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Title: Who You Gonna Call

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Text: [Philippians 4:4-7](#)

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Good morning. Welcome to NAPS—National Associate Pastor Sunday!

I feel like I'm living someone else's life right now. What am I doing on the stage.....on Sunday morning..... at church..... speaking in front of all of you? How did I get here?

I'm sure some of you may be asking yourself the same question: What is she doing up there? Well, let me tell you - it's been a weird, wild ride— LOTS of praying, being in the right place at the right time. People have had blind faith in me; people have taken on me. I took a leap of faith. And did I mention PRAYERS? So I thought it fitting to have my first sermon focus on prayer—taking a look at our own capabilities and knowing when and who to call for help.

If you'll allow me (who am I kidding? I'm gonna tell you anyway.), I'll give you a glimpse into me. I grew up in a DOC congregation in Kokomo, Indiana—First Christian Church. I have MANY wonderful memories of my childhood that occurred within that church. I was part of Chi Rho, CYF (now youth group), children's choir (even though I couldn't carry a tune), VBS, pastor's class, baptism, and youth-led Sundays. I ran around the church after hours because my friend's mom was one of the ministers. That was where my faith was rooted. My mom was a volunteer Chi Rho leader and sang in the choir. She and my dad were deacons and played in the Sunday night bowling league, The Holy Rollers! We had some really wonderful times at First Christian. But this was also the place where we said our last goodbyes to my mom after a battle with cancer at the age of 42. And just like that, my sister's life, my dad's life, and my life were changed forever. My faith was rooted and my faith was tested. But no matter how dark the world got, I always prayed. Now, I'm not going to stand up here and say I had a devoted prayer life at this time, BUT I prayed. I was angry at God, but who else was going to help me get through life? I walked away from church for a while in my late teens and 20's (as a lot of young people do,) but I NEVER stopped praying.

Prayer is a theme for today's sermon. The Scripture is from Philippians, a book of letters written by Paul while he was in prison. We will be reading Philippians 4:4-7:

<sup>4</sup> Be glad in the Lord always! Again I say, be glad!

<sup>5</sup> Let your gentleness show in your treatment of all people. The Lord is near.

<sup>6</sup> Don't be anxious about anything; rather, bring up all of your requests to God in your prayers and petitions, along with giving thanks.

<sup>7</sup> Then the peace of God that exceeds all understanding will keep your hearts and minds safe in Christ Jesus.

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“Don't be anxious about anything; rather, bring up all of your requests to God in your prayers and petitions, along with giving thanks.”

Now I didn't know I was following Scripture back then; I just knew I couldn't do this alone. I was young and scared and needed help from someone much wiser. As I look back at it, I'm not sure it was as much of a conscious decision as it was a simple reflex. Nonetheless, I prayed and I have never stopped praying.

Let's fast forward this story, or I'll be up here way longer than any of us want. I church-shopped for a while after my daughter Hannah was born, but nothing ever really stuck. I heard there was a church that was being built next to my neighborhood and it was a DOC church. So we attended the first service, which was held in a tent on the property and then waited for it to be built. Once it was built in 2008, we entered and haven't left. I was asked to join the staff around 2011 as an administrative assistant—aka the Lori of the North (if you know, you know), and I caught the bug. I loved serving my church. I was the Children's Ministry director for several years and left in 2019 to earn more money to help put our three kids through college. I really liked my job, the initial challenge of learning something new, and I loved the people. But something wasn't right. Something was missing. I stayed active here for sure—as an elder and vice chair of the church board—but it just didn't seem enough. I was chair of the personnel committee as part of my board duties, and so was one of the first to read the job description for the director of discipleship and engagement. It sounded right up my alley. But I had a job. So..... My prayer life got bigger for sure! I knew I wasn't equipped with answers, so I looked to someone who was. I confided in others who joined me in prayers, prayer warriors for sure. And just look how these prayers were answered. You all are stuck with me now! All my anxieties - brought to God for help, and He answered.

“Then the peace of God that exceeds all understanding will keep your hearts and minds safe in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4: 7).

It sure has exceeded my understanding. Never did I imagine myself being called to be a minister, but here I am pursuing a passion that was lit right here. Prayer can be difficult for some. Some don't know where to start or what words to use. I have never really bought into the formality of prayer.

I use the KISS method. The acronym KISS—“Keep It Simple, Stupid” or as I prefer “Keep It Super Simple”—is an old design principle that many businesses still employ today. Apple is one such company. Ken Segall, Apple's creative team leader, wrote a book titled *Think Simple: How Smart Leaders Defeat Complexity*, and in it he wrote, “There were principles that Steve (Jobs) would never compromise. Simplicity is one of them.” If Apple and all of their innovations believe simple is best - I'm in pretty good company.

Prayers do not have to be long and complicated, although I'm sure some of you are sitting out there thinking.....*Michelle, I've sat through some of your prayers. Long is not a problem for you. Prayer is a conversation with God, not a form that we have to make sure all the boxes are checked. It's not a time to give orders, but to check in, report for duty. Some may get caught up in how to pray. What words do I use? How do I begin? Well there is a*

simple method that I learned about when I was working with the children. It is the “Five-Finger Prayer” and can be used as a guide when praying for others:



When you fold your hands, the thumb is nearest to your heart. So pray for those closest to you—your family and friends. The index finger is the pointer. It gives directions. Pray for teachers, coaches, therapists, doctors, first responders. The next finger is the tall guy. It reminds us to pray for leaders—national and local leaders in government, church, your work. The fourth finger is the ring finger and usually the weakest. Pray for those who are in trouble, sick or suffering. Last but not least is the little finger; it reminds us of our smallness in relation to God’s greatness. Ask Him to supply your needs. Bring all your requests to God.

Just talk with God. He wants to hear what’s on your heart. Some people also tend to use prayer as a last resort. I’ve tried EVERYTHING else, I guess it’s time to start praying. Prayer is not a last ditch effort; it should be one of the first things we do. God wants us to pray.....

“Pray continually” (1 Thessalonians 5:17)

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Our Scripture today asks us to bring it all to God. We need to take prayer seriously. Just closing our eyes, bowing our heads, and repeating some nice-sounding words is probably not enough. We need to bring our requests from sincere hearts.

The new year is going to be here in just a few hours from now. A lot of times, new years bring new worries. New worries bring about fretting. Fretting is a waste. Fret is derived from an Old English word *fretan* meaning “to eat.” As defined by Webster’s Dictionary: “to eat or gnaw into; rub, chafe; to cause to suffer emotional strain; to agitate; ripple.” This sounds awful! Why would we want to bring this into our lives? Instead, let’s decide and make a conscious effort to bring God into our daily lives through prayer. The Message version of the Bible gives us this advice from The Gospel of Matthew:

If you decide for God, living a life of God worship, it follows that you don't fuss about what's on the table at mealtimes or whether the clothes in your closet are in fashion. There is far more to your life than the food you put in your stomach, more to your outer appearance than the clothes you hang on your body. Look at the birds, free and unfettered, not tied down to a job description, careless in the care of God. And you count far more to him than birds. Has anyone by fussing in front of the mirror ever gotten taller by so much as an inch? All this time and money wasted on fashion - do you think it makes that much difference? Instead of looking at the fashions, walk out into the fields and look at the wildflowers. They never primp or shop, but have you ever seen color and design quite like it? The ten best-dressed men and women in the country look shabby alongside them. If God gives such attention to the appearance of wildflowers - most of which are never even seen - don't you think he'll attend to you, take pride in you, do his best for you? What I'm trying to do here is to get you to relax, to not be so preoccupied with *getting*, so you can respond to God's *giving*. People who don't know God and the way he works fuss over these things, but you know both God and how he works. Steep your life in God-reality, God-initiative, God-provisions. Don't worry about missing out. You'll find all your everyday human concerns will be met. Give your entire attention to what God is doing right now, and don't get worked up about what may or may not happen tomorrow. God will help you deal with whatever hard things come up when the time comes. (Matthew 6:25-34)

WOW! All we have to do is give it to God! And how do we do that? Through prayer! He WANTS to help us! He WANTS to guide us through! Let HIM. Let Him in. Know when to call in a professional when you can't and shouldn't do it alone! The judge I worked for would often state from the bench when people wanted to represent themselves in court, "I'm a smart man and know a lot of things about the law, but when my sink is leaking....plumbing....that is not my strength. I know I need to call a plumber to get the job done right." We, too, need to know who to "call" when we need help. Who is the professional?

And it will be through this that "the peace of God that exceeds all understanding will keep your hearts and minds safe to Christ Jesus."

No matter where your journey began, you can change the course, if needed, by prayer. Simple, heart-felt prayer to the one who will provide the answers. Call on God! Let's have our New Year's Resolutions begin with a prayer routine. Find a quiet time or a quiet corner in a busy room and talk to God. Write your prayers out if that's easier for you. I have a box that was given to me that sits on my nightstand. It has paper and a pen inside. The lid of the box says, "Give it to God and go to sleep." I sometimes write my prayers inside.

We have several opportunities here to pray and have others pray alongside you. There are cards you can fill out with the offering boxes; you can fill out a request when you check in online; there is a prayer wall in the lobby that will allow you to write a prayer request and tuck it into the wall knowing that a prayer partner will be praying with you—personally or anonymously, whichever you are comfortable with. My prayer group started with this wall, and we are a small but mighty force. This church is a praying community with a heart for God and a heart for people. It is one of the many things I love about Geist. We pray openly, honestly, and earnestly. It is my hope that you, too, will take it all to God and let the professional help with your worries. It is His desire for you to feel the peace that surpasses all understanding.

Let us pray: Lord, help us to remember to call on You daily—not as a last resort. You are waiting for our call. You are longing for our call. Please help us to each find our own way to speak with you daily. In your son's name we pray. Amen.