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Title: Three Essential Prayers: Help

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Text: [Matthew 9:20-22](#) (CEB)

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Do you remember the first time you prayed to God? Anne Lamott does.

Her older brother John was 7 and she was 5. Their parents went out and left them with a babysitter named Carol. Carol went into the kitchen in order to heat up dinner. Anne pulled her brother away from the TV, saying she had an

urgent secret to share. They had to go to the top of the stairs so they could not be seen by Carol. At the top of the stairs, she swore her brother to secrecy and then confessed that she wanted to accept the baby Jesus into her heart. She said, "We have to pray before our parents come home." She remembers being scared to death that her brother would rat her out to their parents who did not believe in prayer. She and her brother managed to pray, and her brother John never ratted her out to their parents.

Today we are beginning a new three-week series that we are calling *Three Essential Prayers*. It is inspired by a book written a few years ago by Anne Lamott. Each week we will dive into one of the three prayers that is essential to our prayer lives.

Each of us would probably acknowledge that we desire a deep, meaningful prayer life. Each of us would also probably acknowledge that it's not always easy to have a deep, meaningful prayer life.

We don't always have what we believe we have the right words to pray. We struggle to find the time to pray. We find it too difficult to pray, finding ideas like praying for our enemies as Jesus commands to be too far-fetched. And if we are being honest with ourselves and with one another, there are times when we wonder if God even cares or hears our prayers.

We start our series with a prayer which I suspect, in some form or fashion, is familiar to us, the prayer *Help*. The times when we need divine intervention have driven many people to pray. To pray for help is to admit that we are not in control. To pray for help is to confess that we cannot do this all on our own. But turning to God can also be tricky

There is a story about a man who fell off a cliff, and halfway down, he caught hold of a bush. As he hung high above the ground, he shouted, "Is anybody up there?" Again, he shouted, "Is anybody up there?" A voice answered, "Yes, this is the Lord." The man yelled frantically, "Please help me!" There was a moment of silence. Then the Lord said, "Let go of the bush, and I will catch you." There was another long silence as the man looked at the ground far below. Then, he yelled, "Is anybody else up there?"

When we pray to God for help, it is a leap of faith on our part. We are acknowledging that we are not the sole author of our lives. We are confessing that our truth is not always God's truth, that our will is not always God's will. To pray for help is to let go and to embrace a radical trust in the ways of God.

The Gospels are full of stories where people come to Jesus for help. A prayer of help is not only words it is also action. Jesus is known as a great healer and the Gospel of Matthew tells of a time when a woman comes to him for help. As Matthew tells it, he is in the middle of healing someone else when this woman comes to him.

"Then a woman who had been bleeding for twelve years came up behind Jesus and touched the hem of his clothes. She thought, If I only touch his robe I'll be healed. When Jesus turned and saw her, he said, "Be encouraged, daughter. Your faith has healed you." And the woman was healed from that time on." (Matthew 9:20-22 CEB)

Think about this...she had been struggling with her health for 12 long years. She has suffered greatly. The systems of the day had failed her. Her healthcare system of the day had failed her. We can guess that she has spent all of her money, which wasn't much to begin with, in order to find relief and healing.

Because she is ill and quite possibly because she is female, she lives on the margins. She needs to be heard; however, no one will listen. She desires to be healed, to be made whole, yet no one will help. Systems and society have failed her.

But she has faith. She persists. Her faith is such that she knows if she just has a chance to approach Jesus, to offer to him with life the prayer of **Help** that she might have a chance.

Matthew leaves how this healing takes place rather mysterious. Jesus simply turns towards her, sees her and proclaims *"Your faith has healed you."*

This is a story we need to hear. Sometimes we get caught up in trying to explain how a biblical story happens, but this is not one of those. This is a story we need to hear and receive because it is an invitation to you and me about what it means to live a faithful life. It is an invitation to radical trust in God.

I can't help but think of the 121st Psalm when I read Matthew

"I raise my eyes toward the mountains.

Where will my help come from?

My help comes from the Lord,

the maker of heaven and earth.

God won't let your foot slip.

Your protector won't fall asleep on the job." (Psalm 121:1-3 CEB)

She knew where to turn, where her persistence would take her. The determination to simply touch the robe of Jesus was her prayer of "Help"

God won't let your foot slip. Your protector won't fall asleep on the job.

Listen to Anne Lamott *"When we think we can do it all ourselves- fix, save, date or buy- a neat solution- its hopeless. We are going to screw things up. We are going to squeeze the very life out of everything. When we cry our help, we go limp and we do not feel so hopeless that we can barely walk, and we release ourselves from the craziness of trying to be our own- or other people's high power. --"* Anne Lamott

Barbara Brown Taylor tells about the time she spent three days on a barrier island where loggerhead turtles were laying their eggs. One night while the tide was out, I watched a huge female heave herself up on the beach and dig her nest and empty her eggs into it. Afraid of disturbing her, I left before she was finished. The next morning, I returned to see if I could find the spot where her eggs lay hidden in the sand. What I found were her tracks leading in the wrong direction. Instead of heading back out to sea, she had wandered into the dunes, which were already as hot as asphalt in the morning sun.

A little way inland I found her: Exhausted, all but baked, her head and flippers caked with dried sand. After pouring water on her and covering her with sea oats, I fetched a park ranger who returned with a jeep to rescue her. He flipped her on her back, strapped tire chains around her front legs,

and hooked the chains to a trailer hitch on his jeep. Then I watched horrified as he took off, yanking her body forward so that her mouth filled with sand and her neck bent so far back I thought it would break.

The ranger hauled her over the dunes and down onto the beach. At the ocean's edge, he unhooked her and turned her right side up. She lay motionless in the surf as the water lapped at her body, washing the sand from her eyes and making her skin shine again. A wave broke over her; she lifted her head slightly, moving her back legs. Other waves brought her further back to life until one of them made her light enough to find a foothold and push off, back into the ocean. Watching her swim slowly away and remembering her nightmare ride through the dunes, *I reflected that it is sometimes hard to tell whether you are being killed or saved by the hands that turn your life upside down.*

The last image challenges us- we cling so tightly to the notion that we can do it all ourselves, even that we can save ourselves, because it is difficult to give up control and place our trust in something other than ourselves.

Jesus' words are not only good news for the woman in need of healing but for you and me as well- "your faith has healed you."

It's why Help is such an essential prayer. Because radical trust in God is the first step towards the life God desires for us to live.

Will You Pray with Me?