

Dear Father, this is Jim.

Matt 6:5 - 8

Helene is one of greatest example of a prayerful person I know. When she prays, she can spend long periods of time praying to God and sharing her heart. She is the first one to say "let's pray about this" when something is going on in our life or the life of a person she is talking to. Helene was the one who made sure we had a family prayer at bedtime every night of the kids growing up and only reluctantly stopped doing that when they got into high school. I also believe she has the strongest faith of our family as well.

I am not a long prayer type person. I pray lots of short prayers throughout the day. I have short conversations with God about my life. Both of our ways of praying are fine and good because we both make prayer a high priority in our life.

For the last few weeks we have been looking at prayer, and in reality, pretty basic lessons about prayer and prayer life. I am doing this for a very important reason. Somehow, we haven't developed really strong, healthy prayer habits as a church. Don't get me wrong, some of you are incredible prayer warriors and I cherish your prayer life. But, for many of you, prayer has been a struggle. It's not a deeply ingrained part of your life or spiritual life. I'm not sure why that is. Maybe we didn't teach prayer enough as you grew up, maybe we haven't emphasized prayer enough, maybe you just don't comprehend how limiting your spiritual life is without a strong prayer life. For some of you, today is going to be a rehash of what you know so well. For others, this may open a door you never knew existed.

PRAYER

I. Prayer 101

A. What is prayer?

1. Ted Waller says “prayer is man at the feet of God expressing the honest feelings of his heart.”
2. Prayer is communication with God.
3. Notice I didn’t say prayer is communication to God.
4. Prayer isn’t always one way.
5. When we open our hearts to God, we share with him our lives and he shares his love.
6. I have been witness to some of the most beautiful prayers you could ever imagine.
 - a) It wasn’t the language. It wasn’t the eloquence
 - b) What made them beautiful to me, is I got to see someone’s heart and be a part of their conversation to God.
 - c) It wasn’t for show; it was just a loving conversation with a God who wants to hear our hearts.
 - d) Watch Fiddler on the Roof sometime, and you will see exactly what I am talking about.
7. I don’t believe in an audible voice, but I do believe God gives us answers to our prayers in ways we understand.
 - a) Have you ever prayed about something then had a complete peace of mind about the situation?
 - b) Have you ever prayed about a problem and then seen the solution so clearly afterwards?
 - c) When Rhyann was little I remember her losing something around the house. She stops her search and prays and asks God to help her find it.

Shortly after that she jubilantly comes up to me with her lost item and says, "See daddy, I prayed to God to find it and he helped me find it!"

- d) I believe with all my heart, she was right!
- e) Read James 5 and passages like that.

8. Prayer is also therapeutic

- a) Sometimes I need someone to just listen to me.
- b) Praying to God is an excellent way of expressing feelings without being interrupted by someone who doesn't understand all we are going through.
- c) Sometimes you just need to talk to someone who knows exactly what you are thinking.
- d) Romans 8:26–28 (ESV) — 26 Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. 27 And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. 28 And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.
- e) I don't know if you have ever been there, but I have. I can't even begin to put my emotions into words, I hurt so badly, or I am so angry and frustrated that all I can do is gnash my teeth at the moment.
- f) The Holy Spirit takes that to God and God says, "okay, I know exactly what he is thinking...and needing."

9. Last Wednesday we were talking about prayer in class. Someone mentioned that maybe God wants us to pray so we can see for ourselves what we are really thinking or feeling. I tend to agree with that thought.

B. What Prayer isn't

1. Prayer is not a combination of mystical religious phrases.

- a) New Christians are surprised to learn that they don't have to use "#guideguardanddirectus" in every prayer.
- b) You don't have to say "thee" and "thou" and "art" to be reverent and proper.
- c) I was at a lectureship many years back in which the director of the session said you did have to use those words. Later on, someone showed him

that “thee” and “thou” was the common man’s language of the early 1600’s not the reverent language he supposed them to be.

d) It may be pretty speech to some, but it isn’t sacred speech.

2. Prayer isn’t a pulpit

a) When we gather for public prayer, we need to remember that we are bringing an expression of feeling to God for those we are leading in prayer.

b) We are not bringing a sermon from God to the people.

c) I almost stop praying with someone who says, “God you know it says in Romans 6:14 that...” because I believe that person is no longer praying to God but preaching at me.

d) We need to be careful that when we lead a public prayer that we understand we are attempting to share the hearts and minds of those gathered to God. We are speaking for them at that moment in time.

e) It’s not only a privilege to share that prayer, but a responsibility.

3. Prayer isn’t a convenience

a) I don’t know how many times I have talked to people who only pray when they really need something.

b) Sometimes we treat God as a Santa Clause waiting for us to give him our list of presents we want.

c) Other times we only talk to him when we have no other choice. We either so desperate or have no other choice, that we try to reach out to him.

d) Prayer is a privilege not a convenience.

II. Prayer in our lives

A. Make prayer a part of who you are.

1. It doesn’t have to last for hours to be a real prayer.

2. Many of the prayers of Jesus that are recorded in the Bible are one sentence prayers.

3. What made them prayers was the fact that they were a natural expression of feeling from Son to Father.

4. When Jesus or the early Christians were faced with a dilemma, they prayed.

a) When Jesus felt overwhelmed by what he would face the next day, he prayed that his death wouldn’t have to be. Lk 22:42

- b) When he felt sucked dry by all the people around him making demands on him he prayed. Lk 6:12
 - c) When Peter was thrown into prison to be executed the Christians prayed. Ac 12:12
 - d) When Paul dealt with various churches he prayed for them.
 - e) When people were sick, others prayed for them.
 - f) When people were healed, people prayed.
5. If Paul needed to pray, if the early Christians needed to pray, if Jesus needed to pray, why do we think we can get along without prayer?
6. Mostly because we are prideful.
- a) to Americans, asking for help is saying I failed.
 - b) Saying I failed is about the worst thing that can happen to us.
 - c) So when we think we can go through life on our own without regularly talking to God, we are being prideful.
7. secondly it may be because we don't believe prayer makes a difference.
- a) Why would God care about me and my problems?
 - b) We sometimes think like the little boy who thanked God for his pancakes for supper. His mom asked, "why did you say thank you for your pancakes when we are having chicken for dinner?" the little boy replied, "I just wanted to see if he was paying attention tonight."
 - c) You might be thinking, "I am a nobody, I'm not a minister or an elder or someone God really cares about, He doesn't pay attention to me."
 - d) Believe me, in God's eyes, no one is more precious to him than you are. He does care.

B. Pray with the mind of an adult and the heart of a child.

- 1. I loved to listen to my girls pray when they are really praying. They prayed for everyone and everything. from the doll in their arms to our mean ole elders! (just kidding)
- 2. During a minister's prayer one Sunday morning, a loud shrieking whistle came out of the back pew. After the services a horrified mother turned to her son and

said, why did you whistle like that during the prayer?" The little boy said, "I asked God to teach me how to whistle and he did!"

3. What could we accomplish if we prayed with the confidence of little children?

III. Deepening Your Prayer Life

A. Make a commitment

1. Make a commitment to pray

- a) Many of us are like people who study foreign languages. We study every nuance of the language but never put it in practice.
- b) Then, when we go someplace that speaks that language, we sound funny because we speak in a strangely formal way that the native speakers don't.
- c) We study every aspect of prayer,
- d) we read about it, we talk about it, But we do not pray

2. Make a commitment to grow

- a) For a long time, a regular prayer life was hard for me.
- b) I would do the basic prayers -- meals, bedtime, difficult times, but growing in my prayer life was a struggle.
- c) But I made a commitment to grow in my prayer life.
- d) I try to pray more often each day.
- e) I share with God more and more of my life.
- f) We all need to make a commitment to continue to grow in our prayer lives.

B. Recognize the urgency of prayer

1. 1 Pet 4:7 The end of all things is near. Therefore be clear minded and self-controlled so that you can pray.
2. Peter is saying we don't have time NOT to pray
3. Ward Patterson wrote: Prayer is not a useful, discretionary add-on for the super-Christian, it is the very life of the Christian faith.

C. Practice discipline in prayer

1. Peter says we need to be self-controlled or in control so we can pray.
2. Use the 5 finger prayer we talked about the other week.
3. Many people use the ACTS method of praying so they have a regular discipline in their prayer life.

- a) Adoration
 - b) Confession
 - c) Thanksgiving
 - d) Supplication
4. However you choose to grow your prayer life, be disciplined about it.
- a) Make it regular
 - b) Make it meaningful
 - c) Make it honest
 - d) Be purposeful in setting time to talk with God.
- D. Expect your prayers to be answered.
- 1. We usually say “your will be done” because that gives us an easy out when our prayers aren’t answered the way we want.
 - 2. Expect God to answer your prayer, but don’t expect the answer to always be yes.
 - 3. When you say “your will be done,” say it from a sincere heart.
- E. Find someone to pray with
- 1. Get a prayer partner.
 - 2. It could be a spouse, friend, or someone whom you trust and respect.
 - 3. Pray together and for each other.
 - 4. Having a prayer partner also helps in keeping a discipline in prayer.
- F. Enjoy God
- 1. Most of all, enjoy God
 - 2. God wants to share your life.
 - 3. He loves to talk to you.
 - 4. Enjoy a relationship with him, you will be enriched by it.