

Seeking God Through Prayer

"Adam had sexual relations with his wife again, and she gave birth to another son. She named him Seth, for she said, "God has granted me another son in place of Abel, whom Cain killed." When Seth grew up, he had a son and named him Enosh. At that time people first began to worship the Lord by name." Genesis 4:25-26

Opening Prayer

Video (Building Our Communication Skills)

Check-In (Expectations)

1. "Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus." **Philippians 4:6-7**

What were your first experiences with prayer as a child? Have you continued those practices or have your prayer practices evolved? What is your most common prayer practice today?

2. "See that no one pays back evil for evil, but always try to do good to each other and to all people. Always be joyful. Never stop praying. Be thankful in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you who belong to Christ Jesus."

1 Thessalonians 5:15-18

What does it mean to "Pray without ceasing..." or "Never stop praying."?

Praying the Bible and the Book of Common Prayer

- The Liturgical Calendar
- Praying the Bible
- Praying The Book of Common Prayer
 - The Daily Office
 - Daily Morning Prayer Rite II p. 75
 - Daily Evening Prayer Rite II p. 115
 - Daily Devotions for Individuals and Families p. 136
 - The Psalter p. 585
 - Prayers and Thanksgivings p. 810

Praying the Episcopal Prayer Beads or Rosary

Closing Observations

Assignment(s): Daily Prayer for Ten Minutes

" Then if my people who are called by my name will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sins and restore their land."
2Chronicles 7:14

Sharing Prayer Needs

Closing Prayer

All Bible quotes are from the New Living Translation unless otherwise noted.

So, How And Why Do We Pray?

" 'When you pray, don't be like the hypocrites who love to pray publicly on street corners and in the synagogues where everyone can see them. I tell you the truth, that is all the reward they will ever get. But when you pray, go away by yourself, shut the door behind you, and pray to your Father in private. Then your Father, who sees everything, will reward you.

When you pray, don't babble on and on as people of other religions do. They think their prayers are answered merely by repeating their words again and again. Don't be like them, for your Father knows exactly what you need even before you ask him! '" Matthew 6:5-8

Opening Prayer

"Our Father in heaven, may your name be kept holy.

May your Kingdom come soon.

May your will be done on earth, as it is in heaven.

**Give us today the food we need, and forgive us our sins,
as we have forgiven those who sin against us.**

And don't let us yield to temptation, but rescue us from the evil one."

Matthew 6:9-13

Check-In (Share Prayer Experience)

Video ("Why Pray?" from *Prayer*)

1. Jesus is reported in the Gospels to have spent a lot of time praying. He often went to a solitary place and prayed, especially at difficult times in His ministry (Matthew 14:23, 26:36-41, Mark 1:35, Luke 5:16, 6:12). He gave us a pretty good

prayer, which has become a model prayer for us. It covers the key areas of what we want to say to God:

First, we call God by the affectionate term "Father." We adore him and acknowledge that he is not only our Father, but the creator of all universes, of all that is seen and unseen, the source of all wonder, and we praise His holy name:

Our Father in heaven, may your name be kept holy. (NLT, Matthew 6:9)

We pray that the Kingdom of God will overtake this flawed earthly kingdom. We ask that God's will be done on earth in all things, and particularly in our lives:

May your Kingdom come soon. May your will be done on earth, as it is in heaven. (NLT, Matthew 6:10)

We ask to be given the things we and world need for life, but we don't ask for things we merely desire, and we don't ask at the beginning of the prayer. We first call on the name of our Father, we praise him, and we pray for his will to be done. Then we ask:

Give us today the food we need, (NLT, Matthew 6:11)

We acknowledge that we sin against our Father and our neighbor and ask forgiveness and acknowledge that we must also forgive our neighbor who sins against us (Matthew 5:44, 6:14-15, Mark 11:25, Luke 6:28):

and forgive us our sins, as we have forgiven those who sin against us. (NLT, Matthew 6:12)

Finally, we ask for the strength to resist temptation and evil, because they constantly surround us and we are always challenged by them. (Luke 22:40):

And don't let us yield to temptation, but rescue us from the evil one. (NLT, Matthew 6:13)

This simple prayer is our best one. We may use many other prayers during this course. We will learn to pray our own prayers in private and aloud in this group. But this prayer is the basis for what we say to the Father.

2. "At that time you won't need to ask me for anything. I tell you the truth, you will ask the Father directly, and he will grant your request because you use my name."

John 16:23

God has no gender, male or female. Still, we traditionally refer to God as Father. Some people have poor, even traumatic, experiences of their fathers. The thought of father is not a pleasant one. Are there other ways we can think of God when we pray...ways that may be more comforting for some? Discuss.

3. " And so I tell you, keep on asking, and you will receive what you ask for. Keep on seeking, and you will find. Keep on knocking, and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks, receives. Everyone who seeks, finds. And to everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. You fathers—if your children ask for a fish, do you give them a snake instead? Or if they ask for an egg, do you give them a scorpion? Of course not! So if you sinful people know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him."

Luke 11:9-13

Some people interpret this as saying we will get anything we ask of God. How does that interpretation fit with the Lord's Prayer? How do you interpret it? Does a wise parent give a child everything they ask? Is prayer worthwhile if we can't expect to get everything we ask for? Why pray? Does God care?

Closing Observations

Assignment(s): Daily Prayer for Ten Minutes

" And we are confident that he hears us whenever we ask for anything that pleases him. And since we know he hears us when we make our requests, we also know that he will give us what we ask for."

1 John 5:14-15

Sharing Prayer Needs

Closing Prayer

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Praying With A Loud Voice

" Don't be afraid, for I am with you. Don't be discouraged, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you. I will hold you up with my victorious right hand." Isaiah 41:10

Opening Prayer

"Our Father in heaven, may your name be kept holy.

May your Kingdom come soon.

May your will be done on earth, as it is in heaven.

**Give us today the food we need, and forgive us our sins,
as we have forgiven those who sin against us.**

And don't let us yield to temptation, but rescue us from the evil one."

Matthew 6:9-13

Oh Father, God. Strengthen us, and teach us not to be afraid in proclaiming you through prayer. Amen

Check-In (Share Prayer Experience)

Video (optional)

1. A while back, I read a "New Yorker" article about stage fright, with which I can easily identify. One of the studies cited in it was from the University of Nebraska-Omaha. In this study, two researchers administered a survey to eight hundred and fifteen college students. The students were asked to list their three greatest fears. The top fear listed by these students was "speaking before groups." The fear of public speaking surpassed fear of financial ruin, flying, heights, deep water, even death. For Christians, the fear of praying in public is likely the equivalent of the fear of speaking in public.

The key to our fright appears to be a fear of exposure and ridicule. Yet, when we pray, we are praying to a loving God and Father, unlikely to ridicule us as we speak

to him. Our fear grows out of concern for what other people may say or think. Today, we will start to work on becoming comfortable talking to God aloud.

What has been your experience with praying aloud in and for groups?

2. " So you have not received a spirit that makes you fearful slaves. Instead, you received God's Spirit when he adopted you as his own children. Now we call him, "Abba, Father." For his Spirit joins with our spirit to affirm that we are God's children."
Romans 8:15-16

This is what we can practice:

- Begin by calling on the name of God as Father, or Abba
- Pray that God's will be done in all things
- Pray for the coming of God's Kingdom
- Thank and ask God to listen to our needs and those of others
- Ask God to forgive our sins and strengthen us against temptation
- "In the name of Jesus Christ. Amen."

It's okay if we sometimes forget one or more of these. Dad will understand.

Closing Observations

Assignment(s): Daily Prayer for Fifteen Minutes

Practice Leading Prayer

" And give thanks for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ."
Ephesians 5:20

Sharing Prayer Needs

Closing Prayer

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Hearing God

" Thus says the Lord who made the earth,^[a] the Lord who formed it to establish it—the Lord is his name: 'Call to me and I will answer you, and will tell you great and hidden things that you have not known.'" Jeremiah 33:2-3 (NRSV)

Opening Prayer

Check-In (Share Prayer Experience)

Video ("Learning to Listen" from *The Prayer Course*)

1. " Though the Lord gave you adversity for food and suffering for drink, he will still be with you to teach you. You will see your teacher with your own eyes. Your own ears will hear him. Right behind you a voice will say, 'This is the way you should go, whether to the right or to the left.'" **Isaiah 30:20-21**

What are some of the ways that God speaks to us? Does God usually tell us exactly what to do or what will happen? What have been some of your previous expectations for how God would speak? Let's discuss them.

2. " And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, who will never leave you. He is the Holy Spirit, who leads into all truth. The world cannot receive him, because it isn't looking for him and doesn't recognize him. But you know him, because he lives with you now and later will be in you." **John 14:16-17**

We sometimes ask if what we are hearing in our prayers is from God, or an expression of our own desires, or a distraction from some satanic source. We are given help in discerning what we are hearing in several ways. The most important help in discernment is the Bible, the inspired Word of God. Reading and praying the Bible is of immense importance. Other sources of help in discernment are

pastors, reliable friends and family members, the beauty of creation, our conscience, art, natural events, and of course through the Holy Spirit.

Let's discuss how we can decide if God is speaking to us when we are unsure or confused. Can you tell of an instance in which you had to discern if what you were hearing was from God or some other source?

Closing Observations

Assignment(s): Daily Prayer for Fifteen Minutes

Practice Leading Prayer

" For the word of God is alive and powerful. It is sharper than the sharpest two-edged sword, cutting between soul and spirit, between joint and marrow. It exposes our innermost thoughts and desires. Nothing in all creation is hidden from God. Everything is naked and exposed before his eyes, and he is the one to whom we are accountable."

Hebrews 4:12-13

Sharing Prayer Needs

Closing Prayer

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Unanswered Prayer

" He went on a little farther and bowed with his face to the ground, praying, 'My Father! If it is possible, let this cup of suffering be taken away from me. Yet I want your will to be done, not mine.'" Matthew 26:39

Opening Prayer

"Our Father in heaven, may your name be kept holy.

May your Kingdom come soon.

May your will be done on earth, as it is in heaven.

Give us today the food we need, and forgive us our sins,
as we have forgiven those who sin against us.

And don't let us yield to temptation, but rescue us from the evil one."

Matthew 6:9-13

Check-In (Share Prayer Experience)

Video ("Perseverance" from *The Prayer Course*)

1. We sometimes feel that God is not listening...is not answering our prayers. We ask for things and we do not get them, or the event we want to happen does not occur. **Are we assuming that our will is God's will?** In Matthew 26:39, Jesus prays not to experience the torture and crucifixion he knows awaits him. But the father has a different will, and Jesus yields to that will. As he said in his prayer, "May your will be done..." In this segment, we will explore what we call unanswered prayers.

Tell about a time when you asked God for something in prayer, and you did not receive it. What did you think? How did you react? Did it affect your faith in God?

2. "I urge you, first of all, to pray for all people. Ask God to help them; intercede on their behalf, and give thanks for them. Pray this way for kings and all who are in authority so that we can live peaceful and quiet lives marked by godliness and dignity. This is good and pleases God our Savior, who wants everyone to be saved and to understand the truth."

1 Timothy 2:1-4

We pray for many things in our world. We pray for cures from diseases, sometimes asking for miracles when the cure seems unlikely. We pray for world peace in an increasingly dangerous and divided world. We pray for justice when often there seems to be little. We pray for happiness in our families and communities when we seem to be at battle with one another. All of these are worthy goals, but often they are not achieved.

Is God not listening to our prayers? Does God not care about the suffering in the world?

Does God always answer our prayers? Are all answers from our Father what we want them to be? Are we sometimes not understanding the answers?

Closing Observations

Assignment(s): Daily Prayer for Twenty Minutes

Practice Leading Prayer

"And the Holy Spirit helps us in our weakness. For example, we don't know what God wants us to pray for. But the Holy Spirit prays for us with groanings that cannot be expressed in words."

Romans 8:26

Sharing Prayer Needs

Closing Prayer

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It Is Not Easy

" Keep watch and pray, so that you will not give in to temptation. For the spirit is willing, but the body is weak!" Matthew 26:41

Opening Prayer

Check-In (Share Prayer Experience)

Video (optional)

1. " I will bring that group through the fire and make them pure. I will refine them like silver and purify them like gold. They will call on my name, and I will answer them. I will say, 'These are my people,' and they will say, 'The Lord is our God.'"

Zechariah 13:9

Most adults , even pious adult, find it difficult to pray at times. Some of us find it difficult to pray most of the time. If you are in this group, don't feel alone. You have lots of company. Numerous reasons have been cited for this. Just a few of these reasons include: praying is boring, it is not cool, an unwillingness to devote the necessary time to commune with God, a lack of discipline, an inability to be still and quiet for more than a few minutes, impatience with the time God may take to respond, worldly temptations, our own lack of obedience to the will of God, a lack of faith, and a lack of humility. One or several of these reasons may apply to making prayer difficult for us.

Do you find prayer hard to do? 1. Not at all. 2. Sometimes. 3. Most of the time.

Why do you think prayer can be so hard to do? What is your personal experience?

2. " Then Jesus told this story to some who had great confidence in their own righteousness and scorned everyone else: 'Two men went to the Temple to pray. One was a Pharisee, and the other was a despised tax collector. The Pharisee

stood by himself and prayed this prayer: I thank you, God, that I am not a sinner like everyone else. For I don't cheat, I don't sin, and I don't commit adultery. I'm certainly not like that tax collector! I fast twice a week, and I give you a tenth of my income.

But the tax collector stood at a distance and dared not even lift his eyes to heaven as he prayed. Instead, he beat his chest in sorrow, saying, 'O God, be merciful to me, for I am a sinner. I tell you, this sinner, not the Pharisee, returned home justified before God. For those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.'" **Luke 18:9-14**

We acknowledge that prayer is sometimes difficult, even for those whom we think of as saints. The challenge for us is to find ways to make our time in prayer less of a discipline and more of a pleasure that we anticipate, in the same way we anticipate going to see a loving parent. We should also remember that we pray in many acts, not just the time we set aside specifically to "pray." **How can we make prayer a joy rather than an obligation? List specific approaches.**

Closing Observations

Assignment(s): Daily Prayer for Twenty Minutes

Practice Leading Prayer

" And when he took the scroll, the four living beings and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb. Each one had a harp, and they held gold bowls filled with incense, which are the prayers of God's people. And they sang a new song with these words: "You are worthy to take the scroll and break its seals and open it. For you were slaughtered, and your blood has ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation.." **Revelation 5:8-9**

Sharing Prayer Needs

Closing Prayer

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What Does Prayer Do?

" You will keep in perfect peace all who trust in you, all whose thoughts are fixed on you!" Isaiah 26:3

Opening Prayer

Check-In (Share Prayer Experience)

Video (Does Prayer Change Anything? from *Prayer*)

1. "Put on salvation as your helmet, and take the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. Pray in the Spirit at all times and on every occasion. Stay alert and be persistent in your prayers for all believers everywhere. And pray for me, too. Ask God to give me the right words so I can boldly explain God's mysterious plan that the Good News is for Jews and Gentiles alike. I am in chains now, still preaching this message as God's ambassador. So pray that I will keep on speaking boldly for him, as I should."
Ephesians 6:17-20

So, what are we accomplishing with all these prayers? Of course, we honor our Father, God by calling on him, and we let him know what is important to us. **But are there other benefits?** I think that prayer brings us close to Jesus, who seems to have prayed a great deal. If it was beneficial for Jesus, it surely will be beneficial for us. Prayer can help us resist temptations. They will always be there, and talking to the Father about them will strengthen us. Prayer dresses us for the spiritual warfare that we are in. Take note of Ephesians 6:17 above. We are fighting for our souls and for those of others. Prayer is our greatest tool in achieving our spiritual maturity, and becoming the evangelists that Christ has called us to become, so that we may go out and make disciples. Prayer guides us in determining God's will. St. Teresa of Avila is quoted as saying: "Christ has no body now on earth but yours; no hands but yours; no feet but yours." So, we are called to do God's work. Always asking God to accomplish things for us and waiting to see it happen may suggest that we are not listening carefully to God's reply. God may be saying that we are

the instruments meant to accomplish his causes on earth. We are God's body. Lastly, our Father likes to hear from us, like any good Dad. It pleases him.

What do you think about these benefits to prayer? Are there others that you can think of?

2. "That is why I tell you not to worry about everyday life—whether you have enough food and drink, or enough clothes to wear. Isn't life more than food, and your body more than clothing? Look at the birds. They don't plant or harvest or store food in barns, for your heavenly Father feeds them. And aren't you far more valuable to him than they are? Can all your worries add a single moment to your life? And why worry about your clothing? Look at the lilies of the field and how they grow. They don't work or make their clothing, yet Solomon in all his glory was not dressed as beautifully as they are. And if God cares so wonderfully for wildflowers that are here today and thrown into the fire tomorrow, he will certainly care for you. Why do you have so little faith?" **Matthew 6:25-30**

Will praying make God take action to make life better for all? Will it encourage us to undertake actions to make life better for all? Will it focus our thinking?

Closing Observations

Assignment(s): Daily Prayer for Twenty Minutes

Practice Leading Prayer

" Rejoice in our confident hope. Be patient in trouble, and keep on praying."

Romans 12:12

Sharing Prayer Needs

Closing Prayer

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