with the topic of drawing water. The week prior to that, we looked at preparation. Once the pump is primed and the water starts to flow, we can begin drawing water. Water in this study symbolizes what sustains and satisfies us.

Isaiah says, "With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation."

A primary way we draw spiritual water is prayer. Prayer increases and replenishes what nourishes and refreshes us.

How do we learn to draw this water? Not only draw it, but receive it? Here are some helpful principles in understanding prayer and drawing this water of life that the Lord provides.

*First, in prayer we **confess**.* We have to confess our sins to God. We spent some time this week on the question, why should I pray? One reason we pray is to confess. Prayer includes confession. That sounds scary to some folks, but it shouldn't be. Confessing doesn't lead to punishment and shame. Too many of us have the wrong idea that confession will mean punishment. But it actually opens the door to freedom and the ability to receive God's grace and favor. All of us have sinned. The Bible says, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9).

In Luke 18, Jesus tells a parable about two men who went to the Temple to pray. One of them, a Pharisee, was rather arrogant and proud, and he told God about all the good things he had done. The other man, a dishonest tax collector, stood off at a distance. He just said, "God, have mercy on me, a sinner."

Jesus said this man went home justified, "for all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be

exalted" (v 14). Prayer isn't about telling God how good we are. He knows us; he knows everything about us, including all the bad stuff. It's not that we have to wallow in our badness, but we need to be honest to receive God's forgiveness. When we ask for God's forgiveness, the joys of life begin to flow in us.

When we sin, there are three options for how we can deal with it. We can repress it, we can express it, or we can confess it. If I repress it, I just push it down deep into the recesses of my mind. It's a lot like pushing a ball down in the water. The further down you push it, the higher it's going to come out of the water when it finally gets released. Repressed things always find some expression later on.

Some people choose to express their sins, and, boy, when we begin to express our sins, not only do we hurt ourselves but we hurt a lot of other people. So I don't recommend unwisely telling everyone your sins without the safety of relationship. Even worse is acting out our sin through bad behaviors.

The best way to deal with sin is to confess it to God. We need to ask for God's forgiveness. That's one reason we pray: because it's a way of purifying—of cleansing— us from sin. Prayer receives God's power to help in our battle against sin in our lives.

The psalmist David said, "I confess my transgressions before the Lord." It's been said that, years and years ago on the frontier, people used to pray daily and bathe weekly. In today's world, we tend to reverse that. We take a bath daily, but we only pray maybe weekly. Prayer ought to occur every day. It's a method of cleansing.

Could prayer be something like the "Delete" button on a computer? We select some text, hit "Delete," and wipe it out. Prayer is a time of cleansing, of confessing, when God wipes out our sin. The Bible says God will remove our sins as far as the east is from the west. He will remember them no more. That's not because God has a bad memory, but he chooses not to hold them against us anymore. God promises to cast our sins into the deepest sea. Then he puts up a sign that says, "No Fishing."

“Come now, let us settle the matter,” says the LORD. “Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool.” (Isaiah 1:18)

God knows how to deal with sin. So, if you want to draw clean water, include confession in your praying.

*Second: not only does prayer involve confession, but we also need to see prayer as **conversation**.* God’s our friend. Jesus is alive, he’s real. He’s the best friend we have. You see what kind of friend he is in the Bible. Remember that passage when Mary Magdalene went to the tomb following Jesus’ resurrection. She was alone in the garden and saw someone she thought was the gardener. She asked him where her Lord had been taken. Then Jesus called her by name, “Mary,” and she recognized him as her friend, her Lord, her Teacher. They began to converse (John 20:11-18).

The chorus of a favorite gospel hymn, “In the Garden,” says:

And he walks with me, and he talks with me
and he tells me I am his own
and the joy we share as we tarry there
none other has ever known.

(The United Methodist Hymnal #314)

There’s no greater joy than having the best companion imaginable and walking every day with Jesus.

Another account from Jesus’ resurrection day is about two disciples going to Emmaus. They were joined by a third person, and they didn’t know who he was. They were having a conversation like friends. Then all of a sudden they discovered their companion was Jesus (Luke 24:13-35).

If we’re drawing the water of life, we’re committed and our commitment is genuine. We’ll discover through conversational prayer that God is our best friend. Song writers have a way of capturing this truth. Another gospel hymn “What a Friend We Have in Jesus” states, “O what needless pain we bear, all because we do not carry everything to God in prayer” (UMH #526).

Jesus is the best friend we have, and prayer is conversation with him. Somebody once said the best way to learn how to pray is to imagine that Jesus is sitting in a chair across from you. Talk to him and let him talk to you. Prayer is conversation that can really water our spirit.

*Third: we need to learn to be **consistent** in praying.* Prayer makes a difference in our lives. God uses prayer to make us different people. "To pray is to change. Prayer is the central avenue God uses to transform us" (Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline* 33).

So, what happens when we pray? One of the things that begins to happen is that our lives change. We become good stewards of all that God has given us, and we prioritize all of our resources. How we treat people, our neighbors, is different. How we go about our business is different. How we treat our family is different. We become consistent.

My grandfather had one of those antique roll-top desks. I remember sitting at it sometimes and looking at all the drawers, cubby holes, and compartments. People put different things in the different compartments. You could put your bills in one spot and your notes in another one, or things you needed to do in yet another one. A lot of us try to put life into compartments like that. We tend to put our work here, our family here, maybe our church over here, our relationship to God here, and maybe our leisure time right here. We try to put it all into compartments, but that doesn't really work; it's not how we're supposed to live. True commitment is about having such a relationship with Christ that it cuts across all the compartments of life to become the foundation of it all.

A life of genuine, biblical commitment isn't like an old roll-top desk with compartments; it's more like a flat desk with everything on top of it. It's together and we're consistent in everything that we do. Life with God is that kind of desktop. All aspects of our lives—home, work, prayer, or church—all are strengthened, and all are focused on where our commitment lies. That's true stewardship of all areas of our lives. Prayer touches every aspect of life.

*Now a fourth thing: we need to pray with **confidence**.* The study book spent some time this week looking at the question, "How should I pray?" We learned that we need to be confident when we pray. We're not just

saying words, we're praying to the Lord God who hears our prayers. We're praying to God who knows how to answer our prayers.

Elijah called the prophets of Baal up to Mount Carmel and said, "Let's decide whose god is really God." Remember the contest they had? Elijah and the prophets of Baal were each to sacrifice a bull and put it on an altar on the mountain, and the god who set fire to the sacrifice would really be God. So the prophets of Baal brought in the bull and put it on their altar. They cried out to their god, and their god didn't answer. Elijah said, "Well, maybe he's taking a nap or maybe he's eating lunch or maybe he's busy somewhere." The prophets of Baal became frustrated and cut themselves, trying to get Baal to answer their prayers and bring fire to the altar, burning up their sacrifice.

To get a true image of prayer, picture Elijah when he rebuilt the Lord's altar of stone and put the bull upon it. He wet it down with lots of water, confident that what he was asking was going to be answered by God. He didn't pray timidly; he prayed with confidence. And when he prayed, God responded. Whoosh! The fire from God came immediately and burned up the bull, the wet wood, the stones, and the dirt (1 Kings 18:16-46).

The Bible teaches us that if we draw water, it's going to be more than a trickle. It's going to be a deluge of how God wants to answer our prayers. That's what he desires most. I think God wants to raise up in today's churches people who pray confidently, asking for big things and expecting to receive them. Sometimes the answers come all at once, and sometimes they come more as part of a process. But God does and will answer prayer.

In the book of Acts, there's a beautiful example of answered prayer that probably depicts the attitude of many churches. Peter was in prison, so a group of believers was praying for his release. While they were praying at the home of Mary, John Mark's mother, they heard a knock at the door. A servant went to the door and recognized Peter's voice. Although they'd been praying for Peter's release, they weren't really expecting it, so the woman was a little bit shocked. Instead of opening the door, she sped back to those praying. I can almost hear her running into the house and saying "Hey folks, you'll never guess who's at the front door." The answer to their prayers was knocking on their door and they had a hard time believing it.

They prayed for Peter, and God answered the prayer (Acts 12:1-18). Let's all pray more confidently because our God is such an awesome God! And let's believe and receive the answers God sends to knock on our door.

A boy was making a list of all the things he wanted for Christmas. His father was watching this process when the boy put down a column called "things received" and listed something from his grandparents.

His dad pointed out "They haven't given you a gift yet, have they?"

The boy replied, "No."

The father asked, "How do you know they're going to give that to you?"

The answer: "I know they're going to give it to me because they said they would give it to me. I can go ahead and write it down."

That boy was confident that his grandparents would do as they promised.

I hope that when we pray, we believe enough to write it down, because Jesus has promised that if we pray something in his name and it's his will, he's going to give it to us. So, then, how should we pray? We're to pray confidently.

One final point about prayer: in prayer we comply with God's will. Prayer isn't about bending God's will to meet my will; prayer is about bending my will to meet God's will.

In the Garden of Gethsemane on the night before he died, Jesus prayed earnestly, "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will." Jesus was totally committed to the will of God.

I still remember some lines of poetry I once read about this:

Thou seemest human and divine,
The highest, holiest manhood, thou.
Our wills are ours, we know not how,
Our wills are ours, to make them thine.

(Tennyson, <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/45328/in-memoriam-a-h-h-obiit-mdcccxxxiii-prelude>)

Prayer isn't saying to God, "I want you to do this, at this time, in this way." Prayer is saying, "Father, I want your will." God isn't a celestial Santa Claus. God's not a cosmic errand boy. He's not a servant that we send out to do things to serve us.

Prayer involves submission to the will of God. How do we know God's will? There are a couple of primary ways. When we pray in relationship to God and as he begins to awaken us to new spiritual awareness, we begin to learn what God's will is. We learn more about God's character. We also know God's will from his promises in the Bible.

Our study book has this illustration in it. If you throw a rope to a rowboat a few feet away from the pier, the people in the boat don't pull the pier out to the boat. They pull the boat to the pier. Prayer isn't pulling God out to where we are; prayer is pulling us to where God is and where he wants us to be.

The bookmarks we gave out have a couple of prayers for the church on them. They're about seeking God's will, surrendering to God's will. We need to be committed to doing what God wants even before we discover what it is.

One of the prayers is a version of one we've used quite a bit around here:

God, we are your church, to do with as you will. By your Spirit's power, help us to be all that you want us to be in Jesus' name. Amen.

The other comes from another pastor in Oklahoma. For a while, she shared various prayers on Facebook. I really liked this one and I still use it:

Lord, give us the vision to see the church you have called us to be; give us the passion to desire your vision; give us the wisdom to find the path to your vision; give us the strength to move on toward your vision; give us the joy to celebrate your work being done! In the name of the One who called together those first disciples to do the work of the kingdom we pray. Amen. (Susan Southall, First UMC, Enid)

Learning how to pray is such a joy. Prayer is *confession* and *conversation*. Prayer needs to be *consistent*, *confident*, and *compliant* with God's will.

This past week has been an exciting study of commitment to prayer. The water flowing through prayer is refreshing and thirst-quenching, truly satisfying. We look forward to the other powerful ways God is going to bless us in this adventure.