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Matthew 6:5-15
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Amen...Let It Be So¹

We began this prayer journey back in April right after Easter when we asked the question, “What were the disciples doing while locked away in an upper room?” They were praying. And so using the Founder of the International 24/7 Prayer Movement, Pete Greig’s book, *How To Pray, A Simple Guide for Normal People*, we took off.

Today I’ll recall the wonderful spots we visited along the way.

Before we do that, let’s circle back to Jesus’ words in Matthew when his disciples asked him how to pray. Join me as we read from Matthew 6:5-15 and we hear for ourselves.

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 others. Truly I tell you, 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: “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** And 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 other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. **15** But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.

Let us pray. Prayer of Illumination.

Why pray? We pray because we are relational beings. God exists in triune relationship...Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Book of Genesis tells us that

¹ This sermon series has been based off of a book by Pete Greig, *How to Pray, A Simple Guide for Normal People* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2019). I am deeply grateful for Pete’s writing and how easy he makes it for us to learn about and practice prayer.

Adam and Eve used to walk and talk with God in the cool of the day.² Just as we talk with our loved ones to get to know them better, we talk with God to get to know God better. And so God relates to us relationally through prayer.

We pray because through Jesus Christ, we are invited to come right before God's throne with grace and confidence. And because of this direct access, we know that God hears our prayers and answers them in His time and way.³

We pray because our prayers make a difference. Our hearts are changed by prayer and we believe that God listens to our prayers. Our prayers are like little raindrops collected in a heavenly reservoir, and at just the right time God unleashes the floodgates of all that has been prayed and answers those prayers in God's special way.

Pastor Timothy Keller in his book on *Prayer* wrote, "Prayer brings perspective, shows the big picture, gets you out of the weeds, reorients you to where you really are."⁴

Again Keller wrote, "Prayer tunes your heart to God... Prayer is also a tune others can hear besides you. When your heart has been tuned to God, your joy has an effect on those around you. You are not proud, cold, anxious, or bored - you are self-forgetful, warm, profoundly at peace, and filled with interest. Others will notice. All 'hear and fear.' Prayer changes those around us."⁵

So then we started out in prayer using the Lord's Prayer as our launch pad. The Lord's Prayer is short, sweet, and to the point. We learned to use the acronym ACTS as our prayer guide. Adoration. Confession. Thanksgiving. Supplication.

Adoration... "Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy Name." Adoration is respect, reverence, strong admiration, and love for a certain person, place, or thing. The term comes from the Latin *adōrātiō*, meaning "to give homage or worship someone or something." Pastor Tylor Staton in his book *Praying Like Monks, Living Like Fools* states, "Adoration is the place of prayer where we discover that God's love is THE defining reality of every square inch of creation, including you and me."⁶

We can adore God by remembering His many qualities and attributes. God is holy. God is eternal. God is everlasting. God is just. God is mighty. God is awesome. God is loving. God is kind. God is forgiving. God is saving. God is

² Genesis 3:8

³ Hebrews 4:16

⁴ Timothy Keller, *Prayer, Experiencing the Awe and Intimacy with God* (NY, NY: Penguin Books, 2014), 130.

⁵ Keller, *Prayer*, 29.

⁶ Tylor Staton, *Praying Like Monks, Living Like Fools* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2022), 59.

wise. God is powerful. God is everywhere at all times. God is all knowing. God is creative. God is father, shepherd, and friend all at once. And so on.

God is to be lifted up simply for who God is apart from what God does. And so we give God all the praise and glory and power for which God is due.

Then we visited confession and repentance...“Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.” This is so important that Jesus reminds us that in order to be forgiven of our sins, we first must forgive those who sin against us.

My friends, scripture is very clear, “We all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.”⁷ So we all need this gift of confession so that we can get right with God and with one another. Scripture also states that “If we think that we are innocent, we deceive ourselves and Jesus’ truth is not in us. But if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us of all unrighteousness.”⁸ That is Good News! Amen!

Author Frederick Buechner wrote, “To confess your sins to God is not to tell God anything God doesn’t already know. Until you confess them, however, they are the abyss between you. When you confess them, they become the Golden Gate Bridge.”⁹ I love that imagery!

While we don’t see it reflected in the Lord’s Prayer, Thanksgiving gives us opportunity to throw in all for which we are thankful. Gratitude is a posture of the heart. We give thanks because God has been so good to us. We are sons and daughters of the living God! And so our lives ought to be fountains overflowing with thanksgiving and praise. Continually.

Then we visited supplication in prayer which are our petitions and intercessions. In other words, asking God for what we and others need... “Give us this day our daily bread.” Timothy Keller states, “We should come before God with the disposition of a beggar.”¹⁰

The word to pray comes from the Middle English ‘to ask earnestly’ and the Latin *precari* which means ‘to entreat.’¹¹ *Precari* is the root of *precarious* because life is *precarious*.

Several times in the Gospels, Jesus said, “Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be open to you. For everyone who asks

⁷ Romans 3:23

⁸ 1 John 1:8-9

⁹ Frederick Buechner quoted from *Wishful Thinking* in Pete Greig, *How to Pray, A Simple Guide for Normal People* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2019), 169.

¹⁰ Keller, *Prayer*, 100.

¹¹ Pete Greig, *How to Pray, A Simple Guide to for Normal People* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2019), 77.

receives, whoever seeks finds; and to them who knocks, the door will be opened.”¹²

In John, Jesus said, “I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.”¹³

Again, Timothy Keller states, that the two purposes of petitionary prayer are external and internal. Externally, God effects the circumstances of history and the world around us as we pray. Internally, we receive peace and rest.¹⁴

Now that’s not to say that God is some Santa Claus who always gives us exactly what we ask. But as we ask, we remain open to God’s will. God is free to answer our prayers or not. Our job is align our hearts with God’s heart so that we can better pray in line with God’s will.

Intercession is little different. Intercession is standing in the gap on behalf of another... “mediating between heaven and earth as equal friends of both, pleading with God on behalf of people, and with people on behalf of God.”¹⁵

Pete Greig writes, “Intercession is impossible until we allow the things that break God’s heart to break our hearts as well.”¹⁶

And so he suggests the following path.

Get informed. Learn about the issues for which we are passionate and feel led to pray.

Get inspired. Know that our prayers make a difference.

Get indignant. Be honest with God about how we really feel about the issue.

Get in sync. Gather others around us to pray on this subject. Jesus said, “Truly I tell you, if two of you on earth agree about anything they ask for, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three gather in my name, there I am with them.”¹⁷

And finally get consistent. Don’t give up. Those prayers may not happen in our time frame, but they may!

Then we considered the question, what about when God does not answer our prayers? How should we respond?

¹² Matthew 7:7-8

¹³ John 14:13-14

¹⁴ Timothy Keller, *Prayer, Experiencing Awe and Intimacy with God* (New York City, NY: Penguin Books, 2014), 230-231.

¹⁵ Greig, *How to Pray*, 97.

¹⁶ Pete Greig quoted in Staton, *Praying Like Monks, Living Like Fools*, 108.

¹⁷ Matthew 18:19-20

We should be honest before God. We don't sugar coat our feelings and pretend as if it isn't affecting us deeply. Even Jesus cried out on the cross, "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me!"¹⁸

Instead of asking why God allowed such and such to happen, we consider "Where are you, God?" The former questions God's power. The latter calls for God's presence.

Pete Greig says, "God's silence is not the same thing as God's absence."¹⁹

In fact, God promises, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you."²⁰ As he was ascending into heaven, Jesus said, "Surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."²¹

When God doesn't answer our prayers, we choose to be vulnerable.

We ask others to join us in our unanswered prayer.

We remain persistent and do not give up asking.

We hold fast to the hope of the resurrection because God's ways are mysterious. We may not understand what God is doing or saying, but we trust that in the end He will restore all things according to His awesome power and will... even bring the dead back to life.

We also remember the words of Psalm 30:5, "Weeping may last for the night, but joy comes in the morning."²²

Next, we visited topics like contemplative prayer or prayer without words.

Pete Greig says "that contemplative prayer is more experiential than logical. It's more like star gazing than astronomy. More like listening to Jazz than hearing a lecture about it."

He describes three levels of prayer like this...

Prayer at its simplest is us asking God for things.

Prayer at its best is relational.

Prayer at its deepest is silence and simple enjoyment of loving God.

Another theologian described contemplative prayer as "Us looking at God, looking back at us, in love."

There is this biblical sense that contemplative prayer is a posture of the soul... quieted and stilled...undistracted by what's going on around us, constantly focused on the Lord. In contemplative prayer we meditate and chew on God's words. We digest them so that they become part of us...which then provides the solid ground

¹⁸ Psalm 22:1; Matthew 27:45, Mark 15:34

¹⁹ Pete Greig in the 24/7 Prayer Course on Unanswered Prayer at <https://prayercourse.org/session/unanswered-prayer/>

²⁰ Hebrews 13:5

²¹ Matthew 28:20b

²² Psalm 30:5

when life get's shaky. In contemplative prayer, we commune with God, abide in Him, and become One with the Father as Jesus prayed.

Now closely connected to contemplative prayer is listening prayer. In other words, how do we actually hear God?

We hear God by being silent. God gave us two ears and one mouth. So maybe we should be listening twice as much as talking.

We hear God by slowing down so that our spirits are not hurried and distracted.

We hear God by meditating on God's Word.

We hear God by paying attention to the world around us, to our bodies, to our lingering thoughts, and to our dreams.

We hear God through the counsel of spiritually wise and mature people who we trust.

We hear God by attending to the Holy Spirit within us. The Apostle Paul encourages, "The Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what to pray, but the Spirit intercedes for us through wordless groans. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God's people in accordance with the will of God."²³

Timothy Keller states, "We should be aware that the Holy Spirit may begin 'preaching' to us. When that happens, we must drop our routines and pay close attention."²⁴ Which is a great lead into our next sermon series in worship on the Holy Spirit.

And finally, we explored the terrain of spiritual warfare and prayer. Notice that the Lord's Prayer is no stranger to this issue. Jesus prayed, "Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from the evil one." Notice that Jesus says "evil one" where as we typically pray against "evil." I think its because Jesus wants us to know that our enemy, Satan, is real.²⁵ And the Apostle Paul reminds us in Ephesians that our battle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, authorities, powers of this dark world, and the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

Therefore we engage this enemy through prayer on God's terms while equipping ourselves with the defensive spiritual gear that protects us. That was a very important sermon to hear in our day when we often hear that our battle is against one another, and not Satan. It is only through prayer that we are able to stand our ground against these attacks.

²³ Romans 8:26-27

²⁴ Keller, Prayer, 96.

²⁵ 1 Peter 5:8

Pete Greig writes, “[We] take our stand against the enemy every time [we] preach the gospel, forgive an enemy, stand up to a bully, care for the poor, create something beautiful, behave with integrity, practice civil disobedience for the sake of righteousness, or take a stance that defies [their] insidious systems of control.”²⁶

So as we draw our conversation on prayer to a close, we ask “What is prayer then, in the fullest sense?” Timothy Keller responds, “Prayer is continuing a conversation that God has started through his Word and his grace, which eventually becomes a full encounter with him.”²⁷ And “We must pray whether we feel like it or not.”²⁸

I’ll close with these last words of advice on prayer from Pete Greig, “Keep it simple. Keep it real. Keep it up.”

And the church said... “Amen! Let it be so!”

²⁶ Greig, *How to Pray*, 208.

²⁷ Keller, *Prayer*, 48.

²⁸ IBID, 89.