**Mark 1:29-39**

I. Acknowledging our complicated relationship with prayer

A. Culturally, we cycle between a rhythm of achievement and entertainment, and prayer doesn’t fit easily within that rhythm

B. We quickly become distracted by the to-do’s of the day and the feelings that pop up in prayer, so we tend to not engage in prayer as much as we think we “should.”

C. Hopefully, this series will be an invitation into a life of prayer that is life-giving and fruitful

II. Examples of Jesus’ own practice of prayer

A. In the context of a life full of people and ministry, Jesus often withdrew to solitary places to pray (Luke 5:15-16)

B. When did Jesus pray

1. Sometimes he prayed before the work of the day (Mark 1:35)

2. Sometimes he prayed at the end of a day of work (Mark 6:45-47)

3. Sometimes he prayed over night (Luke 6:12-13)

 C. Observations about Jesus’ rhythm of prayer

1. Clearly there was a regular rhythm of engagement in ministry and then disengagement to spend on-on-one time with the Father

2. Clearly the kind of prayer Jesus was engaged in was very holistic and relational (it wasn’t just listing off a list of requests)

3. Prayer (time with his Father) was at the very center of Jesus’ life; it was out of his time with the Father that his ministry flowed. Prayer was not just one more thing on the to do list.

III. What did prayer mean for Jesus (observations from Mark 1:29-39)?

A. Prayer meant a time of rest and refreshment with his heavenly Father

1. The day before had been incredibly busy

a. Preaching, healing, casting out demons, lots of people time

 b. It was an exhausting day spiritually, emotionally, and physically

 2. So Jesus withdraws to get spiritual rest and refreshment with his father

a. Overflow analogy: Jesus had poured out so much the day before, so he needed his Father to fill his cup again.

 b. Then, he would jump back into more ministry with a filled cup.

 3. Prayer can mean rest and refreshment for us too

a. Prayer is not one more thing on the to-do list; it’s actually the getting away from the to-do list to be with God and hear him say, “Be still, know that I am God.”

b. The point is not to avoid the responsibilities of life, but to withdraw to be with God in order to be refreshed to face the responsibilities of life.

B. Prayer meant centering his identity and purpose in his relationship with his heavenly Father

1. The day before had been an incredibly successful day of ministry

 a. Everyone was loving his ministry and they were clamoring for more

b. Humanly speaking, the temptation would be to enjoy all the fame and applause and to let that define who he was and dictate his ministry plans

 2. So Jesus withdraws from all the people to be alone with God

a. He withdraws from all the expectations and all the voices to listen to the one voice that defines his identity and purpose: “You are my son, I love you, I am well pleased with you.”

b. Jesus was never beholden to any human being’s expectations on him because his identity was so grounded in his Father’s love for him

3. Prayer can mean a re-grounding of our identity in the Father’s love

a. All day long we listen to the voices of the world (“You need to pleaseme, impress me, perform, achieve, keep up materially, be a better spouse, parent, a better Christian”), and these voices can start to define our lives and dictate our decisions.

b. We need to withdraw to hear the Father’s voice reminding us: “you are my child, I love you. That’s what defines who you are.”

c. Again, the point is not to avoid the responsibilities of life, but to jump back into the responsibilities of life with an inner freedom

d. “Prayer doesn’t offer us a less busy life; it offers us a less busy heart.” –Paul Miller

C. Prayer meant discernment and guidance from his heavenly Father

1. The day before had been an amazing day that required discernment in terms of what next steps to take

2. Jesus withdraws to receive guidance from his heavenly Father

a. He receives divine guidance that goes beyond mere human assessment (human assessment probably would have kept him in that town).

b. Consider also the choosing of the 12 in Luke 6:12-13. Human assessment would not have chosen those 12 men, but God knew which men he wanted.

3. Prayer can be a space for us to seek and receive God’s wisdom that goes beyond the limited perspective we bring to decisions.

Conclusion

I. Being a Christian (= Christ follower) means actually following Jesus in the rhythms and ways of his life.

II. How might God be inviting you into a regular practice of spending time with him in prayer?

III. Choose a place and time this week to be alone with the Father.

**Discussion Questions**

1. Sunday’s message began by acknowledging the complicated relationship most of us have with prayer. What has your own relationship with and experience of prayer been like in recent years? What are some of the barriers to prayer and what are some of the fruits of prayer in your life?

2. Prayer is obviously a familiar topic for most of us. What from Sunday’s message was a new perspective on prayer that struck you or an old perspective that you needed to be reminded of?

3. Several times on Sunday the following statement was made: Prayer is not just one more thing on the to do list. What do you think was meant by that statement?

4. Consider the three things that prayer meant to Jesus from Point III above (points A, B, and C). Which of those most resonates with you as something you need or desire at this time in your life. Be as specific as you can.

5. Did you consider a specific place and time to spend with God in prayer this week? If so, how did that go? If not, is there a rhythm or practice of prayer that you would like to pursue in the coming weeks?