

Session Eight: A Simple Way to Pray - Intercession

1. Review

- a. Prayer is something that, despite popular sentiment, is not as easy as simply talking to a friend. Prayer is learned. Prayer is taught. Prayer is practiced. Much of the discipleship crisis we face today is rooted in our lack of discipleship in the subject of prayer.
- b. We have sermons on prayer, books of prayer, and conferences about prayer but few believers have a spiritual father or mother who has taught them to pray by actually praying with them. This has been our aim here.
- c. To help us we've looked to the great church father Martin Luther and his model appropriately titled *A Simple Way to Pray*. In it Luther lays out the four steps he would go through in order to turn the Scriptures into prayer.
 - i. Instruction: *What is this scripture telling me to believe or do?*
 - ii. Thanksgiving: *What worship and praise is due God?*
 - iii. Confession: *What sin do I need to confess and repent of?*
 - iv. Prayer: *How can I pray for my own life and for those around me?*
- d. These steps should act more like a fluid progression than a rigid structure. In doing so they act like a path upon which we can walk that leads us into the treasures of Christ.
- e. Luther rightly and importantly emphasises the importance of praying from and through the Scriptures. Therefore in order to properly pray we must also know how to properly study.
 - i. In fact Luther would argue that the very act of studying the Scriptures is an act of prayer because you are listening to God through His inspired word.
- f. We said that good Bible study follows this three step process (in order):
 - i. Observation - *What do I see?* (Look for terms, structures, and grammar.)
 - ii. Interpretation - *What does this mean?*
 - iii. Application - *What should I believe or do?*
- g. I think this process merged and mixed with Luther's prayer model provide all of necessary pieces to build a healthy and vibrant prayer life.
- h. Lastly, we said early on that there are some practical steps we can take to dramatically help our prayer life.
 - i. You need a regular time and place to pray. If you can't win the battle for your calendar you won't win the battle for a depth in God.
 - ii. Slow down and have a plan. I encourage people to set aside a few months, pick a book of the Bible (1 Peter and 1 John are great books to start with) and prayerfully work your way through that book. It is better to go slow and deep than fast and wide.
 - iii. Finally, don't do it alone. Study, talk, pray, and fast with your spouse, with friends, with someone. This is a corporate journey as much as it is a solo one.

2. Heart Connection Precedes Intercession

- a. The final step laid out by Luther is what we commonly call intercession. Here again we see the reasoning behind the order established by Luther that we also saw in Daniel and Nehemiah's prayers.
 - i. Previously we saw that until we have some measure of understanding regarding a Scripture we are unable to use it in prayer. You simply cannot meditate or prayer a passage you do not know or understand at all.
 - ii. Likewise intercession always and only flows out of an already established connection and relationship with the heart of God. This is true regardless of what model or formula of prayer you are using.
 - iii. Connection with God always precedes intercession to God.
- b. Martin Luther knew this and thus placed the different aspects of prayer (worship, repentance, and intercession) in the order that he did. Without this connection the essence of prayer is really lost. It becomes nothing but a mundane, routine, spiritual discipline that is dreaded by most.
- c. It was the lack of connection that caused Jesus to rebuke the Pharisees when He began to teach on prayer.

*“And when you pray, you shall not be like the hypocrites. For they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly. **And when you pray, do not use vain repetitions as the heathen do. For they think that they will be heard for their many words.** Therefore do not be like them. For your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him.” - Matthew 6:5-8*

- d. Jesus also emphasized His desire for heart connection calling it the “first” and the “great” commandment in His kingdom. A heart alive in love is His first priority in your life and it is also how He defines success and greatness within His kingdom.

*“Jesus said the him, ‘You shall love the Lord your God **with all your heart**, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the first and great commandment.” - Matthew 22:37*

- e. This order comes into even clearer perspective by simply asking the question we've been asking all along, “What is prayer primarily about?” We have said repeated that the goal of prayerful Bible study is to hear and encounter Christ.
 - i. Timothy Keller puts it this way:

“The goal of prayer is not just the sharing of our ideas, but also of ourselves.”

- ii. Pastor Brian Zahnd says the same thing slightly differently when he says:

“The primary purpose of prayer is not to get God to do what we think God ought to do, but to be properly formed.”

iii. Lastly, one final quote from David Sliker:

“Prayer is not merely a means to an end. Prayer is the end - the ultimate goal of all discipleship and our place of greatest delight.”

- f. All these ideas are rooted in the same truth that prayer first must be about God before it can be about what God can and promises to do for us.
- g. As long as we think of prayer as primarily about getting things we need or want from God rather than thinking of prayer as our way to connect with the Person Of Christ we will end up becoming frustrated, burnout, and bitter at God.
 - i. Prayer must be primarily about the connecting of hearts and not the receiving of things. Most people know of a child whose father is too busy for him so he buys his child anything he or she wants.
 - ii. The child gets anything and everything they want. But all of their receiving of gifts is void of real relationship with their father.
 - iii. No one esteemed that father as a someone to emulate or look up to. No, we loath that person and feel sorry for the child. We don't think of that man as a good father but the exact opposite; universally he is considered a terrible father.
 - iv. Yet this is how many think of prayer. They want God to be that father that lavishes gifts and desires on them regardless of the heart connection.
 - v. While that child will have fun with their toys and gifts for a while they will ultimately become depressed and growing bitter at their father because in all their getting they didn't get what their heart truly ached for, relationship with their father.
 - vi. And this is how so many Christians burnout in ministry and in prayer. Although they receive many gifts their hearts remain disconnected from God and a few years down the road that empty feeling in their heart sets in and they realize that all they really wanted and needed this whole time was God Himself.
- h. This connection is what Luther helps us establish by instructing us to hear, worship, and repent before we ask God for anything. Three quarters of my time in prayer is spent developing and strengthening that heart connection.

3. Intercession as the Natural Overflow of Relationship

- a. The heart connection that is established through the first three steps produces a natural outcome, intercession.
- b. As Christ speaks to you and as you respond in adoration and repentance you will organically find yourself praying those same realities into and over particular people and situations.

- c. Intercession is simply our partnering with the heart and plans of God for a particular person, place, time, and/or situation.
 - i. One small mistake some make regarding intercession is they perceive it as taking God's promises and declaring them over a situation or problem. This is true but too simplistic.
 - ii. Meaningful and powerful prayer doesn't just tap into God's words but into God's heart and emotions, the place where those words came from. Our words are the outward expression of an already present inward reality.
 - iii. I feel love towards my wife before I ever say "I love you". The words are the necessary expression of my love but the essence of my love exists in my heart and mind not in my words. This is true because I can show and declare my love in other ways than just speaking.
 - iv. Likewise God's words to us found in the Bible are an expression of a greater reality, namely Himself. Powerful prayer taps into the God revealed in and through the words not just the words themselves.
- d. As we discover more about God's heart for the poor or the fatherless or the sick we will begin to intercede for them. As Christ reveals His heart of love and mercy and forgiveness we will be empowered to pray for our enemies and for those who disagree with us.
- e. If God is your provider that also means He is their provider thus we pray for provision. If God is your healer He is also theirs and thus we pray for God to heal their sick bodies.
- f. Rooting our intercession in the revelation of God and our connection to His heart also keeps us from the danger of problem-centered intercession.
 - i. Instead of our prayers being centered around the Person of God they become centered on problems. Problem based intercession is also very prevalent within the pentecostal church today, especially those that engage in "spiritual warfare".
 - ii. Most people and churches that practice this kind of spiritual warfare do so by identifying a particular problem and the demonic principality associated with the physical problem.

"Problem centered intercession only magnifies the problem and what God is not doing as time goes on. Over time God gets smaller and smaller as the seemingly unmovable mountain in front of us only grows in size and magnitude."

- iii. This paradigm of intercession becomes dangerous because there is an ultimate goal that is beyond God Himself and therefore He quickly digresses into a means for something greater.
 - 1. In this paradigm of prayer the change becomes the most important thing to us, even more important than God Himself. Although we would never admit it, we would rather have our mental conception of "revival" than God Himself.

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2. When breakthrough is delayed most people who operate under this understanding of prayer become discouraged and grow weary from doing battle with the demonic powers that they are fighting against.
- iv. Additionally, when we operate under this view of prayer we begin to label people as nothing more than territory that needs to be conquered and an enemy that needs to be defeated.
 1. By labeling people in our minds we unintentionally create an “us” versus “them” mentality.

“As soon as we label people we fall into the prideful triumphalistic mindset of “us versus them” that only leads to manipulation and power mongering. We do this many times in prayer by labeling the people as “those sinners” or “the homosexuals” or whatever. That label can easily put a riff between us and them making it hard to reach them. By labeling we make people objects, dehumanized things that we need to conquer. Conquest is not part of the church as it relates to people, only related to demons. The problem is that we often make people the demons that must be conquered and overcome. That only leads to manipulation, pain, and pride. People don’t need to be conquered they need to be loved.”

- v. Although change in our generation, cities, and nation are very important things and something that our hearts must yearn for it cannot be the foundational stone that our prayer lives are built upon.
- g. Intercession is not complicated it is actually rather simple. It is the natural response to the revelation of an eternally loving and merciful God set against the backdrop of a dark and dying world writhing in pain.