

Passion Prayer

by Stewart Ruch

The sermon emphasizes the importance of facing the peril of our sinful nature and externalized sin, and learning to pray with passion and engagement to connect with God.

Duration: 30:59

Scripture: Psalm 28:1, Psalm 28:3, Matthew 6:33

Topics: "Prayer"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker shares a personal story of a family vacation where they faced a perilous situation with their van breaking down. The speaker emphasizes the importance of getting real and sitting still in the face of peril. They highlight the honesty and rawness of the Psalms in acknowledging the reality of peril. The speaker encourages the audience to call upon the Lord in times of trouble.

Transcript

This is Church of the Resurrection in Wheaton, Illinois. This week's sermon is by Bishop Stuart Ruck and is part one of Teach Us to Care and Not to Care, a three-part series on prayer. Please remain standing.

We're going to pray in just a moment. I had a chance to say hi to everyone last week at the 9 o'clock, but then I had to leave to do an ordination in Oak Park and missed the 11 o'clock, so just to say I'm delighted to be back from some time away, family vacation and study time and prayer time. Thank you for the way you prayed for us and the way you always so generously released us to go get rest and get recuperation and then so warmly receive us back.

I'm so happy to be back. I'm also really happy that we're starting a series on prayer. The series is called Teach Us to Care and Not to Care.

It's a phrase from the poet T.S. Eliot's poem Ash Wednesday. We'll unpack more of what that means over the next several weeks, three weeks, but the heart of it is at prayer we care about the things that matter deeply to God and we learn to care not a thing for the foolishness of our own hearts and the foolishness of this world. We learn to care and not to care.

Here's why I'm doing this series for three weeks. Because I would like to pray more deeply. I would like to pray more frequently.

I would like to pray with more faith. I would like you to do so as well. I would like us to discover at resurrection a new season of living in Jesus by prayer and by fasting.

That's why we're doing this series. So let's pray as we begin. Father in heaven, we invoke, we call upon the name of Jesus.

Oh Lord, I call to you my rock. Do not be deaf to my cry. Lord, teach us now how to enter into communion with Jesus, how to enter into a life of prayer, a life of passion prayer.

I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. You may be seated.

It was a Friday, late afternoon, and Kathryn called me. She was out doing errands and said, hey, the battery light just came on on the dashboard. I did some quick calculations and thought the mechanic that we really know has one more hour left in his garage and he's gone.

He's not coming in on Saturday, so that would be inconvenient. And I also thought, how bad can a battery light on a dashboard be? Yeah, I thought that. I mean, how much trouble could a van with 165,000 miles get into? I was in utter and absolute denial.

So I said to Kathryn, no worries. It's probably a short, you know, and I know all about these things. It's probably a short and the dashboard, we're going to be fine.

Oh, okay, great. So, you know, by that time, we had the whole van packed, you know, eight of us going camping, me and the six, Kathryn and the six kids. We had camping gear for everybody, two tents, seven bikes, one canoe.

It's all there. And we head up to Door County and we're getting close to Green Bay and the battery light comes on again. I think, oh, that pesky short.

There it goes again, but then it keeps coming on. And then I watched, there's a thing that says volts on our dashboard, and I'm watching where it's at 14, and it's now moving very, very quickly down into an orange area. And I said to Kathryn, I don't know, like, do you need electricity to drive a car? I mean, I know you need to start a car with a battery, but like, she's like, I don't know, let's Google it.

So she's Googling it and we're trying to figure out what do we do. And all of a sudden, while we're doing this, now we're north of Green Bay, we're into more of a remote area, we're on a highway, and I'm pressing the accelerator and it's not responding. And now the battery light is blinking like this.

And finally, I've come out of full denial, and I realized, actually, one of the things that I had been afraid of the most, which is being on a full-blown vacation car trip with all of my children and everything in the car in a remote area is going to happen. We're going to have a full-blown car breakdown. At that point, I made a decision that I'm still not fully understanding why I did this, because there was two lanes of very busy highway traffic, but I decided rather than going right onto the shoulder that I would turn left into oncoming traffic.

I did see some kind of gas station sign, but Catherine still wasn't understanding it. And she's a very calm woman, but she lost her calm, and she yelled. Now, she's going to disagree that she yelled, but she's not here, she's in Ohio.

So can we just kind of keep this among all of us? She never listens to me preach afterwards. So, okay. But she yells, what are you doing? At this point, we have another car that's following us with some of our kids.

We have two cars. Another car comes up alongside. We're like, what's going on with the van? And I'm trying to push the van, accelerate the van, stopping and starting it across the oncoming traffic.

And one of my kids yells out, Abraham, which is the name of our van, old and used to travel well. Abraham is dead! Abraham is dead! So the car stops and starts its way across the traffic. We got to a long ramp, and then it dies.

It's dead. It's gone. There's no more lights anymore.

There's no battery light. It's out. It's all over.

So I get on the phone to call AAA, which we never belonged to until we were in a crisis, and then we joined. And while I'm doing that, Ellison, my oldest son, is walking around trying to figure out where we are, so we can tell AAA how to find us. And there's a couple walking on the road, and they see Ellison, and they go, do you guys need help? At this point, it's a van.

It's the van. It's the canoe. It's the bikes.

It's all the kids all around the van. And Ellison says, yes, we definitely need help. So they walk up to the van, and the wife, Kathy, leans over to me.

She says about her husband, Richard. She goes, oh, Richard loves to help. I love Richard.

I really need help right now. Okay, I'm fully out of denial. I need a lot of help.

So Richard's looking at the engine. He's like, I don't think I can help with this. But he goes, hey, you guys have all this stuff in this van.

I mean, even if you get a tow truck, what are you going to do? I said, I don't know. He said, well, I got a van. I'm like, well, we're an hour away from our campsite.

He goes, I don't care. I'm going to go get the van. So he goes to get his van.

While he's going to get his van, and we're waiting for a tow truck, someone else pulls up. Her name is Rosie. She has a beautiful red VW convertible.

She's in her 70s. She stops and says, looks like you guys need help. I'm like, what's going on around here? What's wrong with you people? You're so nice.

Must be northern Wisconsin. Well, I'd love to help you, she says. How can I help you? So Rosie takes kids.

And Dick and Kathy take all the stuff, all of the stuff, except for a few things we leave in the van. And they drive an hour to the campsite. They get us all unpacked.

We find out on the journey there that all three of them are followers of Jesus who have been taught by the Bible to stop and to bring help, to be a presence of aid. So peril and the presence of those who had come to help were deeply combined in that story, in that experience. And that combination of peril and presence

is actually a combination that we see played out throughout the Psalms.

When you read the Psalms, when you study them, when you sing them, when perhaps you memorize them, what you will find again and again is this dynamic pattern that actually creates a sense of passion, a sense of connection. When I talk about passion prayer, I'm not meaning to say emotional prayer. I'm meaning to say engaged prayer.

I'm meaning to say communion, connection prayer. And what connects us in any circumstance often will be the combination of peril and the presence of those who might help us. And certainly in the Psalms, again and again you hear the psalmist, David or others, who have written, we are in peril.

We are in danger. I'm in internal danger with my sinful nature. I'm in external danger with those around me.

And I am crying out for help. Oh God. First verse of Psalm 28 that we read this morning.

Oh God, I call to you. My rock, do not be deaf to my cry. Even in that phrasing, we hear an awareness of peril.

We hear an awakening to the reality of danger. And we hear a call to the presence, to the greater presence, the presence of Him who loves to help us, who loves to rescue us. We're going to study Psalm 28.

You can turn there in your bulletin. The Psalm is a book of poetry. If you read your Bible every day, and I hope you're working toward reading your Bible every day, it is common in different reading plans and it's a very important thing if you read your Bible every day that you read a Psalm every day.

First of all, because it's the Word of God. And second of all, that means you get to read poetry every day. The Psalms are each poems.

They're prayer poems. They're liturgy. And they're filled with passion.

You cannot read the Psalm without hearing passion. By that I mean engagement. By that I mean connection.

And by that I mean the emotion that follows connection and engagement. In it we hear that there are things to care very deeply about, the presence of God. To care very deeply about the poor.

To care very deeply about the peril that faces all of us. And there are things not to care much about at all. The foolishness of our own hearts and the foolishness of the world.

Teach us to care and not to care is one of the great themes of prayer and of the Psalms. How do we learn to pray in passion? I wouldn't say that even more than with passion. I don't want you to connect this to emotionalism.

That's not what I'm teaching. Nor do I believe the Psalms or the Bible teaches. But instead passion, engagement, that will certainly bring emotion.

How do we pray that way? What we see in Psalm 28 verses 1 and 2 especially is we face the peril. We face the peril. And we face his greater presence.

One without the other will not lead to full prayer. It could lead to despair or it could lead to a kind of denial that there isn't peril. Those two are profoundly connected and they must be connected in our prayer lives.

Your prayer life, we move fully engaged as you face the peril and as you face his greater presence. I'm working from a little bit of a different translation so the phrasing may sound a little different than what you have in your bulletin. As we face the peril, we do two things.

Let's work on that. Let's go back in verse 1 of Psalm 28. First we get real.

Second we sit still. We face the peril by getting real and by sitting still. Let's look at the get real.

The Psalms are so real. The Psalms are so sort of bald faced and open about the reality of peril that sometimes they're hard to read. Particularly if you're having a really good day and you're not having to face peril in the same way.

Yet they remind us that there is a kind of reality of peril that is always existing. Let me get to that in just a moment. But look at it.

First we have, oh Lord, I call to you. There's a call. Why? Because there is peril that has catalyzed the call.

Lest if you do not hear me, I become like those who go down to the pit. The pit is a symbol. It's a picture of death, of nothingness.

To go down to the pit was to enter into nothingness, was to enter into a kind of death. And the reality that the psalmist is articulating is a profound reality for every human being, which is this. We are desperate for God to be in between the reality of our fragile lives and the profundity of nothingness and the profundity of death.

As a matter of fact, the Bible requires that we face that. That without God, there is nothing between nothingness, death, destruction, and our own lives. Every once in a while, perhaps, we get a wake up call about that.

Maybe it's financial. If God does not provide this, then I am close to financial destruction. It's relational.

If God does not provide a healing of my person and how I relate to others, if God does not provide that, I am facing a relational nothingness. Career, family, you could work that out from there yourself. The psalmist speaks to that, lest if you do not hear me, if God does not come to my aid, I become like those who go down to the pit.

The peril of the Christian life has two components at least. The first is the peril of the sinful nature. Jesus is teaching on this in our gospel reading that was just read, whereby he says there are those who would call themselves righteous.

He calls them the righteous. He means those who call themselves righteous, who think of themselves as righteous, and there are those who are sinners. Jesus is teaching that the human person has a sinful nature, and that sinful nature is a reality of rebellion.

It's a reality of twistedness. It's an inability to see what's true about God and about others, and you're always filtering others and God through a kind of twisted confusion that what is totally true about God, he's good, he's near, can't be true. That's at the heart of the sinful nature.

And there's peril in the sinful nature. There's an internalized peril that is part of the sinful nature that Jesus actually profoundly recognizes. Using the story that I told, it is like the battery light is coming on for our souls, and we're saying it's not a thing.

It's a short in my system. It was a bad day or a bad conversation, but it doesn't really reflect what I just said when I gossiped about that person or spoke about that person behind their back. That doesn't really reflect my sinful nature.

I just had a bad moment, and Jesus is saying no, no, no, no, no. It's a sinful nature. You are sinners, but here is the extremely good news.

We keep thinking, I've got to hide the battery light so nobody sees it. Come to church, ready, you know. I feel kind of bad coming to church because I did something imperfect this morning.

No, no, no, no. Church is where everybody's like, look at my battery light. It's going on.

It's right here. I'm in major peril. And Jesus is saying, that peril that you have, it's not that I want that peril in your life.

I want you to be freed of your sinful nature. I've come to cleanse you of your sinful nature by the cross, but I don't want you to be in denial about your sinful nature because I've come to save sinners. Your sin, your sinful nature, your internalized peril that you are ashamed of and that you're trying to hide is the very thing that connects you to God in prayer.

This is the irony of it, but you've got to get this irony. If you can't get free to face your peril, your internalized sinful nature peril, you will not pray. I mean, prayerlessness is often a sign of denial of peril.

Prayerlessness is often a sign of the denial of peril, internalized or externalized. So Jesus is saying, I've come for the sinner. I've come for you.

I'm not ashamed of you. I know you. I know you're twisted.

I've come for you. That catalyzes passion prayer to face that peril. Peril is also externalized.

We read in verse 3, David, who wrote the psalm, King David is saying, do not snatch me away with the wicked or the evildoers who speak peaceably with their neighbors while strife is in their hearts. That phrase is different than what you have, but it's a good phrase, actually, in this translation. Strife in the heart.

This can certainly point to the sinful nature, but it also points to what happens not just in one person, but in a community of people where spiritual sinful nature is not just internalized, but becomes externalized. The sinful nature and their sinful power. And it's kind of a sinful power that can take over a community.

It can be an ideology. It can take over an institution. It can be what Paul, a New Testament thinker, called powers and principalities.

So there's peril within, but there's also peril without. And for us, we are called to face the peril. Christians should be the first to say, we have a major battery light flashing in our country right now.

The battery light's on in our country for lots of reasons and complexities that are part of that. But let's be absolutely clear. Charlottesville and the events that have been coming before that are a battery light.

It's saying to us as a country, we still are interacting in a time of hatred and violence and racial injustice that exists. And when we see that, we as Christians face it, we name it, we have proper shame about it, but we don't let it keep us from the next step, which is after we face the peril, we pray. Oath for more prayer and less postings on social media.

Brothers and sisters, denouncing it on social media is good. It should be denounced what happened. But I get concerned that you denounce it and you think you're done.

You've posted something and you think you're finished. And then what you're doing rather than going to prayer is you're looking to see what people said about your posting. That specifically is a waste of time.

It's foolishness. Don't care about what others think about your posting. Don't care.

Care about connecting with the creator of the universe who is heartbroken over the image of God, the imago Dei is being treated in our country, and pray because it matters. This just blows me away about being an American. I love, I'm thankful I've been made an American by Jesus.

I'm thankful. It's a gift. But here's what blows me away about myself and others.

I go to other countries. I've stayed in other countries. I've lived in other countries for seasons of time.

And they're praying like crazy for the countries the Christians are because they know that they're in peril. They're not thinking, oh, that the next person is going to finally fix it like we think in America. Sometimes we think, oh, the next person, this person is bad.

The next person is going to fix it. In Brazil, they don't think the next person is going to fix it anymore or they think that in Nigeria. So they pray because they're facing their peril.

We have a denial of peril in our own simple nature lives as well as in the corporate reality. Why am I saying this? So that we'll pray. All summer long, Catherine's been saying to me, you and I are not praying enough for our country.

And she's right about the two of us. We're not. And we're going to try and change that.

I'd like us to change that too as the people of God. So we get real. We face the peril.

I love this, Ian Bounds was a 19th century Christian thinker and writer. Ian Bounds said this about prayer. He said, it's the poor in spirit, by that you could say, it's those who face the peril.

It's the needy and those who know they're needy. It's the poor in spirit that are eminently competent to pray. The poor in spirit are eminently competent to pray.

There are a lot of things I love about Jesus. But one thing I love about Jesus is He is a non-elitist. You don't have to have achieved anything by the world's standards to be a person of deep prayer.

I think that really matters. I think it really matters that the life of prayer is lived by those who actually know the battery light's on and they're facing the peril and they know that what they can do is call out to God and say, please do not be deaf to my cry lest if you do not hear me I become like those who go down to

nothingness. Anyone that wants to get there can get there.

So what's the next step in getting there and facing the peril? Yes, we get real, but then we sit still. The second line after Eliot's first line in the poem Ash Wednesday teach us to care and not to care is teach us to sit still. So one of the most important disciplines and learnings of the Christian life when it comes to prayer and facing peril is learning to sit still.

I mean that literally and metaphorically in this way. It may be that you walk and pray. It may be that for some of our young parents you're feeding a baby.

Moms, you're nursing and praying. It may play out in a lot of different ways this sitting still, but the concept is that you stop. You don't just have the smartphone down and covered.

Put it away. Your brain needs that by the way. Research shows just don't see it.

Don't hear it. You're still. Now for some of you this may take all year to learn and I'd like you to take it as seriously as that.

You may go I might need a year to learn how to sit still. I'm very concerned that amidst the rapidity of our culture and particularly proliferation of digital one of the things I'm most concerned about with that and I know that you hear a lot of people talk about concern with it. Here's my concern is it's going to it's going to change our prayer lives as a people and yours.

So learn to sit still. Learn to prayer walk. Learn to pray as you're driving.

As you're riding your bike. As you're nursing. Whatever it might be.

Part of sitting still is learning routine. Routine is really important. Now I can appreciate it.

Folks might think well yeah different personalities and some are more spontaneous and some are less. That's not what I'm talking about. I mean that's true and that's a helpful thing in some categories definitely.

That's not what I'm talking about. There are things that if you care about you engage routine. It is my absolute hope that all of you brush your teeth at least twice a day.

I think that's a fair hope. Pastors you know that's not usually the first thing I pray for you about but I am hoping you're brushing your teeth twice a day. You may be more artistic or you may be more you know engineering oriented or whatever but my guess is you all brush your teeth every day.

Why? Because A. You don't want your teeth to rot and B. You like to be socially connected to other people. Right? So you have a routine. My guess is you have other routines in your life that are also things that you've said are important.

Probably more instinctual that you're not even sure about. It's really fun watching a new rookie Ian Happ for the Cubs who's coming close to hitting 20 home runs. He's outfielder for the Cubs and he was interviewed about his hitting and he said well the whole thing for me is routine.

To hit well I've got a routine of what I do when I get to the park to prepare to bat. Musicians have their routines to prepare themselves for a concert. Indeed routines might even require that we do things highly sacrificial like a baseball player or like a cellist because we're prayers.

I mean Ian Happ has a 120 game the next day. You can be very guaranteed that the night before that game he's thinking very carefully about what he's gonna do the night before. He's gonna get sleep.

He's gonna eat well. He wants to show up and play well for that baseball game. Friends might say hey let's do this and he might say oh I'm sorry I can't I got a game tomorrow.

They're like well he's a professional baseball player of course. Same with a musician. Very very similar dynamics.

Are you tracking with me? Your prayers. Your Christian prayers. So you live your life differently.

You develop routines because your life is about Jesus and prayer and worship. So you're thinking very different even though people are thinking about how you use your time and how you use your energy. What are some of the greatest challenges to the life of prayer? Sleep and what you see.

And I find it not coincidental that often on Saturday night you don't get enough sleep and you see things you shouldn't see. And the next day is your day of prayer. This is prayer.

The divine liturgy this is prayer. So I want to challenge you that if Ian Happ is doing his whole life around becoming a great hitter which is great and fine and I love to listen to him on the radio and I cheer when he gets a home run. If he's doing that for baseball are we not called to rearrange our lives and our routines in radical ways where people go why aren't you doing this? I gotta pray tomorrow.

What? Yeah, I gotta pray. It's more important than the cello and more important than hitting home runs. Routine is key to growing into something so important like passion prayer.

Like prayer for our country. Prayer for our own lives. It will take that kind of discipline those kind of decisions to sit still.

It's that rooted. It's that deep. So we face the peril and in the facing of the peril the psalmist then calls us always to face the greater presence.

To face his greater presence. Oh Lord, he starts the psalm. He starts the poem.

Oh Lord, I call to you my rock which is a symbol of stillness as well. I call to you my rock. Do not be deaf to my cry.

It is true that there is in the psalms a wrestling of times with the silence of God or what is perceived as the silence of God. It's true, it's in there, absolutely. There are the cries of the heart, my God, my God.

Psalm 22, why have you forsaken me? That is in the psalms. That is part of the prayer life and part of the prayer journey. But it is also over and over again in an even more sort of emphatic reality.

The reality of Psalm 145, the Lord is near to those who call upon Him. I am not denying that in seasons of prayer you will feel far from God. That has happened to me.

Maybe you're in that right now. That's there. It's part of the psalms.

But the fundamental reality of the teaching of the psalms and the fundamental reality of the cross of Jesus Christ is that God is near to those who call upon Him. Small case, if you will, rather than capitalize these seasons of distance. They do happen.

But the reality based on the cross is that God has come near us. The psalmist says, I lift up my hands to the holy of holies, which is to say what? I lift up my hands to the very heart of the presence of God which has come near to me in Jesus Christ. He's near.

Our ability to apprehend His nearness is often damaged. Our lack of discipline, our lack of sleep, what we've seen, our sinful hearts, have challenged apprehending His nearness. But let's be absolutely clear, that does not mean that He's not near.

It means that then we're in confession. It means that we're facing the peril of our sinful nature. But it doesn't mean that He's not near.

There is a tendency to capitalize the lack of nearness and in a small case, the nearness. And I don't think that's accurate with the cross of Jesus Christ. I don't think it's accurate with the teaching of the psalms on prayer.

I hope you're hearing the tension. I'm trying to provide attention that both can be there. But quite honestly, I'm trying to challenge you some that you will meet the nearness of God more if you meet with Him more.

That's what I'm trying to say. That I think it's a biblical teaching. And there are times when He doesn't seem near, you will still meet with the Lord.

You can still engage in prayer. You can still face the peril and know His presence is absolutely real. That's in your individual prayer time.

You may need this. Sometimes I experience His presence in a way I could never on my own. Ever.

I need the people of God to experience the presence of God. So we face His greater presence. We discipline ourselves.

We sit still. And as we do that, we then come fully close to the living God who has made a way for us to be close to Him. E.M. Bounds, again, God draws near to the praying soul.

To see God, to know God, to live for God, Bounds says, this is why we pray. Passion prayer is about the passion of our Lord Jesus. Being present to His passion, to His death.

By that I mean His passion. His resurrection. His presence.

We do ask for things in prayer. I'll teach on that. We do persevere in prayer.

I'm gonna teach on that. But first and foremost, we're present to Jesus in prayer. That's why we pray.

We face the peril. We face His greater presence, our strength and our shield. For the Bible promises, by the power of the cross, is near to those who call.

In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net