

We Value Prayer



Core Value

We value prayer.

Communicating directly with God through prayer strengthens our personal relationship with God and gives us access to God's power and purpose. Personal and corporate prayer includes expressions of thanksgiving, praise, confession, intercession, and petition.

Pray then in this way: 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 also have forgiven our debtors. And do not bring us to the time of trial but rescue us from the evil one. (Matthew 6:9-13)

Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. (Philippians 4:6)

...pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. (I Thessalonians 5:17-18)

Introduction

The Disciples once asked Jesus, "Teach us how to pray." That is what we too want to learn from Jesus today. We want to learn how to pray. It seems so basic, almost like asking, "teach us how to walk," and in some ways it is, yet we sense that there is more to learn. So, let us begin the Core Value of Prayer with this prayer:

Lord, teach us to pray. We understand that in asking you the question we are praying already, but we also know that prayer is more than asking you for things. So, during these moments as we read at home and share together in Sunday School and worship, we open our minds and hearts to your instruction. In the name of Jesus, the master teacher we pray. Amen.

Bible Study

Matthew 6:9-16

Our Father...Hallowed be Thy Name. This passage is one we call the Lord's Prayer. It begins, "Our Father...." The designation "Father" indicates the relationship of God to Jesus and Jesus' disciples. God is like a father to us. God is like a loving parent who listens when God's children speak. We are family. Jesus then says that God's name is to be hallowed. To hallow is to give God honor and respect as the holy God. Together, "Our Father" and "Hallowed be your name," acknowledges that God is both near and far (or imminent and transcendent to use the big theological terms). God is small enough to draw intimately near to humanity and big enough to create an entire universe.

The prayer consists of three "you" or "thou" statements followed by three "we" or "our" statements. The Greek of Matthew is poetic and may be translated roughly as follows:

Let it be hallowed, the name of thee.

Let it come, the kingdom of thee.

Let it come about, the will of thee.

The bread of us, daily give to us today.

Forgive us the debts of us, as indeed we forgave the debtors of us.

Do not bring us into temptation, but rescue us from evil.

Thy Kingdom Come. It is appropriate that we would use the Lord's Prayer as a part of our visioning process as the prayer is itself a vision—a vision of God's Kingdom. In many ways this prayer is a subversive political statement. We pray for God's kingdom to come and God's will be done, not that of any earthly king, president, or form of government. Can you image how Caesar might have felt about this prayer? Christians submit to the reign of God above all else. The church is to be a demonstration of life under God's rule in contrast to the often hateful, unforgiving, selfish ways of the world.

Our Daily Bread. Bread may carry at least two meaning here. Jesus was likely referring to our everyday physical needs. In doing so he identified especially with the poor for whom obtaining bread was a daily struggle. And, as this prayer was used by the worshiping community, they would also think of Jesus' Last Supper. The Lord's Supper, which they observed weekly, was often referred to as the breaking of bread.

Forgive us as we forgive. Notice, Jesus did not say, "if we sin." Jesus assumed we all sin. We all trespass against God's will for God's kingdom. Our relationship to God is broken, so we are indebted to God in a way we can never repay. We can only hope that God will forgive us our debts. Not only did Jesus assume our universal sinfulness, Jesus assumed we would be forgiving of others. After all, that is one of the rules within God's reign—grace and forgiveness, even of enemies.

Lead us not into temptation and deliver us from evil. Some find this phrase troublesome, as if God might lead us into temptation and sin. That interpretation probably reads too much into the phrase. One commentator suggests the meaning is this: "Grant us the strength to resist

temptation.” Thus, this is the church’s prayer for guidance that we would be wise and walk according to the fruit of the spirit rather than the seven deadly sins.

Philippians 4:6

“Do not worry about anything.” This directive is easier said than done when we are faced with a bad medical report or other worrisome news. We cannot over simplify this verse to mean that God will rescue us from all of this world’s troubles if we just pray. We know from experience that sometimes we pray and our problems remain. We live in a broken world and we will never fully understand the “why?” of suffering. However, no matter what circumstances we face we know that God loves us and walks with us every step of the way and God always acts on our behalf. We “do not worry” because worry doesn’t solve anything and because we know everything that can be done is being done by a powerful God who loves us. So, let us as individuals and a church “with thanksgiving let [our] requests be made known to God.”

I Thessalonians 5:17-18

Pray without ceasing. Can anyone really pray without ceasing? The tradition of “Praying the Hours” is one tradition observed by many Christians to help them pray without ceasing. Praying the Hours is the practice of pausing for prayer, reciting Psalms, and worship at seven specified times throughout the day. These times for prayer are meant to remind the Christian that all of life should be lived in prayer. Thomas Kelly describes a way that we might pray continually,

There is a way of ordering our mental life on more than one level at once. On one level we may be thinking, discussing, seeing, calculating, meeting all the demands of external affairs. But deep within, behind the scenes, at a profounder level, we may also be in prayer and adoration, song and worship and a gentle receptiveness to divine breathings (Testament of Devotion, p. 9).

Obviously we can't bow our heads, close our eyes, and talk to God twenty-four hours a day. But we can learn to live all of life with a heightened awareness that God is at our side every moment of our lives, observing our every action, listening to our every word, ready to speak whenever we are ready to listen.

LABC Core Values

Communication. Our core value on prayer begins, “Communicating directly with God through prayer...” This is a helpful way to think of prayer. So often we think of prayer as asking God for things. Yet prayer is so much more than making requests of God. Prayer is communicating with God. Prayer is a two-way conversation. We listen, we talk, and sometimes like good friends we simply enjoy each other’s company.

When we do talk to God our words are not just “gimmie this” and “gimmie that.” Our conversation with God includes the expressions listed in the second part of our core value on prayer: thanksgiving, praise, confession, intercession, and petition.

Praise. We praise God for who God is and for God's attributes. For example, God is creator, loving, holy, and just. The Psalms are full of words of praise from the community. A contemporary song, by Nicole C. Mullins and one of my favorites, offers these words of praise: "Who taught the sun where to stand in the morning? Who told the ocean you can only come this far? Who showed the moon where to hide till evening? Whose words alone can catch a falling star?" We each could write our own lyrics of praise to a God who is beyond words.

Confession. As we meditate on the greatness of God, we realize how much we fall short of that greatness. We engage in sinful acts, we harbor sinfulness in our hearts, we fail to do and be all that God has called us to do and be, and corporately we participate in sinful and unjust systems. There is nothing we can do but fall on our knees, confess our sin, and ask for God's forgiveness. Thankfully God is a God of grace who does forgive and lifts us up as people of worth.

Thanksgiving. Praise, confession, and God's forgiveness naturally leads to thanksgiving. Because of God's goodness we are grateful and offer our thanks to God. We have much for which to be thankful.

Intercession. Intercession is praying for others. We do this in many ways. Sunday School classes take time to pray for the needs of class members and others. Each Wednesday night we take time to offer prayers of intercession for those who are sick, grieving, serving in the military, among others. The cards we send those on our prayer list bring them the comfort of knowing that the Christian community is praying for them and that God is with them. The ministry of intercessory prayer is a significant healing ministry of our church.

Petition. A petition is defined as a request to an authority. In the case of prayer a petition is a request made of God. We may ask God for wisdom in the decision we make, relief from suffering, or to lead us away from temptation and evil.

Whenever we ask anything of God there is always the fear that our requests are selfish, petty, or childish. To that concern, Douglas Steere in *Dimensions of Prayer* offers these words,

Let a person begin in prayer where he or she is, and that means anywhere, with any problem, with any desire. If what that person asks for has him or her in its grip, that means that God can meet that person there.... The only condition that needs to be made about starting anywhere in petitionary prayer is that we stay on in prayer until the little things give way to the big things (pp. 53-54).

Conclusion

Prayer accomplishes at least two things, as stated in our core values. It strengthens our relationship with God and gives us access to God's power and purpose. God has a purpose for our church that we can only discover as we spend time with God asking questions and listening. As we pray, we find that God has given us the gifts, the strength, and the power to accomplish God's tasks and to become the people God calls us to be.

References

The New Interpreter's Bible, Volume VIII, "The Gospel of Matthew." M. Eugene Boring (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995).

Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching. Matthew. Douglas R. A. Hare (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1993).

A Testament of Devotion. Thomas R. Kelley (New York: Harper Collins, 1992).

Dimensions of Prayer: Cultivating a Relationship with God. Douglas V. Steere (Nashville: Upper Room Books, 1997).



Daily Devotionals: Prayer



Monday: *I'll Pray For You*, by Jane Pixley

Scripture Reading: Mark 11:22-24

As you travel life's weary road let Jesus lift your load. "Life is not always fair but God is always faithful."

In the Living Bible, Philippians 4:6-7, says, "Don't worry about anything, instead pray about everything, tell God your needs and don't forget to thank Him for His answers, if you do this you will experience God's peace which is far more wonderful than the mind can understand." If you want to grow strong in your prayer life, you must spend time with our Lord, have faith to know Him better, read His word, ask the Holy Spirit for boldness, power and devotion, and be persistent in your prayer life.

It is so precious to have a close relationship with our Lord. Someone said, "To hear God's voice, turn down the world's volume".

You might ask why I call people on the phone and have prayer with them. I do so because I have the leading of the Holy Spirit to show me for whom I should pray. When I pray I ask "in Jesus' name" for His leadership in people's lives. For example, when I pray for other people, Jesus may lead me to pray for salvation, protection, refuge, financial help, comfort in time of death, or for health and healing.

Tuesday: *When I Pray, Coincidences Happen*, Douglas V. Steere

Scripture Reading: Philippians 4:6

A Japanese Christian girl, whose family life had been destroyed by her father's drunkenness, set about to intercede for his release from this curse. The passion and persistence of her prayers seemed to reach through to something that plucked his sleeve, drew him to turn around, and purged him of this stubborn addiction. A woman living on the borderline of serious mental illness was held up constantly by the prayers of another and found herself making the grade in spite of periodic threats of relapse. A man in sharp temptation, and with every predilection to succumb, seemed drawn back by the persistent prayers of one who cared for him and for his future. Are these cases merely coincidences? Speaking of his own practice of intercessory prayer, all that William Temple, the late Archbishop of Canterbury, would say on this point was, "When I pray, coincidences happen, and when I do not, they don't." And that is perhaps all that there is to say. (*Dimensions of Prayer: Cultivating a Relationship with God*, revised edition, Nashville: Upper Room Books, 1997, pp. 69-70)

Wednesday: *The Value of Prayer*, by Geri Wells

Scripture Reading: I Thessalonians 5:17-18

When I hear a person referred to as a "prayer warrior" I have a sense of awe and respect. It was not until I realized that prayer was their spiritual gift and just because I can't pray as well as they do, doesn't mean that I am inadequate as a Christian or inadequate in my prayer life. The Bible tells us, "Pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus." (I Thessalonians 5:17-18). I find myself praying for even the little, seemingly unimportant things in life. Many a time I have prayed for safe travel during a commute and

something happens that reminds me that my guardian angel is with me. My prayers may not be as beautiful as some I have heard, but I get great comfort in knowing they are heard.

In recent years, I have become aware of the power of intercessory prayer. The first time I experienced this was after my sister's death. I was recuperating from a very serious illness and was still weak. While sitting in the church during her funeral, I could feel the presence of God as if He were holding me in the palm of His hand. I had that same experience during my husband's illness and subsequent death. I thank God for praying friends whose prayers sustained me during those difficult times.

Thursday: *What is Prayer?*, by Keith Stillwell

Scripture Reading: Psalm 46:10, Mark 1:35

When Dianne and I were expecting our second child (Kelsey), the doctor ordered Dianne off her feet. For several months Dianne was pretty much confined to the living room recliner. After putting Brittany to bed each night, I usually sat in the rocking chair next to Dianne. Sometimes we talked, sometimes we watched TV, sometimes I read while she worked on a project. There were periods of time when we sat without saying a word, yet during those times of silence I had a strong sense of being with Dianne, and not just occupying the same room. We were connected in a special way. I remember those days fondly.

I believe those times together taught me how to pray or at least deepened my prayer life. I had always thought of prayer as talking to God, specifically asking God for things. Many of the books I had read on prayer were more like a "to do" list, "pray for missionaries on Monday, teachers on Tuesday...." Not that there was anything wrong with praying that way, but for me something was missing. Prayer was a chore like brushing your teeth. You really ought to do it everyday, preferably more than once.

During those months sitting in a rocking chair next to Dianne, I came to think of prayer as being with God. In the same way I sat with Dianne, I could sit with God. Sometimes I talk to God, sometimes I listen to God, but there are other times when I sit quietly and know that I am in God's presence. Prayer is being with God.

Friday: *The Lord's Prayer*, by Onilee Lawless

Scripture Reading: Matthew 6:9-13

On Sundays I repeat the Lord's Prayer as a part of our worship service. But, do I pray the Lord's Prayer?

Our Father in heaven. You are holy and I want Your will to be done. Be with me today and give me

what I need and forgive my sins as I forgive others who have sinned against me.

Help me not to be tempted to do wrong and protect me from all evil.

I praise and honor You.

Amen

This model prayer contains guides for us for our other prayers - praise and honor, wanting God's will for our lives, asking forgiveness for sins, help for temptaion to sin, as well as protection from evil.

So whether our prayer is for thanksgiving or intercession, the Lord's Prayer can be a guide.