

Invitation to Prayer
February 15, 2015

I want to take you back in time this morning. The time to which we are going is an ancient time. We do not know the date or year. We know it just as a time between other events.

This time was after the first sin. This time was after God evicted Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden. This time was after their son, Cain killed his brother Abel, and after his next brother, Seth had a son of his own. Yet, this time was still a long time before Noah was born. It is a time somewhere in there that is recorded for us.

Genesis 4:26b At that time men began to call on the name of YAHWEH.

If you are not familiar with that name, it is the personal name of the God of the Bible.
(Yahweh = self-existent one)
It means something like self-existent one.

"At that time, men began to call on the name of Yahweh." Why? Why did people then start calling on the name of Yahweh?

Well, in the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve had a personal relationship with God. God talked with them like two people converse back and forth. Man was innocent then since sin had not entered his heart. But they lost this special relationship with God when they sinned and left the garden. That pure relationship had been destroyed by their sin. Mankind no longer had a personal relationship with God.

Adam and Eve were still alive at this point in time. They could share their story of knowing God personally. They wished for that again. They wanted some kind of connection to God. So did others.

So, though God was invisible to them, they started calling on the name of Yahweh. They needed God. They wanted to know God personally. So they called on Him. They sought Him out. They began to pray.

These prayers were not for information. Those prayers were for God Himself. Man sought the face of God. This means they sought the attention of God. They sought a personal relationship with God.

When your children are playing and you need to tell them something, you call their name from across the room. You want them to turn and look at you. You want to see their face, so you know they are attentive to you.

There is a Hebrew figure of speech used in parts of the Bible for prayer. It is to seek the face of God. This means to seek the attention of God, the notice of God, a word from God.

Children do the same to you. They call out, "Daddy, look. Look daddy." They want you to turn your attention on them, by facing them.

Mankind needed, wanted the attention of God. We still do. We need to know that God sees us and hears us and that we have some kind of personal connection to Him that will bring His power and wisdom to bear on our lives.

We need personal contact with God. We need a personal word from God. We need to know that God hears us and sees us as individuals. We need to know that we matter to God. We need the attention, the face of God.

God wants this connection with us too. So God invites us to pray.

Jeremiah 33:3 (NIV) 'Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know.'

(1 Chronicles 16:10; 2 Chronicles 7:14)

God is inviting you to pray.

A few years ago a pastor was invited to attend the National Prayer Breakfast, held by the President of the United States. Clergy of all flavors, from around the country, were invited. They were instructed to wear whatever they normally wore when serving in their respective religious groups. This particular pastor usually wears jeans and a colored button up shirt. He says he certainly wasn't going in that. So he bought a suit. His wife only owned two dresses. So she had to go buy something to wear. She called from the store and told him she found the perfect dress for the occasion. The problem was it cost \$4,000.00. He said she finally managed to find something less suitable, but for a lot less money.

It did not occur to them to turn down the invitation. Would you? If you were invited to the White House for anything, would you turn down the invitation? I wouldn't. I would go,... not for the opportunity to meet the president, but for the possibility of addressing the president, of sharing one of my concerns, to offer an idea, to remind him of what is important. If you had such an invitation, wouldn't you go to the trouble of going?

I don't think you would turn down the opportunity. You would not make excuses. You wouldn't say, "I'm too busy, I've got too many things to do." You would rearrange your schedule. You would not say, "I don't have anything to wear." You would go buy something or borrow something from a friend.

If Solomon were alive today, the wisest man who ever lived, and invited you to meet him, wouldn't you go? Don't you have some questions for the wisest man who ever lived?

Some of you will remember those old TV commercials where two people are talking about investments. They are at a restaurant, or in the mall, or at a ballgame, and one says, "Well my investment broker is E.F. Hutton, and E.F. Hutton says." And then he pauses because everyone around them has suddenly gone silent and is listening to hear what E.F. Hutton says about investing.

That may not be true about E.F. Hutton. But it is true about Warren Buffet, one of the richest men on earth. If Warren Buffet invited you for a chat, wouldn't you go? If your favorite movie actor or sports player invited you for lunch, wouldn't you go?

Well even better than any of those, Yahweh, the creator of heaven and earth invites you to draw near to Him. Yahweh invites you to pray.

Now while prayer is not like two person talking back and forth, there can be two-way communication between you and God. God still speaks to His people today. But most of what He says is the Bible.

Let me give you several **Views of the Bible**.

To some the Bible is ancient mythical writings. Those who see the Bible this way believe it is no different than Aesop's fables or Grimm's Fairytales. These people see no truth for us today in these ancient writings. This view is the Bible has nothing true to say to our lives. I understand why they think this.

To others the Bible is ancient writings that contain some truth about God. These people believe that all religions contain some truth about God. So the Bible is just one set of ancient thoughts about God. It isn't any more true than The Book of Mormon or the Koran or the Hindu writings. I can certainly understand that viewpoint as well.

To us the Bible is the Word of God which He speaks into our minds & hearts. This view is MUCH different than the first two views of the Bible. While the writings themselves are just ink on a page, God does something special with these words, these ideas, these facts, these promises. God gives them life.

The people who wrote these documents did not know them as the words of God. But that is what they became. God had bigger plans for these ancient writings than the original authors intended. Look what He tells us about them.

2 Timothy 3:16 (NIV) All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness,

I want you to note the literal translation here of the first part of that verse. "All scripture is God-breathed." The phrase God-breathed means that God spoke the Bible into the writers. God spoke these words into the ones who wrote these documents.

Note what God says to us in the Bible. God teaches us what how we are to live. God rebukes in us what is wrong. Third, God corrects us, shows us how we got off the right path. And fourth God trains us in how to stay on the right path. Another way to say it is as follows:

Teaching us how we are to live.

Rebuking sin in us.

Correcting the direction of our lives.

Training us how to stay on the right path.

I believe God still speaks these words. He speaks them into us when we come to the Bible to seek HIM. Let me share with you how this conversation with God needs to take place. God is inviting you to pray. I want to share with you how to respond to God's invitation.

1. Come to him believing (faith).

Let me give you a simple definition of Biblical faith. It is this.

Faith = taking God at His word

Faith is to choose to believe what God has said in these writings. Many, many years ago, two men, friends, were at a spiritual crossroads. They had been to college together, both studying to become Christian preachers. They arrived, about the same time, at a point of intellectual doubt about the Bible. They talked about their doubts to each other.

One man decided he was going to go with his doubts and preach from the Bible as if it contained the word of God but was not fully the word of God. The other man determined that despite his doubts at the time, he was going to preach the Bible as if every word was the God-breathed words of God. The first man you have never heard of, most likely. The second man was Billy Graham.*

Once he took a faith stand on the Bible as the word of God, in time, God proved the truthfulness of those words to his heart. God erased all the doubts he had.

Today, God is inviting you to put your faith in Him and in these words. Even if you are not sure, step out and take a chance. What have you got to lose? It is up to God to prove Himself to you. If you really want to know what is true in this world, I believe God will reveal Himself to you through these words. So...

2. Come regularly to the Bible to meet God.

The Bible is the place to meet God is the Bible. I have lunch once a month with some of the pastors in the Arundel Baptist Association. The place we meet is a local restaurant. We used to meet here, in this building. If one of them forgets the new meeting place and comes here instead, we won't be together. This is not the place to meet for lunch. A certain restaurant is the place to meet.

So where is the place to meet God? The place to meet God is here (the Bible). Come to the Bible to meet God. Seek Him.

While there is much ABOUT God to learn in the Bible, religious information is not the primary reason to read it. Don't consider the Bible just holy trivia. Consider it the place to meet God.

Seek God Himself. These are His words. When you come with faith, He will speak His words to your heart and mind.

I know this because God has been speaking this way to me for 40 years. God has made these scribbles of ink alive to my heart. I believe God wants to speak them to you, too. And He knows what you need to hear. He knows what part of 2 Timothy 3:16 you need today.

God is free to apply a particular truth to a particular person at a particular time.

He may rebuke me today, but instruct you. God deals with each of us where we are. God has a unique and personal word for each of us. Reading the Bible is about meeting God. Reading the Bible is about hearing God. Come to God, in His word, and see what He has for you each day.

3. Shape your prayers in response to what God says to you.

Most of us pray our lives to God. We pray our problems, needs, concerns, and worries. And we are supposed to do this. We are expected to do this. But don't shape your prayers ONLY by your life situation. Shape your prayers in response to what God has said to you through His words.

After God speaks His words into your heart, respond with those words. Respond with those truths. Mold and shape your prayers in response to what God has said to you.

This is what you do in a conversation. When your friend speaks truth to you, you respond to that truth. I sent an email out yesterday that the building here might be on the cool side this morning. I expected you, if you read that email, to dress extra warm just in case the heat pump could not keep up.

In just that way, God expects us to respond to His words. He expects us to respond with prayer that reflects what He has said to us, and then respond with further action if He calls for some kind of obedience. Make God's truth your truth. When He speaks to your heart, say yes.

Your prayers through the Bible will not be like what Adam and Eve had in the garden. But because of Jesus and your faith in Him, your prayers through the Bible will be much, much more personal than anything they had after they left the garden.

God invites us to pray, to seek Him, and to listen to Him speak to us through His words.

Will you accept His invitation?