



Purposely on Prayer January 1-14-2024

On June 8th, 2021, Ke'Bryan Hayes, playing on the Pittsburgh Pirates baseball team, hit a homerun! But just barely.

In fact, at the beginning of his hit, he couldn't tell if the ball was going to sail LONG enough and HIGH enough to clear the back wall.

In his rush to run as many bases as possible, in case it didn't clear, he failed to touch first base. The video playback showed the miss clearly. His homerun didn't count.

Reminding us that in baseball, even if you hit a homerun, IF you miss tagging that first base, it doesn't count.

The same is true for the Christian life and in our relationship with Jesus. Staying close to Jesus is tagging the first base, the most important step.

Even if we read out Bibles, even if we worship in church, even if we give, serve, witness. IF we miss tagging the first base...personally staying connected to Jesus, it doesn't count.

We are just going through the motions. We may look good on the outside, but we haven't really gotten anywhere.

Even though missing tagging first base is pretty rare in the major leagues, spiritually this still happens to me more often than I want to admit. In my rushing around, I miss at times... staying close to Jesus.

This is a little embarrassing, but that happened to me again when I got Covid. I was not happy! I was grumpy, so tired, phlegmy...irritable. And I was looking for someone to blame!

So, I blamed God. And I could sense I was resisting drawing near to God. Now this played out for me especially in prayer...just so angry and frustrated and in discomfort and boredom and struggling with the unknown...worried about how fast I was going to heal.

I could tell I wasn't praying as much as I would like. It's like I'd walk up to first base to connect with the Lord. And then step back/basicly say, "Nope, not happening!"

Being sick and mad, made it hard for me to draw near to the Lord in prayer. Which hampered my ability to pray for others.

That's what we learn from our text this morning.

Jesus is trying to help his disciples connect the dots on this truth. Praying leads to loving. When we pray, God shows us our purpose...to share his love with others.

Early in the morning Jesus got up, while it was still dark, and got away from everyone and everything, in solitude. And prayed.

And when he prayed, Jesus gained clarity about his mission. He saw more of what he was supposed to be doing on earth. God wanted him to go to ALL the towns, share God's love with EVERYONE.

Spending time with God in prayer enables us to start our year with intention. And we become clearer about our purpose.

But resetting ourselves, living set on and centered in Jesus, requires being faithful in prayer and that leads to multiplying our love.

Jesus was teaching his disciples this clearly by his actions. Value prayer. Commit to prayer. And love others more.

That is probably why I am so excited about our Dynamite Prayer Initiative. It encourages us to love our church by praying for our church. Asking God to do great things.

I am excited because I need this too. I need encouragement and resources, and reminders and a community faithful to prayer. This is a praying church! I need all of that to help me pray.

Bishop Plambeck has invited all the churches in North and South Dakota and in Minnesota to participate in this Dynamite Prayer Initiative.

It has two components.

You can buy the Dynamite Prayer devotional and take 5 or 10 minutes each day to go through the 28 Day Experiment. Spend 4 weeks with God.

You can do that on your own or you can join a group, meeting weekly for 4 weeks. More details are in the entry way. One small group will start this Tuesday, in the Fellowship hall, at noon, for an hour, feel free to bring your lunch, it's casual.

And the second part.

We are also re-igniting our Breakthrough Prayer process. You have participated in this in the past, here at BUMC.

Breakthrough Prayer is simply committing to praying twice a day for God to break through, to do something new in our midst as a church. Imagine what God could do with all our prayers!

As mentioned, we have created a Dynamite Prayer card...looks like this. With a time to pray at 9:02 am and 9:02 pm, or whatever works for your schedule.

And at the appointed time, simply take the card and pray the prayer on the back...

God Who Sees Us, stir up this truth in our daily experience, "the same power that the Father used to raise Jesus from the dead is at work in us." (Eph 1:19-20) Breakthrough, speak, show, and inspire us so that we may follow where your Spirit is leading us next at BUMC. Amen.

And BOOM you are done. Maybe takes all of 21 seconds...timed myself. A daily, 1 minute commitment, to pray for our church. Pretty easy.

Another exciting thing, kind of a "God at work story", is how we got to this point of offering the devotional and dynamite prayer.

When the Bishop invited us to participate in this Dynamite Prayer Initiative, I hadn't gone thru the devotional. And I learned from Jean Metcalf and the Adult Discipleship team, they previewed their book. It's just wise to preview the materials.

So, Sheryl Lehman and I started going through the devotional, to preview it.

And we got to thinking, what if a small group of us got together and previewed the materials together? Get a few more perspectives? More voices to decide if the devotional was any good, worth your time.

I put in a blurb in the Connections, once. And add personal invites from Sheryl...quickly we had a group of six of us to preview the material and create the prayer cards.

That was pretty exciting to watch that group spring up so quickly! Very encouraging! And we had really positive weekly times together sharing. Maybe God is up to something?

So, even as I highly recommend participating in the devotional, joining a group, and committing to pray twice a day. Thanks be to God, you don't have to just take my word for it.

This morning, three brave women from that group are going to share, willing to share a little bit about what it was like to be a part of this group, read the devotional, and grow in prayer.

Next week, we'll hear from the other two women and myself.

So...now...let's hear from Sally, Erva and Sheryl and their experience with this initiative.

Sally...?

Erva...

Sheryl...

Thank you for sharing! That was really great!

To close, I hope/we hope you participate in some way! Doing the devotional, maybe joining a group. At minimum, we hope you support your church with praying for 30 seconds in the morning and 30 seconds at night.

Don't forget to grab a Dynamite Prayer card...handing them out in the entry way.

Let's join hundreds of churches and hundreds of other Methodists...and pray! To pray and grow in love for God and one another. Let's pray and watch what God does.

Lots of ways to take a small step in being purposeful in prayer, resetting yourself on Jesus in 2024.

As we turn to our Time of Reflection...I invite you to draw near to God in prayer, in the quiet of your own hearts. Think through a next step to take...doing the devotional, maybe joining a group, or committing to pray for your church twice a day?