

CITY CHURCH-EASTSIDE WEEKLY WORSHIP GUIDE

November 8, 2009



Sermon on the Mount: Prayer-A Liturgy of Liberation

“And when you pray do not be like...Pray then like this...”

Last week we entered a unique section of the Sermon on the Mount that focuses on motivation. First, we looked at the dynamics of motivation and giving. This week we look at the same in regards to prayer.

Prayer is a peculiar experience for modern thinkers, Christian and Secular alike. Secularists in fields such as medicine remain skeptical of the efficacy of prayer, but as the saying goes “there are no atheists in foxholes.” If we’re really honest there have been those moments, albeit rare, where we have prayed to something or someone longing for an extraordinary influence beyond ourself. Yet the meaning or point of prayer feels confounding and this experience does not evade the follower of Christ.

It is to this point that Jesus brings clarity to the muddled waters of prayer by shedding light on our errors and offering us a pathway towards freedom.

In verses 5-8, Jesus reveals the two errors we make and does so along the lines of

people groups. From the vantage point of a Judaic worldview he identifies errors that both Jew and Gentile make with prayer. Simply stated the Jewish religious leaders, described here as hypocrites, use prayer to bolster their worth in front of others as they “pray on the street corners.” The Gentiles also attempt to shore up their identity, manipulating the content of their prayer thinking they will “be heard for their many words.” Boiling both errors down, Jesus is summarily saying that prayer is not about our performance before either God or man. Jesus is able to state this clearly because God is described as our Father and it’s Jesus alone who enables this familial relationship. Our prayers reach the very ear of the Father, not because of how we say them, but because Jesus is literally interceding for us in the presence of the Father who is in Heaven. The person and work of Christ leaves us awestruck as we consider that the most powerful person in the universe hears our every word. Oriented in this manner, the text leads us into the “Lord’s Prayer” that can be

understood as two main sections, God’s concerns and man’s concerns. It is rightly noted that in the prayer God’s concerns are preeminent which is radically counter-cultural. Our culture is a culture of self, our name, kingdom, and will. Yet focusing on His name, kingdom, and will is much like going on vacation. The sweeping vistas and rolling waves help us to put life in perspective as we realize that the TPS report is simply not as important as we thought it was! This is the very nature of coming into the presence of God. When our hearts become filled with God, his character, beauty, majesty (the list goes on and on) He becomes greater and we become less. The transformation becomes profound as we are freed from the laborious project called “the self.” We also come to see ourself in a new way, no longer clamoring to God with requests, but resting because he knows our every need. He eagerly desires to hear from us and take care of His children. This week may we trust in the glory that is His name, his kingdom, and his will. Amen.

Sermon Application

The questions and thoughts below can be used for further reflection this week. Seek to use a journal or discuss with a friend. Most of all use this to consider how the gospel of Christ can be transforming. Enjoy!

Application Questions: Matthew 6:5-15; 7:7-11

1. How is prayer treated in our broader culture and faith systems? Does prayer play a role in the life of the secular thinker?
2. Share with your group or a friend your own personal experience with prayer. How have you experienced transformation through prayer? What have been your frustrations with prayer?
3. Read Matthew 6:5-8. What two errors related to prayer are identified here? What would you say these errors stem from? What is God's hope for our engagement with prayer?
4. Why is the person of Jesus crucial to our prayer life? Describe what this means to you personally.
5. What is the "big picture" structure of the Lord's Prayer found in verses 5-15? Consider how your normal approach to prayer. How does the prayer change your normal practice. How does that make you feel?
6. Read Stott's quote just to the left. Why would we say that the Lord's prayer liberates us from the laborious project of the self? What are the risks & rewards of walking away from our kingdom and embracing God's?
7. How has God begun to change your view on prayer this week? Share your insights with your group or a friend.
8. Read Psalm 62 and make a few notes regarding what you learn about God. Spend time expressing your notations to him in prayer. Finally, consider how you were transformed by this experience. Did it help put life in perspective?

Intersect: Beholding God in Prayer

Often prayer can feel overwhelming. Many of us wonder even where to begin! Interestingly, in the Sermon on the Mount Jesus corrects two errors that still haunt us today. Christ points out that some people delight to pray publicly in order to win people's approval and other people pray with many words in order to win God's approval. Without giving it much thought we naturally create quite the performance atmosphere around a spiritual discipline that Jesus outlines rather simply. Keeping it simple, meaningful, and fruitful is a fine aspiration, but we sincerely ask "where do I begin?"

I've heard it said that if you feel estranged from God begin with the Psalms. The Psalms are a fountain of life for a thirsty soul as they beautifully articulate our emotions using words that spark our creativity. The Book of Common Prayer contains a reading from the Psalms as part of the daily lectionary readings. You can find daily readings using either the hardcopy or [electronic copy](#).

Utilizing a Psalm in our prayer life can be easy and rewarding. Pick a Psalm or reference the Book of Common Prayer's lectionary. Read through the Psalm noting what you learn about God and yourself that is unique or interesting. Finally, using your notes and/or the whole Psalm shape your prayer time.

For example if you were to take Psalm 78, read it, and make notes about God and self you could highlight:

- That God is a personal God who seeks to teach us for our welfare.
- He gives us his word and the narratives of his word that we may set our hope in Him as opposed to the things of this world.
- By nature we fail God just as the people of the Exodus did and yet God is continually faithful to us.
- Despite his wrath against injustice he has provided redemption through Christ (the tribe of Judah).
- God works miraculously through the natural elements of our world.

After making such notations, use them as your own words unto God. Your prayers might be transformed!

Pick 2 or 3 times this week when you can try this out for around 10 minutes or so. After giving a try note how you've been changed. How did God reorient your heart? How did he invite you into deeper community with Him? Blessings!

"We've become concerned about our own little name, about our own little empire, and about our own silly little will. But in the Christian counter-culture our top priority is not our name, kingdom, and will but God's. Whether we can pray these petitions with integrity is a searching test of the reality and depth of our Christian profession."

John Stott
Counter Cultural
Christianity

