PREACHING & TEACHING

Sermon on Prayer

Preaching notes on prayer, organised around the question every congregation is actually holding and almost no sermon on prayer addresses: what to do when it does not work. Includes the psalm that ends in darkness and stays there.

topic notes · 4 segments

Topic notes. The unanswered-prayer material in movement three is the reason to preach this at all.

BEFORE YOU RECORD

- Almost every congregation contains someone who has stopped praying and told nobody. They are the audience for this sermon, and a talk about techniques for a better prayer life will not reach them.
- If you preach the Lord's Prayer, preach one petition rather than all seven. Seven petitions in twenty-five minutes is a list, not a sermon.

01. Three texts, three costs

choose one

[the third one is the brave choice]

Luke 11:1-13. The disciples ask to be taught, which is worth noticing: people who had been with him for months still did not know how. Pairs the model prayer with the friend at midnight, so it holds both form and persistence.

Matthew 6:5-15. The critique of performance. Useful in a church culture where public prayer has become a genre with its own vocabulary that excludes newcomers.

Psalm 88. The one psalm that begins in the dark and ends there, with the last word being darkness. Preaching it costs you the tidy ending and buys you the trust of everyone in the room who is in that place.

02. The trap

avoid this

[prayer as a transaction with better inputs]

The how-to sermon. Pray at this time, in this posture, with this structure, and results will follow. It is well meant and it teaches that prayer is a mechanism with an input and an output, which sets up everyone who then does it faithfully and gets nothing.

03. When it does not work

the reason to preach this

[this is the movement the congregation came for]

Say out loud that people pray for things and do not get them. Not as a problem to solve in the next four minutes, but as a fact the Bible itself records repeatedly, including by Jesus in a garden asking for the cup to pass.

The psalms of complaint are roughly a third of the psalter and are almost never read in church. A congregation that has been given permission to pray angrily has been given something far more useful than a technique.

04. An angle worth taking

if you want it

[the address, not the request]

In the model prayer, five of the first six words are about who is being addressed and what they are like, before a single request appears. The proportion is instructive and it is the opposite of how most of us pray under pressure.

USAGE

Free to use. Preach it, adapt it, record it, publish under your own name. No credit required.

Record it with Hilite — hellohilite.com

Studio-quality audio from your laptop mic. Free to start.