

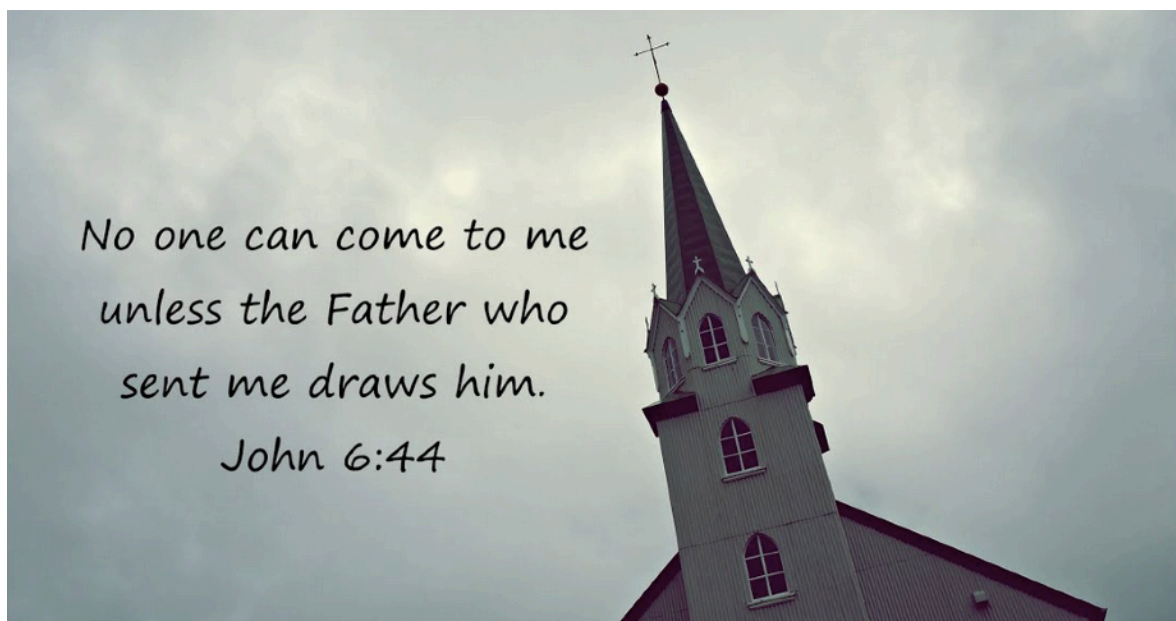
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# Drawn to Jesus

Sermon • Rev'd John Shoaf • 11 August 2024

1 Kings 19:1-9a • Ephesians 4:25-5:2 • John 6:35,41-51

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May the words of my mouth and the thoughts of our hearts give glory to you, O Lord. Amen.

No one can come to me unless drawn by the Father who sent me; and I will raise that person up on the last day. It is written in the prophets, “And they shall all be taught by God.” Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me. (John 6:44-45)

This is Good News indeed for the faithful Christian. God draws us to his Son, and through his Son we are raised up to eternal life. Jesus is building on a passage from the prophet Isaiah, who wrote:

[And God said] O Jerusalem ... I myself will teach your people and give them prosperity and peace. (Isaiah 54:11,13)

God will teach us what we need to know — at least, those who are drawn by God to the Son, Jesus. We cannot come to Jesus on our own; we are drawn by God.

So, what can we do to make God want to draw us to Jesus?

In a way, it's a trick question. God's will *will* be done, and things will happen as God wishes them to happen. We cannot make God draw us in. But think of it this way: we want to be worthy of God's notice, and we want to be ready to hear and obey when God calls us. Remember the parable of the ten young women, who were waiting to meet the bridegroom and escort him into the wedding banquet? Five brought lanterns and extra oil, and the other five brought their lanterns but no extra oil. When the bridegroom was delayed, the five without extra oil had to go out and buy some more, and the bridegroom arrived while they were away. They were not ready to meet the bridegroom. They had not prepared themselves. They were not ready when the call came.

How are we to prepare ourselves for God's call? How are we to be ready?

First, do we know God's word? One of God's greatest gifts to us is the Bible. God reveals a great deal of himself in the Scriptures. From the Bible we know that God is good and loving, but also expects a great deal of us. The ancient Jews had many rules to follow, and God expected them to follow them. Since Jesus's coming, we don't have so many rules; but we still have the Ten Commandments and we know that we can only come to God through faith in Jesus. Besides this, we learn through the stories and parables in the Bible that we are to be merciful, just, humble and loving, and we are to put God first of all in our lives. God teaches us all this through the Bible. So if God gives us the Bible for our instruction, we'd better know it. And we can only know it through regular study.

When I was a kid, we had an old family Bible which had belonged to my great-grandmother Florence. She was born in 1870 and lived until 1972, and I knew her in her last few years. The Bible sat on our library shelf all through my childhood, and occasionally I would take it down and start to read it. (You may recall that I was not raised in a Christian family.) I'd start at the beginning with Genesis, reading the first few chapters about the creation of the world and everything in it — and then I'd get bogged down in the begats. So I'd give up and put the book back on the shelf. Maybe a year later I'd take it down and try again, and I did this a few times, but I could never get into it.

It's hard to read the Bible like a novel, cover to cover; but it is God's gift to us. So what to do? Well, one easy way to read it is to use the readings we hear on Sunday. I suggest to you that during the week, you look up those readings in your Bibles. The readings are shown in the pew sheet. During the week

following each Sunday, look them up, reread them, and read a little bit before and after each reading, so you get the context. It might take you an hour or so each week, but in time, you will be familiar with a lot of the Bible. Again — it's God's word. God gave it to us and expects us to read it.

Second, are we building a personal relationship with God — that is, do we pray regularly? As William Barclay wrote:

Prayer is keeping our friendship with God in constant repair. Many people work on the unconscious assumption that they can do without God when they do not specially need him, and then call him in when everything else has failed. Certainly God will help even then, but in a time of crisis it is so much easier to go to someone who is your well-loved, constantly visited, familiar friend. And that is why prayer should be a daily activity of life.<sup>1</sup>

You need not necessarily set aside a particular time for prayer. Some people were raised as children to kneel at the bedside and pray before going to sleep. That's fine. But you can pray at lunch, while driving (but don't close your eyes), at work, at the gym, wherever. God's always available for a chat. And no topic is off the table.

Third, do we share our faith with others? It is one of the most difficult things, to talk about your faith with someone who doesn't know God. But I think it's also important to talk about your faith with your fellow Christians. Sharing your thoughts about God and Jesus, or the Bible passage you just read, or what you're praying about this week, is a great way to strengthen your faith — and it helps the other person too. Praying together is really great.

Sometimes in our lives God will call on us to do something really difficult, whether it's caring for a loved one who is very ill, or a personal challenge we need to work through. But much of the time, God's demands on us are not onerous. It is often merely keeping God in mind, listening for God's call, using God's gifts of prayer and the Bible regularly, and building up others with your faith. These are the things which make us worthy of God's call, and worthy to be drawn in by God ever closer to our Lord Jesus. As Jesus says, those who have heard and learned from the Father will come to him. May we all be drawn together in a great Holy Communion with our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> Barclay, William, *More Prayers for the Plain Man*. London: Collins, 1962; p11.