



## DEXTER UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

7643 Huron River Drive

Dexter, MI 48130

734-426-8480

---

### WRESTLING WITH GOD

~ Scripture: Genesis 32:22-31 ~

by Pastor Steve Bringardner

#### INTRODUCTION

We're looking at our CORE VALUES to discover the church God has in mind for DUMC to be.

Today's "core value": ***Personal Worship through Bible Study, Prayer and Reflection is vital!***

The Church God had in mind is a church full of people who are growing spiritually, for the "Body" (one of the New Testament's words for the church) is only as strong as its individual components. Only as we (as *individuals*) are being built up can the Body (as a *whole*) be strong, and accomplish the mission God has in mind for us. It was Paul's desire "*that the body of Christ be built up until all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature. . . (and) attain the whole measure of the fullness of Christ*" [Ephesians 4:12-13].

So one of our overall aims is to be well-fed as believers. We have three responsibilities:

- To be fed (through the worship & teaching of the church. . .but the pastors can't do it all!)
- To feed each other (that's where small groups come in)
- To become self-feeding (the ultimate goal!)

#### OUTLINE

So, just how do we develop a healthy relationship with God? How do we become self-feeding?

1. Daily partake of the *WORD OF GOD*:

*"Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good."* [I Peter 2:2]

BUT. . .

*"Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil"* [Hebrews 5:13-14]

2. Faithfully spend time in *PRAYER*:

“*Evening, morning and noon I cry out. . .and he hears my voice*” [Psalm55:17]

3. Regularly *GATHER WITH OTHER BELIEVERS* – the whole family (on Sundays) & in small groups:

“*Let us not give up (slack off) meeting together as some are in the habit of doing,*

*but let us encourage one another.....*” [Hebrews 19:25]

Pastor Matt will deal with #3. So let’s look at the other two this morning. . . . .

## I. DAILY PARTAKE OF THE WORD OF GOD

How might we describe God’s Word this morning? It’s like:

1. *A love letter* [like receiving a letter from a good friend or a lover--  
if you leave it unopened, you won’t hear the good news]
2. *A secret* [ between good friends who do a lot of deep sharing;  
it’s like having a good friend confide in you something incredibly special]
3. *A standard or law* [knowing what you can’t do actually protects, like not driving 100 mph;  
it brings comfort to know you are doing the right thing in a difficult situation]
4. *A light* [to show the way to go, the next step;  
it’s like having your life & future directed in the best path possible]
5. *A lifeline* [like being pulled out of rapid swirling water; it’s knowing you are really safe  
&  
secure and that you will never be let go or abandoned in death]

The Bible is God’s communication to us, given by God who desires our friendship and worship.

The reason we need a significant dosage of the Word of God is to keep us from:

- Walking in the flesh (because of not knowing His ways, His plan for our lives)
- Becoming frustrated (trying to live up to our own expectations, let alone God’s)
- Getting easily confused or deceived (there are so many “false teachings” out there)
- Mistaking own thoughts & emotions for the leading of the Holy Spirit
- Being unable to trust God (because of not knowing His promises or how He works things out)

We need to “*rightly divide (learn how to correctly handle) the word of truth*” [I Timothy 2:15].

## II. FAITHFULLY SPEND TIME IN PRAYER

Colossians 2:19— *Do not “lose connection with the Head (Christ), from whom the whole body grows as God causes it to grow.”*

Colossians 4:2— *“Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful.”*

I’ve heard it said that *“every time you pray, you punch holes in the darkness;*

*but every time you complain, you plug those holes.”*

When it comes to prayer, God desires INTIMACY + IMMEDIACY + INTENSITY. . . . .

### (A) INTIMACY

In the Garden of Eden, ADAM & EVE talked with God *and* God talked with them. They were in communion. Then came the Fall, which brought a rupture in the sense of perpetual communion, for Adam & Eve hid from God. We’re still hiding today. But God has continued to reach out to his rebellious children.

God is an intensely relational God. He desires to be known. He desires to be in relationship with us. He always takes the first step, the initiative. That’s what distinguishes Christianity from other “religions”: He seeks us more than we seek Him. *“We love God. . .because He first loved us.”*

That’s why He can promise that *“when you call upon me and come and pray to me, I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you”* [Jeremiah 29:12-14a].

### (B) IMMEDIACY

God is ever present (available) to you. In the Old Testament, we’re told that God spoke to MOSES *“face to face, as a man speaks to his friend”* [Exodus 33:11]. But the Israelites could not tolerate such closeness. Once they learned a little about God, they realized that being in his presence was risky business and told Moses: *“You speak to us, and we will hear; but let not God speak to us, lest we die”* [Exodus 20:19]. And so they began to step away from the sense of God’s immediacy—the sense of the cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night.

Under SAMUEL, this only grew worse. The people began to clamor for a king. *“Give us a prophet, give us a king, give us a go-between, so we do not have to deal with God directly.”* Look at us today: *“Give us a pastor, give us a priest, give us someone who will do it for us, so we don’t have to come face-to-face with God ourselves.”* Even though we still want to reap the benefits.

Little wonder we have difficulty praying. . .studying God’s Word. . .taking advantage of all the “means of grace”. Like Moses, we must learn how to hear His voice and obey His word. We must create the emotional and spiritual space which allows Christ to construct an inner sanctuary in our heart. That’s what prayer, Bible study, and worship are all about: **CREATING SPACE FOR GOD!**

JESUS needed this sense of God’s immediacy! Do we need it any less?

- *“The Son of Man can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing; for whatever he does, that the Son does likewise” - John 5:19*
- *“I can do nothing on my own authority; only as I hear, I judge” - John 5:30*
- *“The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority; but the Father who*

*dwells in me does his works” - John 14:10*

Then JESUS declared himself to be *The Good Shepherd*, and as such his sheep (us) would know his voice [John 10:4]. So, immediacy is once again available to us through the H.S.

### (C) INTENSITY

A good word for prayer is DESIRE. Desire is not merely a simple wish; it is a deep-seated craving, an intense longing. Desire is absolutely essential to prayer—whether it be a desire for a closer walk, for forgiveness, for strength of character, for healing or resolution of some problem, to bring change into a situation, a person, or a whole nation.

QUOTE: *“Prayer is the verbal expression of desire. If prayer is asking (or seeking) God for something, then prayer must be expressed. Desire is silent, unheard; prayer is heard. The deeper the desire, the stronger the prayer. Without desire, prayer is perfunctory, formal, and has no heart, no feeling. . .and as such is a waste of precious time.”*

Let me take you to the text for the morning. It is found in Genesis 32. Jacob was preparing to meet up with his brother, Esau, from whom he had been estranged for 20 years. The last time Jacob had seen Esau, Esau was ready to kill him for stealing the family blessing. Now, Jacob sends out messengers with the promise of gifts. They return, and report that Esau is heading this way—and “*400 men are with him*”. Jacob is terrified! After taking some precautionary measures (e.g.: dividing the camp into two halves; sending “gifts” ahead), he sets out to pray.

Good move, Jacob! How often we wring our hands and say, “*All I can do is pray*”. I think Jacob had finally learned that he was dealing with the God of the Universe, and the first thing he needed to do was pray. Why do we make such bold confessions of faith, such as:

- *“I believe in God the Father, maker of heaven and earth. . .”*
- *“He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. . . all things were created by him and for him. . . and in him all things hold together” (Colossians 1:15-17)*
- We read what he said to the persecuted church: “*‘Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.’ So we can say with confidence, ‘The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?’” (Hebrews 13:5-6).*

Then make prayer our last resort?

On the night before Jacob was to meet his brother Esau, he took his family and crossed the River Jabbok. We pick up the story in verse 24:

<sup>24</sup> *So Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him till daybreak.* <sup>25</sup> *When the man saw that he could not overpower him, he touched the socket of Jacob's hip so that his hip was wrenched as he wrestled with the man.* <sup>26</sup> *Then the man said, "Let me go, for it is daybreak." But Jacob replied, "I will not let you go unless you bless me."* <sup>27</sup> *The man asked him, "What is your name?" "Jacob," he answered.* <sup>28</sup> *Then the man said, "Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled with God and with men and have overcome."*

Who did Jacob wrestle with? The text just says “A Man”. Was it an angel? the Spirit of God?

To remember what took place that night, God changed Jacob's name to ISRAEL == one who struggles with God ~or~ one who has power with God (not "over"). Jacob was determined to have the power of God at work in his situation. That's the BLESSING he wanted!

I know sometimes prayer is *passive* (e.g.: meditative prayer). But there are times when it needs to be very *proactive* (e.g.: persistent, deliberate).

### CONCLUSION

My grandfather was a man of prayer. I can remember hearing him pray fervently in his room many times when I stayed overnight. What a dramatic impact his prayers had on my life. I wouldn't be here today if it were not for his influence. We need more praying grandparents.

Recently, I was seeking God about something and I went to the place where I know I will meet God (i.e.: a cemetery). I had to know: *Am I on a dead-end street? Am I going to crash?* By the time I left, the Lord had assured me that He is in control! That's good enough for me.

The difference between my grandfather and me is that my intensity is too sporadic.

My hope and prayer is that we will be a people who have the power of God at work in our lives and in our midst. . . that we will be a people of prayer vs. people who pray (occasionally).

What is it you want (desire) this morning? What longing do you have?

- Forgiveness. . .Reconciliation. . .Salvation. . .Change. . .Cleansing. . .Recovery. . .Hope?
- Freedom from negative emotions or criticism (of self, of others)?
- To live in the present and be done with the regret of the past or the fear of the future

Will you give yourself earnestly to prayer? to the study of God's Word? to worship?

Albert Einstein: "*Nothing happens until something moves.*" To help us start moving, the ushers will hand you a sheet: ***Scripture Texts from the Gospel of Mark for Daily Study, Prayer & Meditation.***