

Wow!

We've begun a new sermon series called "**Wow! Wee! Want! Wait!** – Four Essential Elements of Prayer." On Sunday, we started with Prayers of Wow!

1. Warm-up Question: Did you do anything fun for July 4? Any trips planned for this summer?
2. In the movie "Joe Versus the Volcano," Joe is moved from despair to transcendence at the sight of the moon rising over the South Pacific. Even though his life was falling apart, he was moved to prayer: "Dear God, whose name I do not know, thank you for my life. I forgot how big. . . . Thank you. Thank you for my life." Psychologically, how would you describe what happened in that experience?
3. Sunday's sermon was anchored in the story of Job. Job had a great life until being hit with a rapid-fire series of catastrophes. Invaders massacred his servants and carried away his livestock. A windstorm collapsed a house, killing all his adult children. Then Job contracted a life-threatening illness that covered his body in painful boils. His wife urged him to curse God and die. His friends told him he was being punished for secret sins. For the next 30+ chapters, Job got stuck in an obsessive negative feedback loop, desperately trying to understand how/why all this happened to him.
 - a. When in your life have you felt most overwhelmed?
 - b. Right now in your life, what kinds of things tend to most discourage you?
 - c. During hard times, do you find yourself obsessing about why? Do you ever wonder if God is punishing you? Should we allow ourselves to think that way?
4. After 30+ chapters of chasing his tail, grieving, churning in his pain, and questioning God, Job finally fell silent, giving room for God to speak. For God's response, read Job 38-42, selected verses, as printed on page 3.
 - a. The passage tells us that God spoke to Job "out of the whirlwind." A whirlwind, i.e., windstorm, is what killed Job's children. Is that coincidental or significant? Do you think Job heard a distinct audible voice or sensed God's words in his heart as the storm passed over? What tone of voice do you picture God using with Job in this passage?
 - b. In this passage and other verses not included here, God calls Job's attention to many of the wonders of creation – things like the ocean, the cycle of light and darkness, the miracle of snow, the wonder of rain, lightning and thunder, and amazing animals like lions, mountain goats, donkeys, oxen, horses, the hippopotamus, the crocodile, ostriches, and hawks. What is one of the most magnificent things you personally have ever witnessed in nature? What feeling did that experience evoke?

- c. Name a more ordinary, everyday wonder that really speaks to your soul? What feeling does it evoke? How do things like that affect your perspective on life?
5. As Job was reminded of all the wonders of nature, something shifted inside him. His outlook went from angst to awe, from despair to hope, from doubt to trust, from carping to worship. He said to God, “I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you.” From this, we draw a key lesson: When we open our eyes to the awesomeness of God all around us – allowing that to move us to praise, thanks, and worship – our mindset shifts from weakness and despair to power and positivity.
- a. Anne Lamott says, “When we are stunned to the place beyond words, we’re finally starting to get somewhere.” What do you think she means? Do you agree?
- b. Dr. Robert Leahy says, “Awe is the opposite of rumination. It clears away inner turmoil with a wave of outer immensity.” What do you think he means? Do you agree?
- c. Scientific studies show that praise, thanksgiving, awe, and gratitude have a powerful positive effect on both mind and body.

Benefits for the mind include:

More optimism
 More social connections
 More happiness
 Less depression
 Less envy

Benefits for the body include:

More energy
 Better sleep
 More exercise
 Greater resistance to viral infections
 Less alcoholism

Why do you think praise/thanksgiving/awe/gratitude have such a powerful effect?

6. In a recent *Be Still & Know* devotional on our church website, Lynnette Pullen shared a prayer of praise based on her life experience. Read her prayer on p. 3.
- a. What part of this prayer most resonates with you – and why?
- b. If you were to add a stanza to this prayer, giving thanks for something difficult in your life, what would your stanza say?
7. Jeff offered five examples of Prayers of Wow! 1) Listening to beautiful music, 2) Gazing at a moving photograph or painting, 3) Taking a mindful walk outdoors, 4) Verbalizing what you’re thankful for from the past 24 hours, and (5) Retelling a remarkable life experience to God and self. Which of these do you most often practice? Which would you like to practice doing more of?
8. Sunday’s sermon ended with the story of two women in our congregation who defiantly sang songs of praise in the sanctuary (like Paul and Silas in prison) after a counseling session about overwhelming life challenges. Have you ever done something like that? Why or why not? Would you like to? Are you willing to try it?

Job 38-42, selected verses

Then the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind: “Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge? Gird up your loins. I will question you and you will answer me.

Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me if you have understanding. Who determined its measurements? Surely you know. Who laid its cornerstone when the morning stars sang together and all the heavenly beings shouted for joy?

Have you entered the storehouses of the snow, or have you seen the storehouses of the hail? What is the way to the place where the light is distributed, or where the east wind is scattered upon the earth?

Is it by your wisdom that the hawk soars, and spreads its wings toward the south? Can you bind the chains of the Pleiades or loose the cords of Orion?”

Job answered the Lord, “I know that you can do all things and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted. Therefore, I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know. **I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you!**”

Exerpt from Prayer by Lynette Pullen

Be Still & Know, June 21, 2018

Thank you for allowing me to feel hunger and the pains of poverty; it rid me of my pride and helped me to appreciate the simple things in life.

Thank you for tears; they allow me to express and release my grief, as well as my joy.

Thank you for allowing me to be a victim of racism and sexism; from them I have learned to be an advocate of justice for all people.

Thank you for allowing others to hurt me beyond human repair; it gave me the opportunity to discover the supernatural healing powers of forgiveness.

Thank you for allowing others to abandon me in my darkest times; it was then that I first realized You are *always* with me.

Thank you for allowing me to fall; it was the only way for me to learn to pick myself up.

Thank you for grace in times of failure; it gives me the freedom to try again.

Thank you for your Love; I wish I understood it more. It is more beautiful than the love of a mother. It is more magnificent than the wonders of the universe. It is more glorious than the morning sun. It is deeper and wider than anything I could ever measure. It is infinitely more powerful than darkest hate. It is more comforting than any words or embrace could ever be. It is all that I need.