

Prayer: It's Not That Complicated

Part 1:

Matthew 6:5-8

WE: Prayer. Whether JF or not, you've at least tried it.

And at some point probably been annoyed waiting to eat a delicious family meal while your religious aunt or uncle drones on and on "blessing" the meal.

Not unique to Xianity. Every religion has some type of prayer as part of their observances.

But what is it? **We all pray, but we don't all know why we pray.**

For some people it seems like the most important thing in the world, for others it's the reason they gave up on xianity.

Prayed some pretty heavy stuff in a very desperate time and got nothing but silence. Seems like would almost make more sense to pray to a potato b/c at least you can see and touch the potato. And if it doesn't give you what you want you can eat it and try again.

It's often seen as a religious and mystical version of sitting on Santa's lap...

Using the right words and having a serious/pious tone to say your prayer (that really sounds more like a magical incantation) to get what we want from our powerful sky daddy.

But Jesus told us to pray. He taught his disciples to pray. He prayed all the time. So what are we missing? B/c from what I know of Jesus he wasn't into weird magical incantations and manipulating God (himself) to get what he wanted...

So really what is prayer and why do we do it?

Truth is so much better than we think... Good news... shows us all that what we really want is available...

True prayer is the difference between religious observance and a loving relationship.

GOD: Matt 6. One of most famous passages. Intro to Lord's Prayer... "Our Father who art in heaven..."

As Jesus introduces his example prayer he gives us insight into prayer...

God giving instructions on praying.. Probably important right?

Knew something about human nature... **We usually pray to get either the attention or the things we want.**

V. 5

Very different culture from ours. Very religious.. The organized kind. The more religiously observant and knowledgeable you were, the more honor you would have...

So Praying in the synagogue was an honor you wanted. You wanted everyone to see you pray it up real good.

Leaders loved the attention. "Look how religious/holy I am."

Jesus says, "Don't do that junk."

Not too much of an issue in our culture except for some religious and political leaders who use prayer/religion to impress others.

We usually use other things to impress people... but thats a whole other series.

Now there is a place for praying in public... as a group. (We do it at our bi-monthly gatherings)

Difference is WHY... The hypocrites aren't wanting to communicate w/ God but communicate a message to people around them... they are special/holy/important... wanting to get peoples attention on them.

Jesus says... They only get what they actually wanted (attention).

But for us... more often than trying to get other people's attention, we try to use prayer to get God's attention.

- "God are you listening? I need/want this..."
- "God look I'm praying. Aren't you happy with me now"
 - The reverse being.. "Oh I don't pray enough I feel guilty and God is probably mad at me."

And let's go deeper... See, the reason we pray is b/c we want there to be someone listening.

Think of that desperate prayer you prayed... whether you were sure there was someone listening or not... you wanted there to be someone listening right?

We all want there to be someone who hears us and cares for us and can do something about our situation.

And here's the good news... there is. And we don't have to try to get his attention.

V. 6 See prayer isn't about getting anyone's attention... even God's.

We don't have to pray to be noticed. We get to pray because we are known.

You already have God's attention... "Your Father." Jesus made God our own personal heavenly Father.

He didn't present him as a distant force, a cosmic essence aloof and unattached to our lives.

Jesus taught, demonstrated, and proved that... God knows you, sees you, and listens to you. Is intimately involved and interested in your life.

Let that sink in.

So if you think about it... prayer is an acknowledgement that there is a God who cares and listens.

Prayer is an opportunity to personally practice and enjoy trusting God.

Praying is saying... "God I believe you exist (or at least I'm hoping/trying to believe you do). By talking to you I'm choosing to trust that you hear me and care about me."

"Here is what I'm dealing with, what I'm thinking/feeling/worrying about. Here's what I'm thankful for."

Real prayer is a personal conversation not an attention-grabbing ritual.

But that takes us to what most of us use prayer for... getting what we want/need.

V. 7

Sound familiar at all?

Greco-Roman religion... many gods.

Tried to appease as many of them as possible in order to have their blessing and avoid their wrath.

Believed they needed to get their attention by praying same thing over and over... Like kids (Mom, mom, mom, mom)

Also believed the words they used had power/magical power... so the more often these power words were used... the more powerful the magic/prayer.

Correct repetition was more important than attitude or intention.

They tried to manipulate their gods into doing what they wanted.

And if we pray we often do the same don't we? Or at least think it can't hurt.

Want to use the RIGHT words.

- Dear God ("Huh? Oh someones talking to me")
- Lord God, Lord God, Lord God ("Oh good they're still talking to me")
- In Jesus name ("Oh now I have to do it they used the power name")
- Amen (Ok good they're done I don't have to listen to anything else they say... or how they treat others)
- And if we are really listening to someone else's prayer need to say things like hallelujah, yes God, or at the very least moo.

Lord God / In Jesus' name- Extreme example.

Or the RIGHT pattern/formula.

- Acknowledge God... tell him things about himself.
- Thank him
- Once you butter him up ask him for something.

I know there are some good reasons these things exist... But for many in the xian culture they have just become part of the routine of our religious prayer.

Maybe you have no idea what I'm talking about and **that** intimidates you too...

How many of you if I asked you to pray out loud would be afraid you wouldn't do it right?

What's that about? It's this feeling that we have to know the secret words/phrases/cadence/ have to "be good at praying"

BUT Jesus says.. that's not how God works. See **when our focus is on intimate prayer we don't have to be intimidated by prayer.**

V. 8

Don't be like them... WHY? B/c You're Father knows you. [Do the focus on each word thing]

You don't have to worry about getting it right... saying the right things b/c...

Real prayer is built on relationship, not manipulation.

We don't have to butter God up to get what we want or to hear us. He is a Father who loves to give and is eager to give.

He wants us to know him, to enjoy him. To actually have a relationship with him.

- Why Jesus came.
- To give us access to God... no priests, no temple, no sacrifices.

There's no holy place to go to be closer to him. No secret to getting better access to him.

He is here with you now... and he wants you to know it, trust it, and enjoy it.

See difference between other religions and xianity and the best way to understand what prayer is is to understand who it is for.

Prayer is not a sacrifice for God. Prayer is a gift for us.

God doesn't get mad when we haven't prayed enough, or said the right words... He wants us to pray b/c prayer is his gift to us.

God has given us the ability to communicate with him wherever we are. Whatever our mental and emotional state

Whether we know the right words or not... whether or not we even have words at that moment. (HS)

Prayer is what builds/strengthens/matures our relationship with God... a relationship that is then meant to spill out into our other relationships.

YOU:

Idea for this week: You guessed it... pray.

Read: Psalm 145:18 (Or whole thing if you want)

Pray Differently: Create a habit of enjoying access to God.

Some of you have a very helpful scheduled time to pray... great. For others prayer isn't a big thing for you. No judgement.

For both try this this week...

Include God in your day to day minute to minute thoughts.

Keep it simple:

- Wake up- "Thanks for a new day God"
- Getting in car- "Please give me a safe drive"
- Think about kids in school- "Show them you love them"
- Think about me- "Help him get his act together."
- Funny thing happens- "That's funny huh God. thanks for that."

Keeping it simple will help those who have been doing it a long time to remember it's about relationship

Keeping it simple for those who haven't done it much will give you a chance to start enjoying the relationship deeper.

Not JF's- Try it. "God are you really listening? Will you help me with _____. Or Thank you for _____."

GOD:

Jesus came to earth not to create another religion with rituals and chanting prayers... he came to provide direct access between God and his children.

Prayer is not a ritual we have to endure to make God happy.

Prayer is a gift from God b/c he loves us and wants us to enjoy him.

Prayer is not about getting what we want but enjoying who we have.

So try it... again.

Questions:

1. How have you seen God show up this week?
2. In your own words how would you explain prayer and why we do it? And/Or... what has been your experience with prayer?
3. Read Matthew 6:5-8. What further thoughts or questions does this passage create for you?

4. How can you group pray for and with you this week?

Summary:

At some point in your life you've probably prayed. But why do we do it? What's the point and what good does it do? Let's find out together why Jesus thought prayer was so important.

[There were some tech difficulties in the audio here. We apologize. We'll do better next time, we promise.]

Episode Breakdown

00:50 Who's excited?!?!

02:30 you've tried it...

04:35 Good news here

06:15 "Don't do that junk."

08:40 Prayer isn't about getting anyone's attention

11:00 Is it right words or right pattern?

15:09 Praying out loud can be scary

18:00 A difference between other religions and Christianity

19:00 Your challenge, should you choose to accept it

21:50 Closing stuff

24:20 Discussion Qs and them outtakes

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- November 28th, 4:30pm ... <https://www.yourcrosscreek.com/gathering/> for more info.
- Christmas Gathering! December 19, 2021, 4:30pm

▶ #forSalem NOVEMBER Opportunity: CASA Kids

1. Take a tag at our in-person gathering and buy a Christmas present for a CASA kid
2. Can't come in person? Connect with CASA and see how you can help. They do take online donations and have an amazon wishlist! <https://www.casamarionor.org/donate>

▶ **Suggested Bible Readings:**

Luke 11:1-13

Romans 8:26-27

Philippians 4:6

▶ Music we listened to making this episode:

Collective Soul- Heavy: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FoL0z6dn2q8>

U2- Mysterious Ways: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LZegcL_zQSs

Josh Garrels- Benediction: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZpUqBoj2wzk>

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