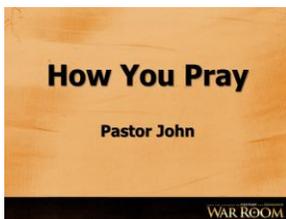


## **How You Pray**

January 29, 2017

KEY PASSAGE: MATTHEW 6:5-8 (CEV)

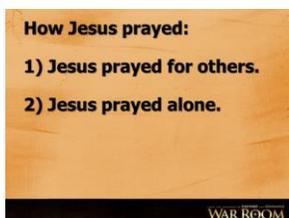
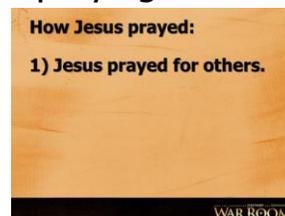
*<sup>5</sup>When you pray, don't be like those show-offs who love to stand up and pray in the meeting places and on the street corners. They do this just to look good. I can assure you that they already have their reward. <sup>6</sup>When you pray, go into a room alone and close the door. Pray to your Father in private. He knows what is done in private, and he will reward you. <sup>7</sup>When you pray, don't talk on and on as people do who don't know God. They think God likes to hear long prayers. <sup>8</sup>Don't be like them. Your Father knows what you need before you ask.*



Today we continue our series on prayer by looking at "How You Pray". Today we will focus on how to come to God in prayer and at how we are called to pray simple, humble, direct prayers. As we have been seeking to build up our prayer life and our relationship with God over the past few weeks, we have looked at when we pray, where we pray, and who we pray to. Today we will begin to pull it all together as we apply our learning and understanding to today's message. Each part is essential and fits together to make a better, deeper, prayer life. Next week we will culminate the series as we delve into the power of prayer and share where we have seen God at work through our prayers. Let us pray.

When we consider 'how to pray', we must begin by looking at Jesus as our example. We have several instances in the gospels where Jesus himself prays to God. To some this may be puzzling. Why would Jesus, who is God incarnate, would even need to pray? The first reason Jesus prayed was to set an example for His followers. It was necessary for Jesus to pray in order to demonstrate the importance of prayer to the disciples and others. The second reason He prayed is that Jesus was partly divine and partly human. From the human side of Jesus, it was natural as a practicing Jew to spend time praying to God. It would have been how he was raised. And lastly, Jesus, as part of the Trinity, was simply communicating with another part of the Trinity, God.

Jesus, of course, prayed in the gospels on several occasions and for a variety of reasons. The most frequent examples we find are when Jesus is praying for others. In Matthew 19, Jesus gathered the children to Him and "*placed His hands upon them and prayed for them*". In John 17, Jesus prays for believers, saying, "*I pray for them... I am not praying for the world but for those you have given me, for they are Yours*". These examples of Jesus praying for others emphasizes our need to pray for one another. They show us the value of intercessory prayer.



Jesus often prayed alone. That has been a focus of the messages the past few weeks – encouraging each of us to find a quiet, private place to connect to God. We find a few examples of Jesus seeking solitude and privacy to pray. In Luke 15, we are told that Jesus "*withdrew to a lonely place to pray*". Earlier, in Luke 6, we read,

*"Jesus went to a mountainside to pray"*. Jesus chose to be with God alone in nature, further connecting to the wonders of God. In the Garden of Gethsemane, recall how Jesus told the disciples, *"Sit here while I go over there and pray"*. He was creating space and time to be alone with God.

**How Jesus prayed:**

- 1) Jesus prayed for others.
- 2) Jesus prayed alone.
- 3) Jesus prayed regularly.

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Jesus also prayed regularly. Again, the topic of Jesus praying comes up throughout the gospels. In Luke 5 we read, *"Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed"*. From this

passage we can assume that prayer was part of Jesus' everyday life. Luke 18 also speaks of consistent prayer. Verse one reads, *"Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and never give up"*. Within this verse we also see a key prayer teaching of Jesus: *"never give up"*. Along with being consistent, we must also be persistent. But we must not confuse persistent with insistent.

**How Jesus prayed:**

- 1) Jesus prayed for others.
- 2) Jesus prayed alone.
- 3) Jesus prayed regularly.
- 4) Jesus never gave up.

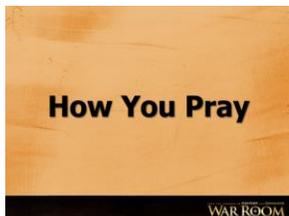
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Even Jesus knew that not all of His prayers would be answered. Remember, Jesus was partly human so not all of His prayers were aligned with God's will. Perhaps the best example of this comes to us when Jesus was in the Garden of Gethsemane. He prayed three times for God to allow an easier path, praying, *"My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet not what I want but what you want"*. But in the end, His divine nature won out as He prayed, *"Not my will, but as You will"*. At times we too must wrestle with the honesty of our prayers and with trying to live according to God's will instead of our own will. As we

**"Not my will,  
but as You will".  
- Matthew 26:39**

WAR ROOM

talked about last week, God is sovereign and God is in control. His will is ultimately what will be done.



Jesus also taught about how to pray in terms of the actual content of our prayers. We worry about using the right words or about what to pray for. We worry about asking too much and we worry about forgetting things. I believe the most important part of prayer is how we view and address God, not the specific words we use. Prayer needs to be more about God than about us or any issue we are dealing with. Jesus taught about “how” to pray most directly in Matthew 6. Our key verse for today comes from Matthew 6, verse 7. It reads, *“When you pray, don’t talk on and on as people do who don’t know God. They think God likes to hear long prayers.”* Jesus advises us to keep our prayers to the point. He continues in verse eight, saying *“Pray then in this way...”* Jesus then goes on to pray what we know today as the Lord’s Prayer.

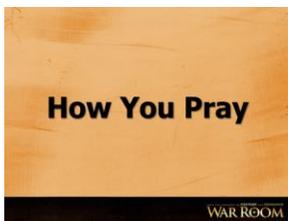
The Lord’s Prayer is a prayer we say every Sunday as part of our worship of God. Jesus was not saying that this is the only way that we should pray, but gave this prayer as a model for us to follow in our own prayers. The Lord’s Prayer begins



with *“Our Father in heaven...”* and continues on to recognize the holiness of God and inviting His will to be done here on earth. It acknowledges the sovereignty and power of God both in heaven and here on earth. Then the prayer goes on to ask for our daily needs, for God’s care and provision. Next the prayer turns to God for the forgiveness of our sins and then also remind us to also forgive those

who wrong us. The Lord's Prayer we find in Matthew 6 concludes by asking God to keep us from evil and to protect us from Satan's attacks.

There are other prayer models that have been developed over the years. In one form or another, most of them contain the pieces we find in the Lord's Prayer: praising or worshiping God, confessing our sins, thanking God for our blessings, and asking God to work in our lives. Whatever the model or form we use, we are remembering who He is, what He can do, and what He has done in our lives. We are thanking Him for His overwhelming faithfulness in the past and asking for more of the same in our future.

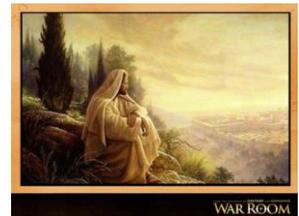


Jesus most often modeled a prayer life that was very direct and to the point. The prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane, the Lord's Prayer, His prayer on the cross, and most other

prayers we read in the Bible are very direct and focus in on the matter at hand. But at other times, Jesus modeled long and emotional prayer times as well. In Luke 6, after healing the man's hand on the Sabbath, drawing anger from the religious authorities, we read that Jesus went up the mountain and "*spent the night in prayer*". In Matthew 14, after feeding the 5,000 and sending the disciples on across the lake,

Jesus "*went up the mountain by himself to pray. When*

*evening came, he was there alone,*<sup>24</sup> *but by this time the boat, battered by the waves, was far from the land."* It was after a long prayer session that Jesus walked across the water to rejoin His disciples. Jesus was comfortable spending long periods of prayer with His Father. There was a deep connection in these



times and it was natural for Jesus to seek God's presence as a means to be in touch with His Father.



While we also need to experience a deep connection with God and to spend time daily in His presence, these long prayers are the prayers I think we most often struggle with. We tend to like our prayers neat and tidy and to the point. They are more 'manageable' then. We get uncomfortable when there are long periods of silence or when we do not really know what words to use or when we do not quite know how to put our prayers together. But the reality is that God knows us better than we know ourselves. He already knows our weaknesses, our sins, and our every need. We can pray with childlike simplicity without hesitation and without pretense. Surrendering to God all that we are and have, great and small, is a beautiful and necessary act of worship. When you trust that God is good, present, and able to help, you more freely approach Him in childlike faith. Like the small girl faithfully saying her ABC's in last week's message, we too can trust that God will sort out all that is on our hearts and minds and answer our prayers in ways that are best for us and that bring honor and glory to God alone.



Martin Luther, the great Protestant reformer, is remembered for many things that he contributed to the faith we know. In posting his 95 Theses on the door of the local church, he launched the Protestant Reformation. Thereafter, Luther's life was one of frequent trial and much testing. He worked tirelessly to bring change to the church and to once again make God the focus. In seasons of extreme busyness, he would rise extra early and spend the first three hours of his day in prayer.

Without that time spent in prayer, he knew that he simply could not have functioned in the capacity needed. His own confession was his dire need for prayer. When we are honest, that is our need as well.

Martin Luther spent three hours in prayer when life got hectic and busy. For how many of us would that be our first thought when life begins to swirl around us? When life gets really busy isn't our first inclination to go the other way – to skip reading the Bible, to pass by the devotional, to make the prayer extra short? Many of us might feel a shortage of time in our lives. There is work and other commitments, there is the family and our spouse, there are friends and parents, there are sports and activities, there are, there are, there are. In the midst of all of this it can be tempting to push our faith practices to the back burner. But it is in the midst of the busyness that we too need to maintain our commitments to our faith practices so that we are grounded in Christ.

So, which one are you? Which one of these people do you most identify with? Are you the lady juggling a clock and a computer and a briefcase and a clipboard and an invitation to some event? Are you the young person with the guitar and the hockey stick and the soccer ball and the school backpack? Or are you the Mom with kids and stuff forming a trail behind her as she rushes from this to that? Or are you the man with piles and piles of papers on his desk with a phone in each hand? Maybe you are the woman with a whisk in one hand, a weight in one, a phone in another, a book in yet another, and a baby in one hand as well? For many of us, this is what life feels like.



Yes, at times, we feel pressure to fit it all in. Yes, at times we feel like there is not time for our faith practices. But it is precisely then, when we feel like the people in these pictures, that we need that time with God. It is the foundation upon which all else in life rests. In reality, time may be the only completely equitable guarantee. While the number of days we're each given varies, the number of hours within each day is exactly the same for all of us. It's what we do with the hours that matters. It is a matter of trust when we lay aside the busyness and surrender our time to God. It is a matter of faith when we give God our time and the control of our lives, trusting that life will be better.

Time is just one stumbling block we face in having a dedicated and humble

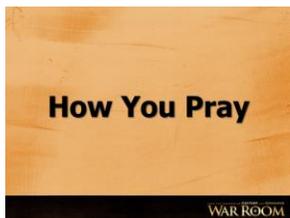


prayer life. In the War Room movie, Elizabeth had allowed her anger against Tony to consume her. Instead of time or busyness, anger was her roadblock. She could not see past her anger to begin to offer Tony forgiveness and grace. But

through a conversation with Miss Clara, Elizabeth has come to a place of peace, to a place of understanding. Elizabeth realized that the undeserved grace that she has received from Christ is the same grace she must extend to Tony. She has come to realize that she must step off the throne of anger and allow God to rule from the throne of grace. She has decided to let God be sovereign.

Because of this decision, Elizabeth changed the 'how' of her prayers. Now, she goes to God in honest and humble prayer and trusts God with the situation. Elizabeth has resolved to turn her marriage over to God by surrendering herself to God's will. She is living on trust and faith. In this scene, Tony comes home

from a trip and Elizabeth has prepared dinner for the two of them. Her newfound peace is hard for Tony to understand. Please watch this short clip. [Play clip.]



There is a difference in Elizabeth that Tony cannot understand. The peace and trust that she now feels allows her to see Tony in a new light as well. She is allowing God to reign and that is reflected in how she interacts with Tony.

There is no fight left in her. She has surrendered control to God. For us, surrendering to God all that we are and have, great and small, is also a beautiful and necessary piece of our prayer life. It is also an act of worship. It is also hard. But when we come to God in prayer, trusting that God is good, present, and able to help, then we can freely approach Him in bold faith. In James 4, from verses seven through ten, we read of our call to surrender and the effects of doing so:

*<sup>7</sup> Surrender to God! Resist the devil, and he will run from you. <sup>8</sup> Come near to God, and he will come near to you. Clean up your lives, you sinners. Purify your hearts, you people who can't make up your mind... <sup>10</sup> Be humble in the Lord's presence, and He will honor you.*

When we surrender to God, Satan flees. When we draw near to God, God will, in turn, draw near to us. For us to be near to God, we must be pure and holy. We must decide that we will surrender our lives to God and to trust into God's love and care. When we are humble before God, God will bring us honor. It is a beautiful thing when we surrender to God. Let us pray.

### **GPS – Grow, Pray, Serve**

- 1) Which way do you pray most often: for others or yourself? How can you spend more time in prayer for others, following Christ's example?
- 2) Pray the Lord's Prayer, one phrase at a time. Take time in between each phrase to delve into what that means in your faith.
- 3) What do you need to surrender to God? How can you give this to God in incremental steps? What the first step you need to take?

### **"Dinner Conversation" Summary:**

Elizabeth cooks and serves dinner – apologizes for bothering Tony at work about being mugged – Tony switches the plates – she is sorry for taking it out on him, it was really good for Danielle to realize who is around you. Want hot sauce – mild or wrath of God? Tony asks, "What do you want Liz?" Liz: "Right now? Would kill for a hot fudge Sunday... and my feet are killing me. Would love a foot rub". "Not rubbing your feet"... "OK – want to pray?" Starving, let's eat.