

Alderwood Community Church
May 23, 2010

The Habit Of Attention

Talking With God - Part 2
 Psalm 46:10; Philippians 4:6-7

1. Our Struggles With Prayer.

According to Gallup Polls, more Americans will pray this week than will exercise, drive a car, or go to work. Nine in ten of us pray regularly, and three out of four claim to pray every day.

Phillip Yancy in his book, *Prayer-Does it make any difference?* “When I started exploring the subject of Christian prayer, I first went to libraries and read accounts of some of the great pray-ers in history. George Muller began each day with several hours of prayer, imploring God to meet the practical needs of his orphans. Charles Simeon rose at 4:00 am to begin his four-hour regimen. Susannah Wesley, a busy mother with no privacy, would sit in a rocking chair with an apron over her head praying for John and Charles and the rest of her children. Martin Luther, who devoted two to three hours to daily prayer, said we should do it as naturally as a shoemaker makes a shoe and a tailor makes a coat.

In the next step I interviewed ordinary people about prayer. Typically, the results went like this: Is prayer important to you? *Oh, yes.* How often do you pray? *Every day.* Approximately how long do you pray? *Five minutes – well, maybe seven.* Do you find prayer satisfying? *Not really.* Do you sense the presence of God when you pray? *Occasionally, not often.* Many of those I talked to experienced prayer more as a burden than as a pleasure. They regarded it as important, even paramount, and felt guilty about their failure, blaming themselves.”

So, why does prayer rank so high on surveys of theoretical importance and so low on surveys of actual satisfaction? What accounts for the disparity between Luther and Simeon on their knees for several hours and the modern pray-er fidgeting in a chair after 10 minutes?

Everywhere, I encountered the gap between prayer in theory and prayer in practice. In theory prayer is the essential human act, a priceless point of contact with the God of the universe. In practice prayer is often confusing and fraught with frustration. The publishing company, Zondervan conducted a website poll, and of the 678 respondents only 23 felt satisfied with the time they were spending in prayer.

Increasingly, time pressures crowd out the leisurely pace that prayer seems to require. Communication with other people keeps getting shorter and more cryptic: text messages, email, instant messaging, Face book. We have less and less time for conversation, let alone prayer. We have the constant sensation of not enough: not enough time, not enough rest, not enough exercise, not enough leisure. Where does God fit into a life that already seems behind schedule?

2. What Is Prayer?

Prayer is talking with God. Prayer is conversing with God. It is walking, and biking, and driving and changing diapers and talking with God. Prayer is keeping company with God. Prayer is being in relationship with God, He is our Father, we are his children.

God is interested in your prayers because he is interested in you. As your Father, whatever matters to you is a priority for his attention. He wants to hear what you have to say. In fact, he is waiting for you to talk with him.

“The eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their cry.” Psalm 34:15

“Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened.” Matthew 7:7-8

*“This, then, is how you should pray: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread...”
Matthew 6:9-11*

“If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him.” James 1:5

“So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness and all these things will be given to you as well.” Matthew 6:31-33

“Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.” Hebrews 4:17

3. A Benefit From Talking With God: The peace of perspective!

Talking with God puts things in perspective! This is one of the rich benefits that I personally get out of talking with God.

Talking with God helps correct myopia, calling to mind a perspective I daily forget. I keep reversing roles, thinking of ways in which God should serve me, rather than vice versa.

Talking with God raises my sight beyond the petty – or, as in Job’s case, dire circumstances of daily life to afford a glimpse of that lofty perspective.

We need the corrective vision of prayer because all day long we lose sight of God’s perspective. We turn on the television and face a barrage of advertisements assuring me that success and

achievement are measured by possessions and physical appearance. Driving downtown, I see a grizzled panhandler holding up a “God Bless. Can you Help? Sign by the expressway, and we avert our eyes. We hear a news report on a dictator in Africa who just bulldozed entire neighborhoods of squatter homes in an Operation to drive out the trash, leaving 700,000 people homeless. The world obscures the view from above.

Prayer and only prayer, restores our vision to one that more resembles God’s. Here is another invitation from God:

“Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.” Philippians 4:6-7

4. Giving God Our Attention.

“Be still and know that I am God.” Psalm 46:10

The emphasis is on being rather than doing. Moments of quiet do not come naturally to us in our hectic world. We must carve out time and allow God to nourish our souls.

Hurry Sickness...Ortberg. p. 81

The habit of attention. Be still. When we do, all else comes into focus. Our life and our universe falls into alignment.

Stillness prepares me for the second command: *“know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth.”* Only through prayer can I believe that truth in the midst of a world filled with chaos, violence, evil, natural disasters and heartache.

In prayer I shift my point of view away from my own selfishness. Prayer is that act of seeing reality from God’s point of view.

5. Practical Help For Developing A Habit Of Talking With God.

A. Consistency

- (1) Same time - When you are at your best. Unhurried
- (2) Same place- to have a special place to meet with God
- (3) Same format- to develop a habit! Once the habit has been established, you will want to vary it so you don’t get into a rut.

B. Principles **Read: Matthew 6:5-13 (p. 960)**

- (1) **Be sincere** (vrs. 5) Talk normal...tell what's on your heart...Be sincere...Don't use religious clichés..talk in your normal tone of voice as you would talk to another person.

At the memorial service yesterday for Bud Healey, a man who came to know Christ at 87 years old, when he was praying with his daughter, as soon as she finished, she closed the prayer, "in Jesus name, Amen." Bud jumped in, and said "by the way Jesus, while we still have you"...and he began to tell God what was on his heart.

We are not to pray in King James English. We are to pray in our normal language, sharing our hearts, telling what is on our minds, giving him the praise he deserves.

We must guard against language, especially when praying with others, that is aimed at impressing others of our spirituality. That is exactly what Jesus is warning about in this passage.

We must be careful not to pray on automatic pilot. But to engage our hearts and minds in our talking with God to express not what we think we should say, but what is actually important to us.

Sometimes believers pray, "*Dear Lord, please be with me on this new job interview.*" Or "*Please be with us on this trip.*" When you first hear this it sounds holy, Unfortunately, it doesn't make sense. Why do we ask God to do what he is already doing? He promises over and over in the scriptures that he never leaves us, nor will he ever forsake us. We should pray, "*Lord, help me be aware of your presence and rely on your strength. Please give me wisdom.*"

- (2) **Be secret** (vrs. 6) Get away from distractions. Jesus says, when you pray, go into your room and shut the door. Why? One obvious reason is a practical reason. A private place insures a minimum of distractions, and most people find distractions interrupt our concentration and focus when we are talking to God. Voices, the phone ringing, kids, dogs, birds can cause me to loose my concentration during my time talking with God.

Create a special atmosphere, a regular place where you go to meet with God. It could be by the side of your bed, in your den, living room, a kitchen chair with your apron over your head like Suzanna Wesley, you choose your special place to be alone with God.

It also has the idea of being relaxed and unhurried.

- (3) **Be specific** (vrs. 7-13)

"*Our Father*" – Never forget that if you are a child of God through Jesus Christ, you are praying to a Father who couldn't love you more than he already does.

“In Heaven” – Is a reminder that God is Sovereign, majestic and omnipotent. Nothing is too difficult for him. Fix your eyes on his ability, not on your problems.

“Hallowed be your name” - Don’t let your prayers become a “wish list” for Santa Claus. Worship God and praise him when you come to talk with him.

“Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” - Submit your will to God’s. Tell God that you want to put his will first in your life- in your marriage, family, career, ministry, money, body, relationships, church.

“Give us today our daily bread” - As you talk with God, lay out all your concerns, whether big or small.

“Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors” - Confess your sins, receive his forgiveness (believe it) and ask God to give you a forgiving spirit to forgive others.

“And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.” - Ask God to protect you from evil and for strength to rely on God to overcome temptation.

C. Pattern

Adoration Adoration sets the tone for the entire prayer. It puts God in his proper place.

“Praise the Lord, O my soul; all my inmost being, praise his holy name. Praise the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits – who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit and crowns you with love and compassion, who satisfies your desires with good things so that your youth is renewed like the eagles.” Psalm 103:1-5

Confession

“Have mercy on me, O God, according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions. Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me. Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight.” Psalm 51:1-4a

Thanksgiving

“Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his love endures forever.” Psalm 107:1

Supplication

“In everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.”
Philippians 4:6

Conclusion: This week make an appointment with God: Same place, same time, same pattern:
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