



# Learning the Skills of Spiritual Communication

“True North” Series - #4

Whenever you set out on a challenging journey it is never wise to do so without preparation and equipment. As we head out on this journey we will be taking as a church in the next 7 months we’ve been talking about the compass. We want to be sure we are dead set on “True North” – agreeing on what we believe!

I brought something this morning that is also necessary equipment – Gu! You use it when you run marathons. I took 5 of these along with me and had Ashlee and Vicki give me two more along the way. What’s it for?

Marathon runners experience what is called, “the wall”, around mile 20. The body has used up all the stored energy that it can hold and for the last 6 miles of the race the source is fat – much harder to access – therefore you feel like you can no longer put one foot in front of the other unless you know some secrets... This is where “Gu” comes in. I had a pack of “Gu” at miles 4, 8, 12, 16, 20 and 24 (didn’t always work out just exact but generally that was true) and I finished strong and feeling good. I never hit the wall!

The Bible compares the Christian life to a race. It says over and over that the Christian life is hard! So, what is the “Gu” that keeps us going? There are many forms but let me suggest today that...

## Prayer

Is one of the most essential skills we must develop in order to keep on keeping on and doing it in the right direction. I want you to see how Jesus used prayer in his own life!

## Jesus’ Personal Example

**Before Major Decisions –**  
“One of those days Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray and spent the night praying to God. When morning came, he called his disciples to him and chose 12 of them, whom he designated apostles.” - Luke 6:12, 13

**Before Major Challenges –**  
“Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, ‘My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will.’” - Matthew 26:39

**In Everyday Life –**  
“But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.”

- Luke 5:16  
Solitude is the one place where we gain freedom from the forces of society that otherwise relentlessly mold us. And Jesus often retreated to solitude and prayer.

I like this quote from David Wells: (Prayer is Rebellion)  
“What then is the nature of petitionary prayer? It is, in essence, rebellion – rebellion against the world in its fallenness, the absolute and undying refusal to accept as normal what is pervasively abnormal. It is, in this its negative aspect, the refusal of every agenda, every scheme, every interpretation that is at odds with the norm as originally established by God.”

Prayer is the only way we can be “in the world” but not “of the world”

## Jesus’ Teaching

**Power of Private Prayer –**  
“But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.” -

Matthew 6:6  
This is the first record we have of what Jesus taught about prayer. Interesting that it emphasizes that everybody has to have a private place to talk to God!

**Pattern of Corporate Prayer –**  
Have you ever noticed the pronouns in the Lord’s Prayer? They are all plural! “Our Father...” – “Give us...” – “Forgive us...” It’s given as a pattern for people to pray together. Not that it can’t be prayed individually but it is given to be prayed together. Matthew 6:9-13

Prayer dotted the landscape of Jesus’ life and teaching like the lakes of Minnesota. Prayer was everywhere! For many of us prayer dots the landscape of our lives like the lakes of Nevada!

If that is true then you may be finding yourself hitting the wall more often than you care to admit! And if you hope to finish this race called the Christian life then you’re going to have to rethink how you use your

“Gu” – how you use the privilege of prayer. Sometimes Christians use other substitutes for prayer – listening to KTIS or Christian music or Chuck Swindoll (not that these are bad – they’re GOOD!) but if they become a substitute for prayer they will leave you wanting! And if you are identifying with me right now...listen up because the second half is all about “good news!”

This message has both a personal and a church-wide focus. The church focus relates to our journey together – discovering vision / discerning God’s will about building. This morning we unveil our theme for this journey of faith...Beginning today we take A.I.M. at...

## Advancing In Ministry (Answering the Call of God)

As the Resource Development Team tossed around words that describe what this is all about we talked about commitment and faithfulness, about the Master’s Plan and growing, about the future and building but this is where we landed.

- Our goal is to move forward (Advancing)
- Our goal is about (Ministry) more than about a building
- We are concerned that whatever we do we do in (answer to the Call of God)
- We are convinced that God’s call will always lead us to something glorious!

This translates well over to our personal lives, too! So this morning is about...

## A Call to Prayer

I came up behind one runner who had Philippians 4:13 (I can do everything through Christ who gives me strength.) written on a scrap of cloth and pinned to her back. I said, “I like your verse.” We talked for a half mile or so and I said, “I like Hebrews 12:1.” So I quoted...

Hebrews 12:1-3 “Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the

***joy set before him endured the cross...so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.”***

What that says to us, among other things, is that it is very much a possibility to grow weary and lose heart! Saw people taking off their numbers and stepping off the course into the crowd. But if we are going to not grow weary and not lose heart then we must fix our eyes on Jesus and that happens best through prayer!!

Prayer doesn't seem like much – like this little Gu packet - but it is powerful.

Let me tell you a story shared by Denise Boone of Littleton, CO...

Our eight-year-old son Jonathan plays on a hockey team. One day his coach announced a contest. The winner would receive two tickets for a Colorado Avalanche NHL game. Our son competed hard, but the tickets went to another boy. On the drive home there were tears of disappointment. I said, “If the desire of your heart is to go to a Avalanche game, you should pray about it.”

We discussed that God was not a Santa Claus, who gave us everything we wanted, but that we should tell him our desires and leave them in his hands. At bedtime that night Jonathan made his requests known to God. “God, this is Jonathan...I'd like to go to an Avalanche game. I know you are busy with a lot of other things, but I'd really like that.” My husband didn't know about our son's prayer. The next day he came home from work and announced that a friend had given him tickets to watch the Avalanche practice. It wasn't a game, but Jonathan we excited. The practice was held at the PEPSI CENTER in downtown Denver. Our seats were only eight rows up from the glass, right above the players bench. Seeing that some boys were standing by the glass, Jonathan went down and joined them. Thrilled to be so close, he watched his favorite player, legendary goalie Patrick Roy, at work.

Suddenly Patrick Roy skated over to the bench. He had broken the blade on his hockey stick. As the trainer handed him a new stick, Roy looked at Jonathan and pointed. The trainer

took the broken stick and handed it over the glass to our son. Jonathan held the stick above his head as if he had won the Stanley Cup. His smile could have powered the entire arena!

Patrick Roy's stick now hangs on his wall, but it is more than just a precious souvenir. It reminds our son of God's goodness. God always has our best and his glory in mind, and he is able to answer our prayers with more than we could ask or imagine.

That story reminds me of this quote from Hudson Taylor – missionary to China in a past generation...

*When we work, we work. When we pray, God works. – Hudson Taylor*

### **A Schedule That Works**

#### **Daily – The Personalized Lord's Prayer**

15 minutes 4/5 times a week as you drive to work; as you start your day or end it...short concentrated prayer on the issues of the prayer Jesus taught us to pray. Let me give you an example of how that might sound...

“Hallowed be your name” – I know I'm going to face unholy forces all day long. Help me to be holy as you are holy!

“Your kingdom come...” – I pray about the elections coming up. May your purposes advance. I pray for our troops today and their families.

“Give us today...” – Supply our needs today Father. I pray for Bill and Susie too because I know with their bills this is a hard time.

“Forgive us our debts...” – I'm struggling with my attitude toward Bob at work. Help me to be grace giving and to think of how you forgive me.

“Lead us not into temptation...” – Deliver my kids from the forces that are trying to enslave them.”

Along with that include prayer for your church family on this challenge we have in front of us...

1. **What is your vision for Immanuel's future?**
2. **What is your will about our building plans?**
3. **How do you want me to be involved?**

***Weekly*** – Once a week set aside a time to spend with God that is protected from other things. Couples may have to help each other out. I know I could have never done my training without Vicki being committed to it with me. Make a cup of coffee or grab your Bible and head for a place where you can be alone and just spend it with Him. You might want to take your journal and write down some thoughts that come to your mind. Take your Bible and read. This is a time where you are aware of prayer being a two-way dialogue rather than a one-way speech.

***You can't build a relationship on one-way speeches. You need frequent, sustained, intimate, contact between two persons, both of whom speak and both of whom listen...Listening to God speak to us through the Holy Spirit is not only normal, it is essential*** – Bill Hybels

These are special times...for you and for God. God loves you! He looks forward to the times just you and He can spend together. Even though you may not feel like it – work through the feelings of guilt or rejection or whatever you feel – and spend 45 minutes just with Him. Once a week. You will be amazed at the changes it can bring. But not just in you...

I brought along my finisher's medal from last Sunday but I also brought this one. This is my most important medal. It was given to me back in 1999 by my son-in-law Dan. After the marathon that he had run he took it off and gave it to me and said, “This is to motivate you to run next year.” It did and I did!

He sacrificed something that was valuable to him so that my life would be changed. Are you willing to sacrifice your time so that the life of another person may be changed forever? This is our “Call to Prayer.”

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This message was originally presented on Sunday, October 10, 2004 by Pastor Mark Coughlin at Immanuel Church of Forest Lake, Minnesota.