

WORLD DAY OF PRAYER OPENING SERVICE: FUELED BY FAITH

Wednesday, Sept. 11, 2024

Rev. Richard Rogers

Do you believe that prayer works? [Congregants murmur] Six of us! That's great. [Congregants laugh] Right? It's a powerful six of us, though, right?

So, here's the challenge. Unity has always been about prayer. You know, since 1886, Myrtle Fillmore -- one of the Unity co-founders with her husband, Charles -- she was diagnosed with TB. And she began a spiritual process of healing through prayer. She was in prayer daily for three years.

Have you ever wanted your healing -- your miracle -- to come a little faster? [Congregants laugh] Right? So, for three years she was in prayer. You think, *"Well, man, I prayed all weekend."* [Congregants laugh] *You know, I dedicated a whole week to prayer!"* Three years she was in prayer.

In 1889 she had her healing. And people began to join her in her dining room table -- around her dining room table at night. Because they were so impressed; they were so touched; they were so moved by her healing that people just began to come to a dining room table at night, and they would just pray.

In 1890, the Society of Healing Prayer started: Silent Unity. And, you know, for the last 134 years, 24 hours a day, seven days a week, Unity has been there holding people in prayer. No matter what your faith; if you have no faith at all; no matter what your religion is; whether you wanted to donate or don't; didn't care. They're just there for prayer. And the number is 1-800-NOW-PRAY. If you haven't called Silent Unity lately, it is worth your activity just to do it.

So the question that I have for you is: There are now scientific studies that support that prayer works. They're pretty extensive! Crawford did a review of scientific studies on prayer. And they came up -- and these were studies between the years of 1955 to 2001. Crawford reported that 71% of the clinical studies and 62% of the laboratory studies reported the positive outcome from prayer.

Now, what I want you to see is that, in these studies, there was a group that was prayed for and a group that wasn't prayed for. And the group that was prayed for, they could see a substantial difference. So 71% of the ones reported in the clinical study; in a laboratory study, 62%. And then they went on and found out that many of these were double-blind studies and that they worked.

Dr. Cha studied 219 infertile women in South Korea, ages 26 through 46, that were going through IVF treatment in South Korea. Seoul, South Korea. And these women were randomly put into groups, and this was a study based on distant healing. The prayer groups were in U.S., Canada and Australia. The patients and their providers were not informed who was in the study, who was not in the study. The investigators didn't even know until the physicians had done the work at the end who was in it. So, it was a triple blind study. So, there was no... Like, they didn't even know they were being prayed for, so there was no placebo effect.

It showed that the women that were prayed for had a 50% versus a 26% pregnancy rate. Double. Double! It doubled the group that was prayed for. And the impregnation rate ... I don't know; I guess that's what they said. I didn't know that's a term. Don't, don't email me. Just email Richard. [Congregants laugh] It was 16% versus 8% -- more than double!

Now, there was also a study that showed the impact on non-humans. Lesniak discovered a study -- did a study -- where they studied intercessory prayer on wounded non-human primates which comprised 22 bush babies that were found wounded with chronic self-injuries. These animals were randomly put into groups, and a control group with similar baselines. Prayer was conducted for four weeks. Lesniak found

that the prayer group animals had a greater reduction in their wound, and a greater improvement in the hematological parameters than the control animals. This study is critical, because it included non-human species and, therefore, unlikely any placebo effect. I thought that was so funny! [Congregants laugh]

Now, not all studies show that prayer works. Sir John Templeton did a study in Harvard on cardiac patients. And Sir John Templeton has been very generous with Unity Churches over the years when he was alive, right? And Harvard did a study. And in this study, they found that only 52% of the people that were prayed for improved, while 59% of the people that were not prayed for improved.

So what does that mean? If you're a cardiac care patient at Harvard, ask them not to pray for you. [Congregants laugh] Straight up. *"No! Nobody's praying for me as long as I'm here. When I leave this place, yes! Everyone can pray for me."* Right?

So, the question really isn't all these studies. And there's list and lists and lists of studies. But it's not really about the studies. Because the real question is: Does prayer -- not only does it work for everybody else -- but does prayer work for you? Does prayer work in your life? And that's one of the things that we really, I think we all have to individually answer is: Do we believe that prayer works?

And, you know, one of the things that happens sometimes -- for me, anyway -- is somebody will come up to me and say, *"Richard, will you pray with me about this or with that?"* or whatever it is, right? And I'm praying. I write it down. I'm praying with them. I'm holding them in prayer. I'll see them a few months later, six months later. And I'll say, *"So, how's that going?"*

And they say, *"Oh, well, it's healed"* or *"I got the new job"* or *"I'm in a great relationship. It's done!"* Right? They're done.

I say, *"Well, that's answered prayer!"* And they give me this blank look. [Congregants laugh] And I say, *"You asked us to pray with you! We've been praying with you! You are actually living answered prayer!"*

And sometimes we don't even remember that we're actually living answered prayer! That we are walking, talking answered prayer. And because it's so easy for us to assimilate our good, that we don't always realize what really drove that. What was the defining characteristic that allowed us to have the experiences that we're living.

And so, the question that I have for you tonight is: Do you realize how much of your life is answered prayer? That you're living the prayers that you prayed a year ago; five years ago; 10 years ago; 20 years ago. You're living that prayer now!

So, when we don't believe that prayer works, I don't think we're paying attention. Because we're not noticing all the prayers through the course of our life that have been answered; that have allowed us to build this life!

See, one of the things I think we all need is a little prayer journal. I think we need a little prayer journal beside our bed. And everything that we're holding a prayer -- and it could be others; it could be yourself -- that you just put a little date, what you're praying for, and you just put it in your little prayer journal. And then every month or so, you go through your prayer journal and you just see thing after thing after thing, situation after situation after a situation, where you're actually living answered prayer.

Because if you want to build your faith, you need to see your faith at work. And if you write down all your little prayers and all the people that you're praying for, and you see over and over again their life getting better -- they're having the miracle, having the experience that they wanted -- you begin to see, *"Holy moly, my prayers are working!"* And it's really not because of me. It's because the activity of God

is at work in all of our lives. And, as we pray together, we are empowered! And Jesus said, *"Where two or more gathered, there I am in the midst of them."*

And we have this power called prayer. And when we use it, we are blessed by it! Now, if we don't use it, we're still blessed. But I believe we're not as blessed.

And so, when you look at your life, what are you praying for? What are you holding in prayer? What is the thing that you want to move forward?

You know, a friend of mine: she is a crafter. And, you know, if you know anything about me, you know that I'm not. Right? [Congregants laugh] That's not one of my spiritual gifts; I just don't do it. Right? She's a crafter. And in her craft, she makes these wonderful ... They're actually jars. And she puts on them, "God Can."

And the idea with one of these "God cans" is that you write down whatever your prayer is; whatever the need is; whatever the situation is. You drop it in in the jar; you screw the lid back on; and you affirm ... together: [with congregants] *"God can!"*

God can! Right? I mean, it's a pretty simple idea! It's that, whatever you put in that jar, you're affirming that *"God ..."* [congregants] *"can!"* God can! And it's your God can! And it's amazing, because that simple act is the basis of us building up faith. And then when your God can gets too full, you take them all out and you think, *"Wow! That was done!"* And maybe it wasn't done exactly the way you wanted it to be done, but it was answered prayer. And over and over and over again, as we take these blessings out, we see answered prayer and it builds our faith.

So tonight, we start 24 hours of prayer. We join Unity churches around the world in 24 hours of prayer. And the idea of this prayer -- which has been the basis of Unity from the beginning -- is that we think prayer makes a positive difference in our lives and in the lives of others. And when we join together in prayer, there's a blessing that happens that is greater than we do, sometimes know, on our own. That, as spiritual beings, we have the ability to set an intention in prayer; to give it to God; and to watch it manifest in a goodly way.

This is the way Jesus taught us to do it: Matthew 17:20:

"For truly I say to you, if you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move. And nothing will be impossible to you."

Let me read again:

"For truly I tell you, if you have faith as a size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move. And nothing will be impossible to you."

Now, let's look at a mustard seed for a second, okay? Because many times when you think about this whole idea of faith, we think that we have to have this monster mountain-size faith to move the mountains in our life. That, if we want to be praying about something -- if we want good in our life -- we believe that we have to have this super-suspendous prayer life or faith life that is so big to move the mountains in our life.

And Jesus is so clear about this! He says, *"If you have faith the size of a mustard seed."*

How many of you have ever seen a mustard seed? You know, a mustard seed is about 1/32nd of an inch; 1/32nd of an inch! Now, do you know that, if you get a ruler out when you go home today, there is not even a line on the ruler for 32nd. There's a line for 1/16th; 1/8th; 1/4th; one half. But there's no 1/32nd! Because 1/32nd is so small, it would just make the whole ruler just one solid black line. So they can't even

put 1/32nd on there, because it's so small. So, when you hold a mustard seed at the tip of your finger, it is like one dot at the center of your finger.

So Jesus is saying if you have that little bit of faith, you will say to the mountain, "*Move from here to there,*" and it will be done. That that's all that's asked of us! To have one little dot of faith and we can begin to move mountains in our lives!

Now, we don't really believe that. But that's why it's so important that we really begin to develop a process for our faith. Because every day, if you write down your one or two or three prayer requests for that day, and you see that over and over again -- in God's way, in God's time -- those things are realized, you realize that all it really takes to have a deep, profound spiritual life is a little dot at the end of your finger!

Because you're not doing it. Your faith isn't what's important! All you have to do to have enough faith is to actually write down your prayer request and put it in the can! That's really all it takes! Because who does the work in your life? Who does the spiritual work in your life? It's God! It's not you!

As we develop spiritually, we kind of get a little spiritual ego. "*Look at all the things that I've healed. I'm almost walking on water!*" [Congregants laugh] "*Like, I'm feeding the multitude; look at all these tacos!*" [Congregants laugh]

That much! That's all you're asked to have -- is enough faith that it would fit on a dot on the tip of your finger. And that you ask God to move and work in your life. And that you actually write it down; you put it in the God can. And you watch God create one miracle after another in your life. But you actually have to have the faith to write it down!

You know, a few weeks ago, Unity sent Post-It notes to us. And I don't know if they sent them to all the ministers, but we got them in our house. And there's a group of Post-It notes. And the affirmation on the posted note is, "*My faith moves mountains.*"

Will you say that with me? [With congregants] "*My faith moves mountains.*"

Let's say it again like we actually mean it: [with congregants] "*My faith moves mountains.*"

And what I want you to see is: all you're talking about is that much. That's your whole job: to have that little bit of faith! That you actually believe that you could turn it over to God, and that God will do good and mighty things in your life. That your only job is to believe that it's ...

Jesus taught us the way to pray. He said: ask, believing that you will receive it; surrender it to God; and then give thanks even before you see it. And this four-step process: ask, believing that you will receive it; surrender it to God -- put it in your God can, write it down in your journal, and then put it away. You don't have to do anything more; put it away! Ask, believing that you will see it, surrender, and then give thanks ... and watch how that works in your life.

"My faith moves mountains."

Together: [with congregants] "*My faith moves mountains.*"

And I want you to hear that I believe that many of us have been making prayer way, way too hard. It's such a simple process! You've got to ask ...

Now, the other question is: Do you have to ask 100 times? Do you have to ask 1,000 times? Do you have to ask every day in prayer? No! You can write it down once -- put in the God can once! Ask, believing that you'll receive it. When you put it in the God can, you know that it's done. You put it in the God can, and it's done!

So you ask, believing that you will receive it; you surrender it; and then you give thanks. *“Thank you, God, that this is now working in the highest and the best way.”* And it's literally over; done; complete at that point.

I absolutely believe that our prayer life, for many of us, is just way too complicated. You think too much of the responsibility is yours. All us high Type A personalities; when we have a prayer project, we want to ... [congregants laugh] Like, we want to get in there and get it done! We're “Good Do-Bees!” We make things happen!

That's not what prayer is at all. You're writing out a little slip of paper – *healing; blessing; I want a raise; I want a great relationship.*” You put it in the thing. Ask, believing that it will be done; surrendering it to God; and give thanks.

“My faith moves mountains.”

Together: [with congregants] *“My faith moves mountains.”*

One more time: [with congregants] *“My faith moves mountains.”*

One more time: [with congregants] *“My faith moves mountains.”*

Pray with me.

I want you to open your mind, your heart, your soul to the most simple spiritual process we've ever had. Jesus never said it was hard. He just said: ask believing. Ask, believing, and then surrender to God; let it go! You don't have to think about it; you don't have to worry about it; you don't have to plan for it. It's done!

Ask, believing, surrender, and then rejoice and give thanks that your good is already yours.

Tonight, we begin 24 hours of prayer. Not 24 hours of worry; 24 hours of prayer to, over and over, rejoice and give thanks that everything that we are praying for is already ours. That we have a mustard seed-size of prayer; of faith.

As we pray tonight, we are divinely blessed. Thank you, God, for all the good. Thank you, God, for all the answered prayer in our lives. Thank you, God, for all the things; all the miracles; all the blessings too numerous to name that have filled our life; that have gone unnoticed. Today we rejoice; we give thanks; and we celebrate the bounty of your blessings in our lives.

So, in the name and through the power of the living Christ, we give thanks. And so it is. Amen.

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