

Our Place at His Place

Pray Tell

November 15, 2020

Welcome you to where we're learning how to talk to our Dad!



Do your prayers please God? Last Sunday, I said that Jesus can be very disappointing, because *His* thoughts and ways are not *our* thoughts and ways; (Is 55:8-9) *and* He's stubbornly opposed to compromising our eternal best. And this means that **the will of God is *always* good, yet *seldom* predictable**. In Acts 12, the Lord allows King Herod to kill the Apostle James (one of the Sons of Thunder), and then rescues the Apostle Peter (the Rock) from prison.

[Then Peter] went to the house ... where *many* people had *gathered* and were *praying*. Peter knocked at the outer entrance, and a servant girl named Rhoda came to answer the door. ... she was so overjoyed she ran back without opening it and exclaimed, "Peter is at the door!" "You're out of your mind," they told her. ... But Peter kept on knocking, and when they opened the door and saw him, they were astonished. – Acts 12:11-16 NIV

I wanted you to see that it's always good to pray, even if our thoughts and ways are so inferior that we're bound to be astonished by the answer. Because, **when we pray the right way doors open**. Thing is, we have it in our head that *we're* the ones doing all the knocking. When in reality **the Rock often stands at the door and knocks**. And **we hesitate to open up and let His answer in**. Know why? Rhoda! A little flakey, that one. So the **prayers that please our Father**, regardless of whether we're praising, thanking, or requesting, are those that **open our heart to Him**.

So how, pray tell, are we to pray? I'm glad I asked. Because, as a pastor, I happen to know that *most* believers struggle with prayer. If you're *not* the scheduled-prayer type, **prayer can feel like a haphazard afterthought**. And if you *are* the scheduled-prayer type, **prayer can feel like another chore to check off**. And many, who would never admit it, even to themselves, sort of **unconsciously conclude that prayer doesn't do much**. The lights stay on, the bills get paid, the dog gets fed ... so ... you know, **we amp it up when something bad happens**, and we need to get God's attention, and hopefully squeeze a little miracle out of Him.

That's probably not *you*. It's those *other* believers who won't admit it to themselves. And yet, when it comes to prayer, *most* of us are hot and then cold, on again, off again, up, down, touch the ground. It's like this guy who cried out every week at church – it's okay, he's Pentecostal – for God to fill him again with His Spirit. One Sunday his wife yells, "Don't do it, Lord; he leaks!" What if we've got the whole prayer thing mostly backwards? **What if the main point of prayer is to get *our* attention?** In order to *get* our attention **refocused, recalibrated, and realigned** to our *Father's* will, **so that He can get us to do something for Him?**

Well, if you're in need of a little guidance from God on praying, you're certainly not alone. Did you know that's the *first* thing Jesus' twelve apprentices asked about, after they were chosen?



One day Jesus was **praying in a certain place**. [Stop. Look. That is a telltale "harmonize me" challenge. And if we seek, we find that He's on the hillside above the Sea of Galilee, praying all night to choose His Twelve (Mt 5:1, 6:9; Lk 6:12)] When He finished, one of His disciples said to Him, "Lord, teach us to pray," – Luke 11:1 NIV



Now the boys aren't beginners when it comes to prayer. Hardly! Their Jewish heritage required a strict practice of memorized prayers that began in early childhood. Every morning. Every night. Three other set times each day. Before eating. After eating. And many other occasions. Some historians estimate that devout Jewish men in that day prayed 3-4 hours a day! So, **if these guys need guidance, I don't feel so bad**. Because so often *my* biggest prayer-guilt concerns the amount of time I spend. But, **their request isn't about quantities or schedules**. Those they know



Obviously they could see something *very* different in the way He prayed. **Prayer wasn't a duty, but a delight**. It didn't tax. It refreshed and recharged. And Jesus didn't settle for **prerecorded prayers** at **predetermined times**; and yet, it was *never* haphazard with Him. **He enjoyed getting away to pray**, at all hours of the day ... and night, **for the sheer delight of conversing with Dad**. I mean, if *anyone* didn't "need" it, it was Jesus; He and the Father were already One! And **this was nothing like these boys had ever seen**.

And He just spent *all night* praying about *them*. So His response is their first taste of what would be the *norm*: an answer that is **unexpected, counterintuitive, challenging, confusing**, and of course **life changing**. They expect *more* religious duty; but, true to form, Jesus gives 'em *less*. *Much* less. **He gives 'em truth instead of duty**. And, as they'd come to know as also being true to form, His answer is **amazingly comprehensive and incredibly concise**. It's known throughout the world as **the Lord's Prayer**. But it should be known as the Lord's Prayer **Guide**.

At least twelve different relationships with God are covered in the Lord's Prayer ... Guide: Our Father: **Dad**. In heaven: **Creator**. Hallowed be Your name: **Deity**. Your kingdom come: **King**. Your will be done: **Master** (i.e. Lord). On earth as it is in heaven: **Transformer**. Give us this day our daily bread: **Provider**. And forgive us our debts: **Judge**. As we forgive our debtors: **Mentor**. And lead us not into temptation: **Shepherd**. But deliver us from evil: **Savior**. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory: **Friend**. Know why? Jesus said He **calls** them friends, who know their Master-Father's business. (Jn 15:14-15) But, however you slice it, **THAT'S** a *lot* to ponder as we pray.



Oh, did you know that a *huge* part of the Lord's Prayer Guide are the three big *warnings* that precede it? warning #1:

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. – Matthew 6:5 NIV

What's their reward? People saw 'em. Some reward. So, **are you a hypocrite for not praying as you know you should?** No. That's not hypocrisy. It's failure. And **failure doesn't make you a hypocrite, insincerity does.** So, the big question, that Jesus is getting at, is this: **Do you present in public what you are in private?** If not, stop praying about everything else, and get *this* right with God right now! Because **Jesus demands – and I mean, demands – sincerity, authenticity, and genuineness.**

I've been asked on occasion, why we don't pray the Lord's Prayer every Sunday at His Place. That's a great question. And I have a strong opinion. And it's based in large part on Jesus' next warning. Now, having just said not to be like those who pray in public, Jesus warns:

But when **you** pray, **go into your room, [and] close the door** and pray to your Father, who is **unseen**. **[Because, if you want be like Him, you should be unseen as well!]** **Then** your Father, who sees what is done **in secret**, will reward you. – Matthew 6:6 NIV



The Lord must love irony; because He sure seems to set us up for it! We're specifically warned to pray the Lord's Prayer Guide both **sincerely and secretly**; and yet, there is no other prayer that is more often recited both **mechanically and publically!** "But I find comfort in the Lord's Prayer." **We're not supposed to find comfort in a prayer.** We're supposed to find comfort in our Father, as we faithfully follow, obediently surrender, share our secrets, and allow Him to speak to our heart. **Why's it such a private, prayer-closet affair?** Because **it's meant to be seriously personalized**, not mechanically recited. That's why it's so private.

The disciples asked Jesus to **"teach us to pray"**, not **"teach us a prayer"**; and there's a big difference; and that's probably why there's no record of this prayer being repeated verbatim or publically by the disciples, and no epistle instructions given to recite it. In fact, the shorthand version in Luke doesn't even match Matthew's. So it's not like they were trying to keep it just so.

This doesn't mean we can't pray it together, or publically. But we can't let *that* replace its intended function as **Jesus' framework to build our private prayers upon**. It's the Lord's Prayer Guide. And **we can't let it become a mechanical** (and therefore meaningless) **tradition**. Boy-o-boy does Jesus hate *that* stuff! And **it can certainly be prayed with sincerity as is**. In fact, it should be our goal to wrap our minds around each phrase to such a degree that we can honestly speak it as an expression from our own heart. But there's a third warning:

And **when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans**, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. Do *not* be like them, for *your* Father *knows* what you need *before* you ask Him. – Matthew 6:7 NIV

So why pray? For the conversation. He understands before you explain. He's already working on it before you ask. But here's the weirdness: He's only on it in advance because He knew you were going to! **The purpose of prayer isn't to get God to act.** It's to stay in touch, and partner up with Dad, and tell Him our deepest, darkest secrets, and realign, and refocus, and learn to trust His *answers*. Because He *answers* our prayers. We just don't *like* a lot of His answers.

But whatever you do – don't insult and demean and malign your One and only Omnipotent Ally by "babbling like pagans, for they think they'll be heard because of their many words."



Rome's multi-god state religion was crucial to its identity. With roughly forty annual festivals, sacred days outnumbered non. **Romans saw themselves as highly religious**; and **they ascribed their supremacy to collective piety**. And rejection of Rome's religion was treasonous. Look close at the Temple of Bacchus – there's people standing on the porch!

The philosophy was based on a *contractual* principle: **I give that you might give**. It depended not on faith or doctrine, but on the correct practice of prayer, ritual, and sacrifice. And of these, **prayer formulas were considered the most potent**. Therefore, public prayers had to be performed professionally and faultlessly; and at each home's daily prayer shrine, **private prayer wasn't personal expression**; it was **formulaic recitation to accomplish specific goals**. Maybe that's a big part of why Christianity became the official religion of the Roman empire in 380^{AD}.



The purpose of prayer isn't **to bend God's will to meet mine**, but **to bend mine to meet His**. Prayers prayed right are like a spiritual chiropractor, only **they adjust our soul back into alignment**. Pagan babbling is nothing more than **an attempt to control supernatural powers for personal gain**, whereas **effective prayer is a process of surrender**. Long story short: we're not in Rome, so don't do as the Romans. Plus ...

The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working. – James 5:16 ESV

Because, just like Jesus said:

Your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. – Matthew 6:6 NIV

"Reward? What's our reward?" This is an incredibly significant question, because Jesus promises that **God will reward us for praying privately and sincerely**. So, if you've prayed earnestly and alone, and yet seem to have missed out on your reward, only one of two things can be true: **Jesus is lying** (which actually can't be; so it's gotta be whatever the next one is), or **you have the wrong idea about your reward**. "Yeah. That's what I figured."



When my kids were young, I'd sometimes bring home little gifts in my coat pockets. So, when they saw me, they'd usually yell: "What'd you bring?!" And if I had something, I'd say: "Check my coat!" And when I didn't have anything, and they yelled: "What'd you bring?" I'd yell: "ME!" And you can imagine what a letdown *that* was.

But, as they matured, their demands subsided (just go with it for the sake of the analogy!), and they began to embrace *me* and appreciate *me* more than the things I brought *them*. They grew up and realized that **relationships are reciprocal**. And that **presents are inferior to presence**.

“Okay. So what’s the reward from *our* Dad?” His **presence** and **assurance** and **affection** and **guidance**. And if *that’s* a letdown, you need to grow up. Because, **if our prayer life doesn’t grow in depth and intimacy, we burn out**. Know why? You can only beg for so long. **Jesus didn’t give us an incantation to get *Dad’s* attention**. Just the opposite. And we’re going to dig a lot deeper into this, over the next couple of weeks. So, until then, consider yourself warned.

Let’s pray ... *together*:

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen. – Matthew 6:9-13 NKJ