

Too busy not to pray 2
Patterns to help us pray

Proposition: Having some kind of a structure and plan for our prayer life prevents us slipping into meaningless routine and keeps our relationship with God vital.

We begin our second week looking at the issue of prayer this morning and I pray as we do, that God would deepen our prayer life, and our personal disciplines around prayer, so that we would know him better. A good prayer life will release the miraculous so that you can change your world. A good prayer life will give you focus and perspective in life but best of all a good prayer life will keep you close to your Father in heaven.

I can't help but picture in my mind the scene of the disciples looking at Jesus on His knees daily. Jesus: so incredibly busy, so constantly surrounded by people wanting His teaching and His miraculous touch. When the disciples looked at Jesus' prayer life they marvelled, not at His fancy theologically accurate words, not at His posture or even His discipline in prayer. What the disciples marvelled at was the Lord's closeness to the Father that they could see as He prayed. They knew the words, they knew the impressive prayer postures of the Pharisees but they didn't know this kind of intimacy with the Father and so they turn to the Lord and they say "Lord teach us how to pray." And Jesus' response is recorded in Matthew and Luke and well known to each of us.

Matthew 6:5-13

Contemporary English Version (CEV)

5When you pray, don't be like those show-offs who love to stand up and pray in the meeting places and on the street corners. They do this just to look good. I can assure you that they already have their reward.

6When you pray, go into a room alone and close the door. Pray to your Father in private. He knows what is done in private, and he will reward you.

7When you pray, don't talk on and on as people do who don't know God. They think God likes to hear long prayers. 8Don't be like them. Your Father knows what you need before you ask.

9You should pray like this:

Our Father in heaven, help us to honor your name. 10Come and set up your kingdom, so that everyone on earth will obey you, as you are obeyed in heaven. 11Give us our food for today. 12Forgive us for doing wrong, as we forgive others. 13Keep us from being tempted and protect us from evil.

I want to be really, really simple and practical this morning so that we are reminded of some biblical patterns to prayer so that I pray our own prayer lives will be re-invigorated. A lot of what I am going to say is obvious and not new but I hope to provide for you a practical framework to try for your own prayer lives.

If we look at the Lord's prayer and what Jesus taught here on how to pray the first thing that we notice is that we are to:

PRAY DAILY

Jesus begins the Lord's prayer by saying "When you pray" not if but when. And the Lord taught and demonstrated from His life style that prayer was to be a daily priority. Now we are all busy people, we have work obligations, family, household and recreational and social goals to meet but if it is important we will make time for it. We will make time to train for a sporting event. We will make time to renovate the house. We will make time to do the extra study or to catch up with those friends. If it's important we will make time for it. Jesus always made time to be with the Father on a daily, disciplined basis. He didn't go to that early morning time of prayer thinking, oh well, I am a believer I have to pray, I ought to pray so here goes. Neither did He take prayer so casually that today He prayed at 5am and tomorrow He might pray at 3pm if

He has time and the next day, who knows? No He had a disciplined time of prayer every day and WHEN He prayed He was most of all looking forward to spending some uninterrupted time with His Father in Heaven. When you and I are serious about something we will always make time for it in our schedules. If you and I want to get really fit and healthy it won't just happen as we sit on the couch watching the rugby and eating chips. We have to be intentional about it. It's the same if we want a closer walk with God. There has to be a daily plan and structure.

PRAY PRIVATELY

Jesus talked about going into a room alone. We need to find somewhere free of distractions to pray privately. There are some of us who have a room in our house where we can go and pray on our own. There are some of us who have a particular chair or a place overlooking the garden where we can go daily to pray. There are of us who pray when they get to or leave the office at work and others who find they can pray effectively while on public transport. The issue is that we set aside a daily time and place to pray and we build that routine into our lives. By having a regular designated place to pray you will find that when you get to that place there will already be an attitude of worship of holiness for you about that place and you will move into prayer and connect with God most easily in that place. I have often been asked to pray through or to bless a house and when there has been or is a praying Christian in that home I have very often felt that a room or a chair or a place in the house is discernibly holy. I can feel the difference in the atmosphere of that place. Pray daily, pray privately and

PRAY SINCERELY

Jesus instructs His disciples not to talk on and on. Don't just say a whole lot of routine prayers on and on. Now friends we all slip into this one quite easily. How often do we pray at bed time or meal time the same prayer we prayed yesterday and last week and last year? We pray because that is what Christians do and we miss the opportunity to make it from the heart. I mean how often have you had a busy day and bought some KFC or fish and chips or pizza on the way home for dinner. We sit down in front of a chronically unhealthy meal and we pray "Thank you for the food we are about to receive, bless it to our bodies and us to your service." Bless it to our bodies!! Come on I am sure the Lord doesn't even want us to eat that stuff and He is not planning to suddenly make it a nutritious meal because we have prayed over it.

In the great commission, in John 14:18 and in Hebrews 13:5 we hear God saying that He will always be with us and He will never leave us or forsake us. So what do we pray as we are about to go on a trip. "Lord would you please go with us to Bethel's today." How much thought has gone into that prayer. I mean, He is always with us.

One of the ones I have struggled with most is that at many Christian meetings someone will thank God for the freedom we have in NZ so that we can meet together like this. I think that is a prayer Christians in the west pray all the time without engaging their hearts. How much better it would be to pray, "Lord I am really grateful for a chance to enjoy the company of ____ and ____ and ____ in this place. On the Alpha course Nicky Gumbel tells the story of a man who got saved on a Wednesday and was told to go to church on Sunday. On Sunday the pastor said that he wanted the whole church to be at a prayer meeting during the week. At the prayer meeting this man George prayed: "Hi, God it's me George. We met last Wednesday, and I am really grateful to you for letting me join your family. I feel much happier and I am looking forward to serving you."

Pray daily, pray privately and pray sincerely – pray with heart. Fourthly

PRAY SPECIFICALLY

Boy when you look at the Lord's prayer and the way Jesus prayed for people it was very specific. In Jesus' model of prayer he said when you talk to God just say "Our Father" because as you address him as Father you are reminded that you are praying to someone who loves you more than anyone else possibly could. He is in heaven, he is sovereign and majestic, and He is bigger than you and me and any problem we

face. May His rule come on earth as it is in heaven; in my life, in my marriage, in my work, in my health, in my finances, in my church. Lord give us today our daily bread; ask him specifically for your needs. Forgive us our sins specifically so that there is no obstacle between you and God and so He can bless you and you can keep growing in your relationship with Him. Keep us from being tempted and protect us from evil: that is giving us victory over specific temptations and over the attacks of the evil one.

When you look at the Lord's prayer please don't see it as some magic prayer you can pray each day without engaging your brain. Instead this model prayer shows such a variety of areas that when we pray we should be specific in.

When we look at the topic of patterns for prayer and we want to become daily, private, sincere and specific prayers the ACTS acronym we learnt as baby Christians is still very helpful.

When you have that time alone with God, to prevent you falling into repetitious routine prayers these four areas of prayer are always helpful.

It's helpful to your prayer life to aim to begin your prayer time with God by praying prayers of

ADORATION – to acknowledge God for who He is.

If you begin your prayer time acknowledging who God is; He is all powerful, all present, He is the creator, He is the one who is most on your side; He is always with us, always faithful, always kind. If you begin your prayers with prayers of adoration it sets the tone for the rest of your prayer time. Personally I believe worship be it song or prayer like prayers of adoration are the short cut into Gods presence. Prayers of adoration or praying in your prayer language have the same effect in that they quickly take you into holy ground. You begin to acknowledge that God is worthy of your praise and much bigger than the problems that you are facing today.

Something else happens when you pray prayers of adoration. You may have come to the place of prayer with many needs and concerns and that is valid but as you worship God with your words something happens in your heart and you move from its all about me to its all about Him and even your selfish motives get purified and you begin to see your concerns differently.

God is worthy of your worship and at the beginning of your prayer time lets commit to offering him that worship.

CONFESSION; Naming our faults and sins

It's easy for us to pray, Lord forgive us all the bad things we have done and for not doing a whole lot of stuff we should have done. But that is not confession. Confession is when you go to God without excuses, oh she made me or he made me so mad and so I... dump the excuses and just say to God a moment ago when I had that argument with so and so, I was being selfish and proud and the words I chose were an offence to you Lord, I am sorry for my motives and for what I said, please forgive me and help me not to go there again. Our sins are obnoxious to God. They stink. There is no such thing as a little immorality, a little drunkenness, a little selfishness, a little lie. Sin is sin and when we mess up we need to specifically acknowledge the wrong we have done and ask the Lord for forgiveness.

When you and I keep a short account with God several great things happen.

- a) your conscience cleansed
- b) that specific sin is removed from you as far as the east is from the west (Psalm 103:12) and
- c) God begins to transform you from the inside out. Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 5:17 that "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation, the old has gone and the new has come."

When I am really appalled by my sin and confess it to the Lord He begins to change me right then and there so that I am less likely sin in that area again.

Adoration, confession and

THANKSGIVING; That is to express our gratitude to God for what He has already done.

Psalm 103:2

2With all my heart I praise the LORD! I will never forget how kind he has been.

1 Thessalonians 5:18

18Whatever happens, keep thanking God because of Jesus Christ. This is what God wants you to do.

Its one thing to feel grateful for what God has done, it's a far better thing though to take time to give Him thanks for what He has done. There is the story of the 10 lepers in Luke 17. 10 were healed and 10 felt grateful but Jesus was disappointed that only one came back and gave Him thanks.

Mums and dads you know what it is like when you do things for your children, how pleasant it is and how much closer you feel to your kids when they come back to you and thank you for your help and kindness. If you and I learn to give thanks in all things, to bring back to mind what God has done for us we will never struggle in our faith or become discontent or become depressed. Thanks is a powerful way to pray. It's to acknowledge what God has done for you and it's like a shield of faith that protects you from the various attacks of the enemy.

Thank God for answered prayer, spiritual blessings, relational blessings and material blessings. Just about everything in life fits into one of those categories.

Adoration, Confession, thanksgiving and an old fashioned word

SUPLICATION; That is to ask God for help

If you have a written outline to help you pray more broadly and vibrantly under this category write the titles;

Family

Ministry

Other people

My work

Personal character

Using that kind of an outline then pray for the members of your family, then pray for fruitfulness and Gods help in doing what he has called you to do. Then pray for other people, friends, missionaries, neighbours who need to know the Lord. Pray for your business, contacts, workmates, orders, prosperity. Finally pray for God to address the issues in your character that you know need to change. And I would add to that choose to pray in your prayer language so that issues of your character that you are not even aware of can be transformed by the Holy Spirit.

Finally, after you have prayed daily in the private place, prayers that are sincere and specific, prayers of adoration, confession, thanks giving and supplication don't forget the last part of an effective prayer time with the Lord.

REFLECT on what God has said to you and what He wants to do in your life.

There are times at theological colleges where this seems over done but the reality is unless you take time to evaluate what God is saying to you and doing in you, you may well miss the benefit of that time alone with God. What needs dealing with? What is growing in your character? What is not growing that should be? If people take the time to reflect on what God is saying it's extremely unlikely that their relationship with God will plateau and get boring. Instead they will find that more and more on a daily basis they are being transformed into the image of Christ.

Lots and lots of people keep prayer journals where they write down Their prayers, the answers to prayers and what they hear God saying. I really admire people who do that. And ... as most home groups won't be meeting this week I am going to suggest that just for this week we do it also.

On the insert/ page of your newsletter write down

This week I will commit to recording my prayer times

Jesus prayed daily, privately, sincerely and specifically. I will choose to pray

At _____ o clock each day.

The place where I will pray privately will be _____.

**Written prayers of
ADORATION**

CONFESSION

THANKS GIVING

SUPPLICATION/ REQUESTS

MY REFLECTIONS ON WHAT GOD IS SAYING TO ME AND DOING IN ME:

Monday:

Tuesday:

Wednesday:

Thursday:

Friday:

Saturday: