

Today I Pray, 0: When you pray...

Reconnect – February 21, 2010

Morning/Series Intro:

- Good morning and welcome to Reconnect Barrhaven, where we want to be a church that loves God, helps people and builds community
- **[washrooms, kids]**
- Today is the first Sunday of the time of year we call “Lent” – the 40 days before Easter
- It’s a time for decluttering your life – a spring cleaning for your mind and your heart
- You’ll hear more about that later – but we’re starting a new series today for Lent – called “Today I Pray”
- It’s going to be a look at what we traditionally call The Lord’s Prayer – the prayer that Jesus taught to his friends and followers
- This morning we’re going to look at Jesus’ thoughts on how to pray
- And before we continue with more music, let’s pray the prayer he taught together:
- (the words are up on the screen)

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy Name

Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done

On earth as it is in heaven

Give us this day our daily bread

And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil

For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory

For ever and ever, amen

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[Jesus continued to teach:] “And now about prayer. When you pray, don’t be like the hypocrites who love to pray publicly on street corners and in the synagogues where everyone can see them. I assure you, that is all the reward they will ever get.

But when you pray, go away by yourself, shut the door behind you, and pray to your Father secretly. Then your Father, who knows all secrets, will reward you.

When you pray, don’t babble on and on like the pagans do. They think their prayers are answered only by repeating their words again and again. Don’t be like them, because your Father knows exactly what you need even before you ask him! This, then, is how you should pray:

Matthew 6:5-9, NLT

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Text: Matthew 6:5-9; Romans 8:26-27

Key Thought: Instead of praying to impress people or run God, Jesus wants to help us connect with our Father.

[Jesus continued to teach:] “And now about prayer. When you pray, don’t be like the hypocrites who love to pray publicly on street corners and in the synagogues where everyone can see them. I assure you, that is all the reward they will ever get. But when you pray, go away by yourself, shut the door behind you, and pray to your Father secretly. Then your Father, who knows all secrets, will reward you. When you pray, don’t babble on and on like the pagans do. They think their prayers are answered only by repeating their words again and again. Don’t be like them, because your Father knows exactly what you need even before you ask him!” This, then, is how you should pray:

Intro: If you were going to speak about praying...

- Q: What would YOU say?
- Classic messages on prayer:
 - Pray more
 - Pray harder
 - Start praying
 - Praying to get what you want / so God answers
 - Why don’t I get what I want when I pray / why doesn’t God answer my prayers?
 - Prayer theory – how it works, etc.
 - If you loved God like you say you do, you’d pray more
- Guilt seems to abound, as well as issues of control and even self-centeredness (it’s all about ME)
- Not only that, but frankly, they are BO-OR-RING to listen to... !
- So... now what do I talk about?

Jesus: if anyone knows anything about praying...

- Generally it’s safe to talk about Jesus – and in this case, if there’s anyone that understood praying – that lived what they taught – it was Jesus
- Jesus is a man who prays – he prays regularly, and he prays more when he’s facing a big decision or in a crisis – he prays with people, and he prays alone – and people remark on it over and over
- He calls God “Father” - *Abba* – there’s a deep relationship there, along with respect – God is family, and he lives his life in a way that matches up to that understanding
- But what’s nice about Jesus is that he’s approachable – people want to be near him – he’s not some holy bore or snob – even though he has this incredible connection to God, people still are drawn to Him and what He says – about life, about people, about God
- What does Jesus want to do? Jesus wants to make God approachable – to convince people that God loves them – that He wants to know them more – that He cares for them and is on their side – that they matter to Him
- And one of the ways He knows that has to be done, is by getting people to pray – to connect with God, to make Him an essential part of their lives, not just an add-on or a nice idea or a memory
- The section of the Bible we’re looking at this morning has Jesus taking people through what they do that’s “spiritual” – he’s trying to dig deeper and show them why this stuff matters and how it can lead to a connection with God, instead of just more guilt or boredom or lack of meaning

- He gets to prayer, and the first thing he says about it is, “When you pray”

“When you pray” (3x)

- Jesus comes out of a praying culture / society – it’s not only expected, but it’s also done – it’s a part of life, it’s built-in – he doesn’t say “if”, he says “when”
- We live in a time where we have constructed all sorts of things to avoid being alone with our own thoughts, let alone with God
- You can have music or video with you 24 hours a day – you can be in contact with any or all of your friends 24 hours a day – never alone, never without something to be thinking about – plus, we live a hectic life – we’re always rushing places, we’re always looking at the clock, we sleep less and eat more, but it’s unhealthy food – we’re run down, in debt, worried about many things – frazzled and frantic and distracted
- And then we read the words of Jesus, and he keeps saying “When you pray” – and we figure that there’s no way that we can measure up

“When you pray” – talk about **Lent** – making space for God in a cluttered life

*getting to “when you pray” – how do you do it? Where do you carve out that time?

Q: When do you pray? Q: Where? Why?

Q: How do you pray? Do you close your eyes or not? Why or why not?

Q: Why do you pray?

- Feels awkward talking about it, doesn’t it? Like we’re either making ourselves hypocrites or talking about something taboo – but how are we going to make it part of our lives without talking about it?

[Jesus continued to teach:] “And now about prayer. When you pray, don’t be like the hypocrites who love to pray publicly on street corners and in the synagogues where everyone can see them.

- Set times of prayer in that society – when all action would stop – like Islamic countries today, with their calls to prayer – so, you prayed wherever you found yourself – and you could arrange your schedule to “find yourself” in a very public place, much of the time
- It’s so burned into people that they don’t want to be hypocrites that we can’t talk about praying – but it’s not the public part that was the problem – it was the praying to be seen, to be thought better of – it’s praying to make yourself look good

I assure you, that is all the reward they will ever get.

- Why pray? We’re usually looking for God to answer – or to be with God – but when you pray because of external pressures – and then when your motivation doesn’t change – satisfying those external pressures is all you get – impressing other people – making other people happy – making people think a certain way about you – and it’s not just praying – it can be dropping the J-bomb, letting people know what you do on Sunday mornings, talking about your life – what’s the motivation, because the motivation determines the impact and the effectiveness

- Those who make prayer about themselves are the only ones who hear those prayers – God is not interested in being “second place” in receiving a prayer

But when you pray, go away by yourself, shut the door behind you, and pray to your Father secretly.

- Most people wouldn’t have a “panic room” in that culture – with a home of one or two rooms total, where do you go? But it’s a heart thing – go away if you can, but go away mentally – with your desire to be alone with God and speak with Him
- You’re allowed to pray in public – but praying to make yourself look good – that’s the problem
- Jesus wants prayer to be REAL – to be genuine, to be authentic – real to God, real for you, real when it touches other people, too
- Sometimes the best kind of prayer IS forced – but only to get the ball rolling – the kind of forced when you know you need to do something, even if you don’t want to at the time – but once you get going on it, you realize that this is what you needed to do, and you’re glad you did it

Then your Father, who knows all secrets, will reward you.

- I love this – knowledge is power – we crave knowing things – especially, if we can, before anyone else finds out
- But God knows all secrets and He can still function – and He loves to have secrets with you

When you pray, don’t babble on and on like the pagans do. They think their prayers are answered only by repeating their words again and again. Don’t be like them, because your Father knows exactly what you need even before you ask him!” This, then, is how you should pray:

- It’s OK to pray for long periods of time, and it’s OK to pray the same way again and again – but again, it depends on your motivation and what you’re trying to accomplish
- Sometimes we pray like we’re trying to convince God – Jesus tries to get us away from that kind of drama by saying that God already knows what we need – but as they say in Narnia, “he likes to be asked”
- “like the pagans” – it’s not a commentary on other religions or their worship as much as a state of mind – there are “pagans” in every faith community – people who are trying to control the god they pray to – that’s what pagans do – through spells, rituals and more – if they can pray the right words, or a formula, or enough times, or loudly enough, then they will get what they want – the god will have to give it to them
- Thankfully, our Father doesn’t work that way
- “repeating prayers” – but who hasn’t repeated a prayer before? Is Jesus saying that it’s wrong to keep praying about the same thing? No – it’s natural for us, especially when we’re hit with a crisis or something horrible – sometimes there’s only one prayer that you can pray - a single sentence and that’s it, because we’re shattered – but we keep praying that to let God into our lives
- If we repeat the same prayer over and over again, it’s because we need to keep boosting our own level of trust in God on the issue – money, or health, or family, or job, or future, or kids, or a spouse
- Does God need to be reminded or convinced? No, I don’t think so – but WE do – because the distractions come in and push our prayers out to the side
- The God we serve “knows all secrets” and loves working in secret – on you and me
- He sees all of us – our thoughts, lives – and he knows what we need before we ask Him
- Praying by nature is asking God things – making suggestions, asserting ourselves – asking

- But it can't be telling – that's as annoying to him as it is to us as parents when our kids do it
- And us trying to control God through praying (or any other way) is just as ridiculous to Him as when our kids try to manipulate us or get us to do something that they want

Key Thought:

Instead of praying to impress people or run God, Jesus wants to help us connect with our Father.

...we don't even know what we should pray for, nor how we should pray. But the Holy Spirit prays for us with groanings that cannot be expressed in words. And the Father who knows all things knows what the Spirit is saying, for the Spirit pleads for us believers in harmony with God's own will. **(Romans 8:26-27, NLT)**

Conclusion: Talking to your Father – the Lord's Prayer

- Hypocrites – pray to impress people
- Pagans – pray to control God
- Jesus wants better for us – a third way – and that's why he gives the model prayer – simple, heartfelt, direct while also intimate, far thinking – talk a bit about the Lord's Prayer, at the end, and challenge people to pray it every day between now and Easter – see what comes of it – it refocuses us on God in every way in our lives, big and small – in our relationships, in our possessions, in our choices, in our loyalties, for our past, present and future, in who God is and what He does

Pray it (again)

Response: Your Love Is Strong (Foreman)