

“The Pendulum Principle”

Luke 5:12-16

Preached by Dr. Robert F. Browning, Pastor

Smoke Rise Baptist Church

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I read it twenty-five years ago in Leonard Griffith’s book, We Have This Ministry, and have never forgotten it. I have tried to live by his advice down through the years and have hurt myself when I failed to do so. He described it as the Pendulum Principle. Every encounter with man must be balanced by an encounter with God. If not, your life will get out of sync.

Whenever I seem to be out of sync, I examine my prayer life. It usually doesn’t take long to realize why I am unbalanced. What I discover is that I have had several encounters with people and few if any encounters with God. I am trying to be a husband, father, minister, neighbor and citizen on my own. That’s a recipe for disaster and should be avoided at all costs.

Jesus knew this, even early in his ministry. That’s why there were times when he would walk away from people with enormous needs to spend time alone with his Father. One place we see that happening is Luke 5:12-16.

After healing a man with leprosy, Luke recorded, “Yet the news about him spread all the more, so that crowds of people came to hear him and to be healed of their sicknesses. But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed” Luke 5: 15-16.

For what do you think Jesus prayed? I don’t know for sure, but I have given it a lot of thought and would like to share my ideas with you.

I think he prayed for companionship. I don’t think he wanted something from God as much as he wanted God. He wanted to feel His presence and know that He was near. More specifically, Jesus wanted to know that he wasn’t alone.

I believe this is the purpose of prayer. We pray to develop and maintain a close relationship with God. We pray for many reasons, because we are sick and need healing, confused and need guidance, are sinners and need forgiveness, are afraid and need courage, are weak and need power, are happy and need to express gratitude. The reasons for praying are endless, but there is only one purpose and that is to develop a close and abiding relationship with God.

I can understand why it was Jesus’ pattern to frequently withdraw to lonely places and pray. God was his best friend.

Can you say that? I hope so, but fear many cannot. Perhaps you desire a close relationship with Him but do not know that is what He wants, too. You may have an image of God as a stern judge, a demanding boss, or an abusive parent that prevents intimacy. I don’t believe those images are accurate. Jesus certainly does not give us that impression. Instead, he leads us to believe that God is a loving parent who wants nothing but the best for us. Surely that image of God encourages you to develop a close relationship with Him.

I think Jesus prayed for wisdom and guidance. Not only did Jesus want to feel God, but follow Him. He knew he had been sent for a purpose and he wanted to fulfill it. However, it was God’s purpose that He wanted to fulfill, not man’s. To discover that purpose and stay on track, Jesus needed help. He needed wisdom and guidance.

One of my favorite Biblical stories is the raising of Lazarus in John 11. John recorded that after word was sent to Jesus that his dear friend Lazarus was sick, Jesus waited two days before he started the journey to Bethany. How strange. You would think that Jesus would drop whatever he was doing to go help one of his closest friends. Why the delay? Perhaps it was to give Lazarus time to die and be buried before Jesus arrived so he could raise him from the dead. Maybe. Could it have been, though, to give Jesus time to pray to seek God's will. More was at stake than the illness of a dear friend or even the grief of Mary and Martha. To go back to Jerusalem and raise Lazarus from the dead would require his own life. Was it time to die for the sins of the world? Was it time to be the sacrificial lamb? Was his earthly ministry over? Only through prayer would those weighty answers come.

Do you seek God's will when facing decisions? I hope so, because I know He wants to guide you in the right direction. Maybe you are struggling with some tough decisions this morning. People are pulling you in two or more directions. You may even be faced with a decision between good and good like Jesus was in John 11. Those always seem to be the toughest. Let me encourage you to do what Jesus did and withdraw to a lonely place and pray. I believe God will meet you there and help you.

I think Jesus prayed for strength and power. He knew at this point in his ministry that he would face two enormous challenges, helping people with their needs and overcoming powerful opposition. Luke attached this sentence about Jesus withdrawing and praying to a story about Jesus healing a leper. It is followed by a story that reads, "One day as he was teaching, Pharisees and teachers of the law, who had come from every village of Galilee and from Judea and Jerusalem, were sitting there" Luke 5:17.

What's the message? Jesus was going to face two incredible challenges, helping people and overcoming opposition. I am talking about helping the most undesirable people with chronic problems and facing the most organized opposition by threatened religious leaders. I don't know anyone who has faced a stiffer challenge.

When Harry Truman assumed the Presidency on April 12, 1945, he was in a state of shock. "I'm not big enough. I'm not big enough for this job," he told Senator George Aiken of Vermont. "Boys," he said tearfully to a group of reporters, if you ever pray, pray for me now."

What is the biggest challenge you are facing today? I know One who wants to help you confront and deal with it. Hope you will let Him.

Do you see the value of the Pendulum Principle? If Jesus needed to balance encounters with people with encounters with God, how much more do we? Make a commitment to implement it this week. Balance the demands of people with time spent in prayer. I believe you will like the results.