

**2024 August 11 Sermon:   Worship With Rejoicing: Prayers of the People  
2 Samuel 18:5-9, 15, 31-35,**

***"O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! Would I have died instead of you, O Absalom, my son, my son!" 2 Samuel 18:33***

Last week, we learned about the transformative power of God's Word, and today, we delve into the equally powerful realm of prayer. Prayer is not just a source of comfort, hope, and assurance but a force that can change our lives. It sustains us individually and as a church, always lifting us up when we are down. Communication is a crucial aspect of any relationship. A genuine relationship is always two-way. And it is no different when it comes to our relationship with God. God communicates with us primarily through His Word, and we speak to Him through prayer. The reality is that we cannot have a deep connection with God when we neglect prayer.

Overlooking prayer causes us to miss out on many benefits that enrich our lives. Prayer is not only something that Jesus teaches us how to do in Matthew 6:9-13 but is also something that we read in scripture that He himself frequently did. The benefits of prayer include changing our focus from the circumstances going on around us, good or bad, and directing our focus to God in heaven. Prayer reminds us that there is something beyond this physical world we live in, and our battles are not a fight against flesh but a spiritual one.

Furthermore, prayer brings us closer to God. Because prayer is communicating with God, it helps us build and deepen our relationship with Him. It ushers us directly into God's presence and helps calm us during times of stress and anxiety. It provides us with a way to release burdens and find comfort and peace.

Prayer can be a source of emotional healing, helping us cope with pain, loss, and trauma, as well as improving mental resilience and even having positive effects on physical health, such as lowering blood pressure and improving overall well-being. This deepening of our relationship with God through prayer makes us feel connected, loved, and understood.

In our text today, we see David's agony after the death of his wayward son, Absalom! Despite Absalom's attempts to usurp the throne, David responds to his death not as a victorious king but as a heartbroken father. The complicated nature of this episode in David's story **calls our attention to the prayers of the people as our response to God's Word and to one another.**

David's anguish over the fate of his son is genuine, even though this son had opposed him as king. Even though the family had been torn apart by behaviors, selfishness, and raging egos, David still wanted to love his wayward son into a new way of being in the world.

Perhaps a part of David's pain was realizing how he had failed his son. What parent doesn't face such a loss without feeling somehow responsible for all that happened? This story can bring a measure of hope to those who may have felt like all is lost—not that there are immediate solutions. But there is an offer of grace, an invitation to lead with love, and a call to hold on to one another and to the God who loves us like a parent and whose heart breaks when we hurt.

**The Prayers of the People are the community's response to the proclamation of the Word.** They provide a time of intercession and public prayer in worship and represent an initial step in a commitment to action. The movement of the Prayers of the People moves from the world and the universal Church to local churches, communities, and individual personal needs.

**The prayers of the people invite us to respond to the complicated and often unknown challenges facing our neighbors in the pews, down the street, and around the world.** There are few simple solutions to the complex problems that plague our lives, whether it's war among nations, conflicts within families, or battles being waged in individual hearts. Our neighborhoods may be hungry for food, a living wage, or unconditional love, and we must grapple with these problems. However, regardless of the enormity of the challenges we face, grace abounds again and again.

**The people's prayers remind us that when we don't know what to do or are afraid to acknowledge the suffering around us, we begin with prayer**—and not just individual prayer, but corporate prayer. We don't have to know the details of our neighbors' struggles to gather together and offer one another grace through prayer.

When we gather as God's people for worship, our faces turn toward God. Our worship is an offering of selves, words, actions, commitments, confession, and repentance, all directed to God. However, we also turn our gaze outward toward the created world and the people around us. **We lift up prayers for healing and hope, for transformation and grace, asking God to intervene in situations we may not fully understand and with people we may not know.** Our prayers are earnest and faith-filled. We even offer ourselves as signs of God's presence, God's healing grace, and redemptive presence in the lives of those around us and the wider world. These prayers are known as "the prayers of the people."

Sometimes, we speak of intercession - prayers or actions on behalf of another. We care for others even without knowing their history or the details of their circumstances. Asking for prayer within the community doesn't mean sharing everything. It is an invitation to show grace for and with one another and with the world around us. We don't need to judge those who may have made bad choices. We can extend grace and provide space for healing and transformation to take place in safety.

The greatest thing about prayer is not simply what we get out of it; it is the fact that God is there, meeting us. The creator of the universe welcomes us to commune with Him. It is a wonderful privilege to pray to Him at any moment, in any place.

Let our prayers be true intercessions, prayers of the people who cry out to God and cling to hope.