

Devoted to God: Prayer

September 9, 2007 - Skip MacMillan

Series on being devoted to God: Prayer, Scriptures, Being a Christian, What Doing Christianity Looks Like

Motivation: "In Christ are unsearchable riches" (Ephesians 3:8)

What if you received a \$150.00 gift certificate to your favorite restaurant?

What if you entered, gave your name, had it written down in the book, received the "thing" (pager) but that was it.

You never went beyond the foyer, never ordered an appetizer, dinner, wine or desert.

You can smell and see the food at other people's tables, you can even enjoy some of the atmosphere but it is all very limited because you remain in the foyer.

Technically you are a legitimate customer but you haven't experienced or tasted all that is offered.

This is where some of us are with the Lord. We are "saved," names in the Book, identified as "in," we are going to heaven but we are still lingering in the cramped waiting area.

Our experience with God is limited due to our unwillingness to move forward.

God is inviting you in, given the gift of eternal life, but you're not taking the opportunity to commune with God.

The little light "thing" is going off but many of us are still sitting there.

Ephesians 3:17b-19

Our Motivation: "In Christ are unsearchable riches" (Ephesians 3:8).

Devotion to God is about enriching your relationship with God, about responding to His love for you. When you have encountered the living God and He has brought your soul to life, prayer and reading Scripture is the "natural" or "supernatural" response.

Prayer is:

An Opportunity for God to Speak

God wants to speak with you – through Creation (Romans 1), through the Scriptures, through Circumstances, or as in John 10, "His sheep follow Him because they know His voice (God speaks)."

What does He want to say to you:

Isaiah 30:21 - "your ears will hear a voice behind you saying, 'This is the way; walk in it.'"

Matthew 11:28 - "Come to Me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest."

Isaiah 41:10 - "do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with My righteous right hand."

2 Corinthians 12:9 - "My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made perfect in weakness"

John 16:33 - "Take heart, I have overcome the world."

In God's speaking, He settles your heart, strengthens and inspires your soul, changes your attitudes and sets your course (R.M. McCheyne, p. 52).

An Awakening of the Heart, Mind and Soul to the activities of God via contemplation and reflecting.

Awakened to what is behind the material veil, beyond what our five senses can tell us.

Awakened to see life at 30,000 feet up, and into your own heart.

Awakened to wonder and to awe as to what God is doing in the world.

God uses prayer to awakens us to a more meaningful life with Him.

A Soulful Dialogue with God

Soulful meaning honest, genuine, just as I am. No dressing up, pretense, facades; just me having the privilege to dialogue with God. Soulful means asking tough questions and being willing to listen.

Dialogue – you talk and then you let God talk (via Scripture, feelings, peace, thoughts).
Prayer is one continual lifelong conversation with God.

Soulful - Psalm 142:1-2

“Biblical prayer is crying to God out of the depths, it is the pouring out of the soul before God . . . passionate pleading to God, even wrestling with God” -Bloesch.

Payoff – experience the riches found in Christ, and we are reassured that He is there, that we are not alone, that we are His, and as a result we are encouraged.

Goal of prayer is for you, those around you and the world to be transformed into the likeness of Christ for the glory of God the Father. “We pray not simply for personal happiness or for protection but for the advancement and strengthening of the kingdom of God” (Bloesch).

Prayer is an Opportunity, Awakening, Soulful dialogue with God
We are moved to pray because we believe that “In Christ are ‘unsearchable riches” (Ephesians 3:8)

Learning from Jesus

Jesus prayed. “Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed” (Luke 5:16).

Often – continuously

Lonely places – private, quiet, alone, mountain tops (Matthew 14:23), morning time (Mark 1:35).

Get alone with God, somewhere private, quiet and focused.

Do this “often”.

How did Jesus Pray?

His Prayers are Thankful, Simple, Honest, Intense and full of Trust in the Father

Thankful

Thankful for the Father’s Provision

“Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves” (Matthew 14:19; 15:36).

Thankful to the Father for hearing His prayers.

“So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, “Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me” (John 11:41-43).

Begin with “thank you”, adoration.

Sets the whole attitude and tone of His prayer.

Begin your prayers with thanks to the Father, see Psalms 144-150.

Know that the Father hears your prayers.

This is why some don’t pray, we don’t buy into that He hears us; “You always hear me”.

He loves hearing you.

Simple

Simple, short, and to the point.

Matthew 6:7-13

“When you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.”

Lord’s Prayer: Adoration, Provide for us, Forgive us, Lead us and Deliver us from the evil one.

None of the recorded prayers of Jesus are very long, because He was in continual conversation.

“We ought to act with God in the greatest simplicity, speaking to Him frankly and plainly, and imploring His assistance in our affairs, just as they happen” -Brother Lawrence.

Honest

Jesus did not hold back, expressed what was on His heart, and even questioned the Father.

"He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee along with him, and he began to be sorrowful and troubled. Then he said to them, "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me. Going a little farther, He fell with His face to the ground and prayed, 'My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from Me. Yet not as I will, but as you will'" (Matthew 26:37-39).

Honest-

with His disciples: "my soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death".

with the Father: 'My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from Me. I don't want to do this or is there another way?

Honest Questions, why?

"From the sixth hour until the ninth hour darkness came over all the land. About the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice, 'Eloi Eloi lama sabachthani?' which means, My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:25-46).

Jesus was always honest in prayer, direct, to the point, transparent, genuine, upfront, expressing his heart, making deeply personal requests, yet always respecting and submitting to the Father's will.

David's Honest Prayers – Psalm 142:1-7

Soulful dialogue with God requires a tension between gut-level honesty and supreme respect.

Don't hold back, express what is on your heart; God is a very Big God, He can handle it.

"Biblical prayer is crying to God out of the depths, it is the pouring out to the soul before God . . . passionate pleading to god, even wrestling with God" -Bloesch.

Intensity

"He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee along with him, and he began to be sorrowful and troubled. Then he said to them, "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me. Going a little farther, He fell with His face to the ground and prayed, 'My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from Me. Yet not as I will, but as you will'" (Matthew 26:37-39).

"He knelt down and prayed, 'Father, if you are willing, take this cup from Me; yet not My will, but Yours be done. . . . And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground" (Luke 22:40-42).

Intense Words: "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from Me."

Huge theological significance: what if it ended here, no Cross, no atonement?

If there was no Cross, there would be no atonement, forgiveness of sins, and we would be left in our sins.

Furthermore, Paul says that if there is no resurrection we are without hope.

Physically Intense: "his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground."

Position of Intensity: "He fell with His face to the ground and prayed face down," "knelt down".

The position of your body speaks to the intensity of your prayer.

Intensity of His love

"Two other men, both criminals, were also led out with him to be executed. When they came to the place called the Skull, there they crucified him, along with the criminals—one on his right, the other on his left. Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." And they divided up his clothes by casting lots" (Luke 23:32-34).

Trust in the Father

"My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from Me. Yet not as I will, but as you will" (Matthew

26:37-39).

"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:25-46).

"It was now about the sixth hour, and darkness came over the whole land until the ninth hour, for the sun stopped shining. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two. Jesus called out with a loud voice, 'Father into your hands I commit my spirit.' When He had said this, he breathed his last" (Luke 23:44-46).

Trusting the Father's Words, Quoting Scripture

Psalm 22:1 - "My God, My God, why have You forsaken me?"

Psalm 31:5 - "Into your hands I commit my spirit"

Trusting the Father's Plan: "Yet not as I will, but as you will" (Matthew 26:37-39).

Trusting His spirit in the Father's hands: "Father into your hands I commit my spirit.'

Trusting the Father even in His silence: The Father was silent in some of the darkest moments of Jesus' life.

Current Problem : Mother Teresa and you

What do we do in the silence?

Trust the Father and keep fulfilling the mission, as Jesus did.

Trust there is something much larger at play.

How did Jesus Pray? With Thankfulness, Simplicity, Honesty, Intensity and full of Trust in the Father.

Why do we pray? Because "In Christ are 'unsearchable riches" (Ephesians 3:8).

Practical Advice

Prepare: set the alarm clock, find a place, get a spiral notepad/pen, prepare the coffee, go to bed earlier.

Start.

Formats:

Lord's Prayer

ACCTS (acrostic)

Adoration - Psalm 144-150

Contemplating - Prayer is asking substantive questions and thinking deeply.

Confession - Psalm 51

Thanksgiving - be thankful; changes attitude. (The kids in the car arguing and stopped by getting them to think of something they are thankful for in the other person - Jezzar "I'm thankful when Eden doesn't bother me").

Supplication (to ask humbly and earnestly of)

Interceding - pray for others; 1 Timothy 2:1-2 - for the world, big picture.

Petition - pray for your own needs.

*Listening - allowing God to speak.

Conclusion

Our motivation is "In Christ there are 'unsearchable riches" (Ephesians 3:8).

The more you experience His richness, the more you will want to pray and the easier it becomes.

"In order to form a habit of conversing with God continually, and referring all we do to Him, we must first apply to Him with some diligence; but that after a little care we should find His love inwardly excite us to it without any difficulty" -Brother Lawrence.

Prayer is an:

Opportunity for God to speak.

An Awakening of the heart, mind and soul to the things of God.

A Soulful dialogue with God.

God wants to speak to you; He wants to hear from you.

I pray you will pray and be transformed in the likeness of Christ for the glory of God the Father.