

To pray or not to pray  
...That's a good question

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Lord, teach us to pray and teach us how to pray. In Jesus' name, amen.

When I talk to you this morning about prayer, please, first and foremost, may you know that I am learning just like you, and that these are advisements, not mandates. These are lessons I'm learning, not that I have already learned them.

Thank you to David for asking me to return to Beachside Vineyard. Thank you to each of you who has come this morning to celebrate the goodness of the Lord, or to learn more about him.

Let's divide the sermon into pieces, segments if you will. The purpose of prayer, the principles of prayer, some problems of praying, God's provisions in prayer, and a few practicals of prayer. OK? That will be our outline and let's see what we can all learn together this morning. To pray or not to pray...that's a good question.

#### **I. PURPOSE OF PRAYER**

Communication between the throne of God and individual men and women is a dialogue. This is the purpose of prayer, to open the door of conversation with the Almighty. It is not to inform him of things about which he is ignorant or uninformed.

Philip Yancey in his latest book entitled "Prayer" says the main purpose of prayer is to know God. And he cites Tim Stafford who says that chatting once in a while with God or with anyone for that matter doesn't get the job done. You don't talk with a friend a few sentences a year or every few years. You have to have real conversations regularly to increase relationship.

#### **II. PRINCIPLES OF PRAYER**

The life of faith intimately connects us to the prayer of faith. But there is a tension.

*Tension one: Should it be continual or occasional?*

Paul wrote to the Thessalonians and instructed them (Pray without ceasing). How is this possible without being a monk?

I like the imagery of the altar of incense.

Ex. 30.7 "And Aaron shall burn fragrant incense on it; he shall burn it every morning when he trims the lamps.

Ex. 30.8 "And when Aaron trims the lamps at twilight, he shall burn incense. There shall be perpetual incense before the LORD throughout your generations.

Here we see Aaron and his duty of filling the slaughterhouse with incense. As a hippie we used incense to cover up all kinds of smells and this area of the sacrifices was no different. When should he light or trim the lamps. Twice a day. Why? So that it was a perpetual continual aroma before God.

This illustrates the principle of now for always.

So is prayer continual or occasional? It's both. The Greek for 'without ceasing' could be translated 'stretched outedly'. It's communion vs chat. Nehemiah was constant in prayer, but he was also a wine taster and wrote his book and did the wall building leadership. You get the idea.

*Tension two: Personal vs. corporate.*

You've read Jesus' words, "Matt. 6.5 ¶ "And when you pray, you are not to be as the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners, in order to be seen by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full.

Matt. 6.6 "But you, when you pray, go into your inner room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees in secret will repay you.

Why then do we pray in public here in church? Why do we pray together in groups or at dinner?

Listen, as with most tensions in biblical studies, it's not either/or. It's a both/and. God wants to hear from us together and he wants to hear from you privately.

What Jesus is correcting in Matthew 6 is the trumpeting of righteousness. He wants us to seek God's approval and not man's approval.

Gal. 1.10 For am I now seeking the favour of men, or of God? Or am I striving to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a bondservant of Christ

So we could say closet prayer is first, but not only.

Also of note is the notion of a *Minyan*, the Jewish quorum. Rabbis have determined (from Genesis and Abraham negotiating with the Lord about Sodom) that it takes 10 men to pray as a community. Jesus lowered that requirement to 2 or 3 in Matthew 18. (You don't need to have 2 or 3 to be heard by Jesus... but if you are having a group prayer, you don't need 10).

*A third principle of prayer, the types of prayer.*

1)Worship--body parts, silent (aleph before bet)

2)Praise-- God for who He is

3)Thanksgiving --for what he has done

4)Petition --God to do things

5)Supplication-- to do to us

6)Intercession --to do for others

7)And I suppose we should include command -- Is. 45.11 Thus saith the LORD, the Holy One of Israel, and his Maker, Ask me of things to come

concerning my sons, and concerning the work of my hands command ye me.

*Fourth principle: 9 exact prayers*, that is nine things we are told to pray for in the Bible. This is not an exhaustive list, but exemplary.

- 1) Labourers (Matthew 9.27)
- 2) Latter rain (Zech 10)
- 3) Timing of the final gathering of the Lord with his saints (Mk. 13)
- 4) Backsliders to return (1 John 5)
- 5) Ministers (2 Th. 3)
- 6) Authorities (1 Tim. 2)
- 7) Interpretation of tongues (1 Co. 14)
- 8) Holy Spirit (Luke 11)
- 9) One another (James 5)

### III. PROBLEMS OF PRAYER

#### Problem 1: Fatigue

This affects us all and affects our body and our soul and our spirit. I believe we are tripartite, even as God is Father, Son and Spirit. And we have to know fatigue will affect all the segments of our lives.

Spirit: undisciplined, out of shape, not asking (James 4)

Soul: mindlessness, (note pad)

Body: tired, weary

#### Problem 2: Unforgiveness: Wrong relationships

- ① Matthew 5: leave gift if someone is against you
- ② Col. 3, Eph. 4, you vs. someone else, forgive
- ③ Principle is to forgive before they ask, like Jesus did from cross
- ④ Do it privately, otherwise it's almost trumpeting your grandness
- ⑤ Husband and wife (1 Peter 3.7)
- ⑥ Agreement (Amos 2) How shall two walk unless agreed
  1. Matthew 18, two or three agree
- ⑦ With God's will (John 11: I'm always heard")

#### Problem 3: Motives

James 4 ...ask amiss

#### Problem 4: Sin

- 1) Cut cord, telephone, dial, talk

- 2) Psalm 66: If I regard iniquity in my hear
- 3) Isaiah 59.2 God's ear is not so dull

#### Problem 5: Idols

Ezekiel 14.3 "Son of man, these men have set up their idols in their hearts, and have put right before their faces the stumbling block of their iniquity. Should I be consulted by them at all?"

Problems... not hearing the poor, doubt (this makes for repetition to be vain)

The biggest problem: *Irrelevance*

Ezekiel 36 Why should I pray anyway? It doesn't matter. God will do what God will do. Read: and finish with

Ezek. 36.37 ¶ 'Thus says the Lord GOD, "This also I will let the house of Israel ask Me to do for them:

But "I will" is part of the package. I will be asked for. Your prayer is part of God's will.

#### IV. PROVISIONS OF PRAYER

"How much more" the tenor of the NT

##### 1) Destitution

- ① Humility I am unworthy, a sinner (Jacob Gen 32, Luke 18)
- ② Helplessness (O Hallesby)
- ③ Power of God lies in our weakness not in our strengths

##### 2) Ingredients for answered prayer

1. Fasting, greater faith, not arm twisting of God
2. Abiding
3. In Jesus' name
4. Word of Jesus in you
5. I will, the certainty of answered prayer

##### 3) Daring

Persistence (ask, seek, knock, knock, knock) (Unrighteous judge)

Paternalize (Jesus first to call God 'father') and taught us to pray thus

#### V. SOME PRACTICALS OF PRAYER (SUMMARY)

- 1) Do it daily, at least once, alone (when did Jesus pray) and pray with your Bible open (God's communication back to you)

- 2) Pray with at least one other person at least 1/ week
- 3) Pray weekly for at least one of the 9 things
- 4) Keep a note pad, walk, open eyes. Golf courses are good places to pray with or without sticks in your hands.
- 5) Make wrong relationships right, rightly
- 6) Purpose to be honest about sin, idols and false motives
- 7) Give charity regularly
- 8) Fast regularly
- 9) Be honest