

Jesus Teaches on Prayer 8-4-02

In any relationship, communication is the key to continuing and deepening that relationship. Several weeks ago we considered how God is speaking to us. Prayer is entering into a communicating relationship with God. The Apostle Paul tells us in [Ephesians 5:31,32](#) that our relationship with Jesus is like that of a man and his wife. For any couple to have an ongoing relationship they need to keep up their communication, sharing their heart with each other. It sounds quite normal, but how many of us think of that kind of relationship when we speak of prayer? We usually think of a time we ask God for something, or to bless the food, or for problems beyond our control. What kind of a relationship would married people have if they only spoke when you wanted something, or had an emergency? There is nothing wrong with asking God for good things, or going to Him in a time of need, but when all your communication is "Gimme" communication, something is wrong.

Prayer is very simply speaking our hearts to God and listening as He shares His heart with us. If we allow the Holy Spirit to change our mindset about prayer we will find we come with a much more receptive attitude. If instead of coming with obligation and duty we come to meet a friend that is closer than a brother, more able than any superhero, more loving than our marriage partner, we will find our expectations of Him will not be disappointed. We need an excitement about our prayer life that continually draws us. If we find all that it can mean to us, prayer will be our most treasured part of every day. If we try to pray out of obligation or just mental exercise that we go through to obtain what we want, we will find prayer to be drudgery. We have to realize prayer is powerful and brings the Kingdom of God into the lives of men. No wonder we have a hard time praying. Satan resists prayer. Don't be surprised if you don't feel like it. It is not the feeling that should motivate us but our conviction in the power and need for prayer.

Jesus had such a prayer life that His disciples, noting it, asked Him, "Lord, teach us to pray." If we are going to really look at prayer we should see what the Master himself taught His disciples by both His words and His actions. If anyone had a perfect understanding of prayer, it was Jesus. Even now, the author of Hebrews tells us, [\(Hebrews 7:25\)](#) Jesus is praying to the Father for us. The more we mature as children of God, the more we will be like Jesus, living in prayer. The Apostle Paul tells us in [1Thess 5:17](#) to pray without ceasing, for that is the life of Jesus.

Jesus taught on prayer in Matt 6:5-15 (NIV) 5 *"And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. 6 But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. 7 And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. 8 Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. 9 "This, then, is how you should pray:*

Commented [Q1]: 31 "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh."
32 This is a profound mystery--but I am talking about Christ and the church.
Eph 5:31-32 (NIV)

Commented [Q2]: 25 Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them.
Heb 7:25 (NIV)

Commented [Q3]: 17 pray continually;
1 Thess 5:17 (NIV)

Commented [Q4]:

"Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, 10 your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. 11 Give us today our daily bread. 12 Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. 13 And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.' 14 For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. 15 But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.

The first part of Jesus' instruction deals with motivation. Why are you praying? If it is for others to see you, then that is all you get out of it. Others see you and have a false regard for you as a spiritual person. What a waste! You could be communing with your Maker, instead of impressing people. So, Jesus teaches us to check our motivation for praying. Are we really praying to commune with God?

Instead of a public display, pray in secret. Many have interpreted this to mean a place of solitude. That is a good place to be undistracted, but if we are to combine that with the Apostle's instruction to pray always, then we would always be in solitude. When we put Jesus' instruction with what He just said in the previous verse we see that He means inwardly versus outwardly for others to see. The closet is within our own hearts. We commune in our spirit with God who is Spirit. To commune with Him we need to be communing from our spirit, not just our mind. Certainly the mind is involved, but the mind must be operating under the direction of our own spirit, not just pattern, habit, or our physical nature. The ear hears sound. The eye sees light. The spirit of man made alive by the presence of Christ is the receptacle for prayer.

You can be in a crowd, eyes open, on your way with some errand and be in prayer in your spirit. Jesus' often went to solitary places to pray, but He also must have been praying as He went about teaching and healing. He said He did nothing but what He sees the Father doing, and spoke nothing except what He heard from the Father. That would require constant communication. To the mature Christian, prayer bubbles up like an artesian well. That is constant communion with God.

We need both, constant communication and special times of solitude. I think of it like carrying a cell phone throughout the day. I talk to the Father anytime and anyplace. The connection is not as clear as I'd like, but nevertheless I can speak to Him and hear from Him at anytime. But when I get home I put my cell phone away. I go into His awesome presence and we speak face to face. There is no problem with reception. There in His presence, beholding His glory, I am changed. This is the secret place that no one knows but me, not because it is a secret location, for it is anywhere, but because no one can invade or dispute the wonder of time spent there.

His next instruction seems to have fallen on deaf ears today. Don't keep babbling on and on. I think this not only means long drawn out prayers for the sake of long public prayer, but also includes mindless chanting. We have so many expressions that we consider suitable for prayer. It is so refreshing to me to hear prayers that

are straight from the heart. We have our own good phrases that can lose their meaning when we say them without thinking. Let me give you a few: "Heavenly Father", "bless this food to the nourishment of our bodies", "Your will be done", "in Jesus' name". Wonderful expressions that mean so much but often roll off our lips without thought to the fullness of their meaning. Some of us could pray with our mind in neutral because we have prayed so many public prayers. We need to pray from the depths of our spirit each word we pray.

To avoid this routine attitude in prayer, I like to use my imagination to help me grasp what is really going on. I'm speaking with God Almighty. That is the all-powerful One. I'd be holding onto a lot less power if I grabbed hold of the power lines coming out of Palo Verde Nuclear Plant! Sometimes I imagine going behind the veil into the Holy of holies and seeing the Shekinah Glory over the mercy seat. It is hard to be complacent and routine if you let God sanctify your imagination to grasp the reality of what is happening in the spiritual realms. Andrew Murray puts it much more poetically, *"But to the man who withdraws himself from all that is of the world and man that waits for God alone, the Father will reveal Himself. As he shuts out the world and its life, surrendering himself to be led by Christ into God's presence, the light of the Father's love will fall on him."*

Thinking we will be heard by much speaking is a misunderstanding of the nature of God. Review the attributes of God. Get a good book on the subject of His attributes or review my sermons on-line (www.bible-sermons.org) regarding the attributes of God. He knows what you have need of before you ask. He is loving and gracious. You don't have to convince Him to give you what is good for you. He is just waiting for you to ask. Heaven is full of answers to prayers that have not yet been uttered. Remember He is faithful and just. Pray according to His perfect character, and you will have faith your prayer will be answered.

Jesus uses a title over and over in this passage – Father. Though the Jews have referred to God as Father, Jesus was the first to address God directly as Father and encourage us to do the same. We are coming as children into the presence of our awesome Father who has everything under control. We can express our concerns and know He hears and has the solution. How humble and loved we should feel as we stand before Daddy! That love should cause our hearts to be at peace and our ears to be attentive to each word He will speak to our hearts.

The Lord's prayer is really the disciples' prayer. It was a prayer He gave them to pray as a model of prayer. It is Prayer 101. Notice the plural pronouns. It was meant to be prayed together, and at the close of the service we will. This plural usage shows us that although most of our prayer life is in secret, there are times when we should be praying together. The prayer begins with the third mention in this passage of Whom it is we are addressing, *"Our Father in heaven..."* We are addressing the Almighty in heaven and yet He is our Father. By entering into Christ we have become sons and daughters of God. He is at the helm of the universe. This One to Whom we pray is controlling the physical realm. That will give you confidence that your prayers can be answered.

...hallowed be your name... His name is the sum of His attributes. His name is holy. All that He is, is perfect. Recognition of that should humble us and even bring us to our knees. If our minds are engaged and assisted by the Holy Spirit, this expression should give us the vision of grabbing those gigawatt power lines. He is holy, and I only have a right to come into His presence because of what Christ did in my place. Thank God for Jesus, because if you stand in this place without Him you would be toast. We say with the psalmist, *"Behold O God our sun and shield and look on the face of your anointed."* Don't look at me, look at Jesus! Your rebellion against God would be dealt with instantly and totally. Now we take refuge in that title "Father".

Many of you have not had a perfect father so it is hard to relate to that title. Let your image of the word be transformed into the God who loves and cares for you, with patience and confidence that you will become all that He has planned for you. Father! I like to repeat that in prayer. We have a Father. We have a wonderful Father. We have the best Father. He is not overindulgent, He cares enough to deal with me for my good. He disciplines me, but at times He also pours out blessings on me. He has an inheritance for me beyond my wildest dreams. He is my Father!

Notice that we begin with God. He is first and foremost in prayer. The prayer begins with "your name", "your kingdom", "your will" and then later turns to us. We often rush into prayer with our needs first. That is backward from Kingdom ways. God is first and foremost in all things, including prayer. We acknowledge Him and His right to rule over all so that we have a right attitude in presenting our petitions.

...your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Here is where we lay down what is burdening us and ask for His will and not our own. Jesus not only taught this but lived it, even in the shadow of the cross. There in the Garden he could see the horror that lay before Him, but He lived His teaching and prayed, "Not my will but yours be done." Prayer is often the great attitude adjuster. We come with all our concerns and burdens, but then we come into the presence of our Father who has it all planned. We point at pieces of the puzzle and wonder how they fit. He just smiles, for He knows exactly how they fit and when and where. Take peace from that smile. He may even show you just what it is He wants you to pray to see His will done. Then our prayer is changed from fearful concern to peaceful resolve to enter into the Father's way. True prayer is submission.

The Scriptures also say that, *14 This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. 15 And if we know that he hears us--whatever we ask--we know that we have what we asked of him.* 1 John 5:14-15 (NIV)

As we come before God and acknowledge that His ways are best and ask what His way is in our circumstance, He shows us what to pray for or how to pray for the situation that you brought to Him. Now if you know you are praying God's will, you will believe He will do what you are praying. It's as good as done. If I was working for a wealthy and ethical employer who asked me to do a particular project, I would expect him to provide all the resources to get the job done. How much more then, will we have confidence that God will answer our prayers when we pray His will, and equip us with all we need to do His will?

When we pray for God's kingdom to come we are praying for Him to reign in the earth in the lives of men and women. We are praying for them to submit to the lordship of Jesus. The angels do his bidding. We want to see all mankind do His bidding, also. Only then will sorrow and pain cease, for then creation will be in harmony with the Creator. I increasingly find myself praying that the Kingdom of God is manifested in situations. A kingdom is the area over which king reigns. It is His territory, under His rule. May the Kingdom of God be manifest in our worship services. May the Kingdom of God be manifest in the way this church operates. May the Kingdom of God be manifest in the unity of believers in this city. Thy Kingdom come in me, in my home, in our church, and in this city.

But praying like this may also mean God calls you to action. He may ask you to put legs to your prayer. He often burdens us about a situation on His heart so that you will be the instrument through which He meets a need. You may be the instrument through which He brings His Kingdom into a situation, whether that is meeting a need, giving a word of encouragement, sharing a Scripture, or any one of God's wonderful ways of expressing His love to the hurting.

Let us make a brief summary of what we have looked at this morning in regards to prayer: It is communicating with our Father. We can do so anytime but we also need times of solitude. Check your heart for the right motivation in prayer. See that you have the right understanding of the character of God so you can pray accordingly. Magnify Him first, praying for His Kingdom and His will, not your will and ways. Be prepared for the LORD to make you the instrument through which answers to prayers come. We'll continue through this prayer next week and look at the half that encourages us to ask for our needs.

One of the most notable men of prayer, E.M. Bounds, wrote, *"A person who can pray is the mightiest instrument Christ has in this world. A praying church is stronger than all the gates of hell."* May the LORD make us a praying church! Jesus said, "My house shall be called a house of prayer." He didn't say "a house of preaching" or "a house of praise". We do need those things, but that is not primarily what He has called us to be. He calls us to be a house of prayer for all nations. In the coming weeks we'll examine what that may mean to us and how we may need to make some changes to line up with God's intention for us. During the coming weeks we need people to testify to the power of prayer and answers to prayer. Please make an appointment with me to let me know when you would like to share your story.

Let's close this part of the service with the LORD's prayer on the middle front of your bulletin:

"Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, 10 your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. 11 Give us today our daily bread. 12 Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. 13 And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one." AMEN!

Communion:

This do! He didn't leave a library, or a pyramid, or great portrait, that is what men do. He left something much more powerful and life transforming. He left us this meal to remind us where our hope lies. He points us to the cross where we are made right with God, where we have peace with God through His blood.

Communion is what the message today was about – communing with God. Every time we commune with God and share His heart we are drawn to one another. We all share that same love poured out on us through the cross. We all live in the same hope. As we commune with God, thanking Him for what He has done we have communion with each other. It is the partaking of Jesus that makes us one and that partaking of Jesus is pictured here in the sacrament of communion. *One Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in you all.*