

**Echoes from the Mountain: The Sermon on the Mount
The Prayer Jesus Taught Us**

2.26.17

Text: Matthew 6:7-13



Reflection questions... [please consider the teaching notes, first, as a basis of your reflections]

“What is your view/image of God? How has it been shaped/formed? How has your image of God encouraged you to pray? How has it prevented you from praying? Has Jesus helped to change your mind about God?”

“Would you say that your desires are big enough to simply provide temporary gratification or, sufficient to address an eternal longing? What do you think it would look like if God’s dreams came true in your life? In your identity? In your marriage? In your vocational pursuits? Why do you think you are so hesitant to ask God wants?”

“How is hearing your own prayers helping you to discover what it is that you really care about? Which circumstances seem to be strengthening your resolve? Which seem to be inviting a revised response? Would you say you are at, ‘If there’s any way, take this from me’, or, ‘Nevertheless?’” (Luke 22:42)

“Would you say that your experience of prayer is more discipline or communion? What would you say is impeding your experience of God’s love for you?”

Teaching Notes...

Jesus asks us to imagine a world...

... which is the thoughtful and self-initiated creation of a good and loving God--- one you could feel free to call “Father”.

... in which, moment to moment, we were present with, present to, and present for God (“*unceasing prayer*”, 1 Thessalonians 5:17)

... where interaction with this benevolent God was not the peculiar domain of the exceptional few, but the experience of all who lived with such awareness and openness.

... where heaven and earth were not disparate spaces, but actually realities which intersected in ways that allowed us to experience life with an eternal quality to it, right here and right now, where all of this is supposed to matter.

Prayer always begins with God.

God has already initiated the conversation with humanity. He started talking (revealing; speaking; present) a long time ago. Therefore, prayer is our response to an invitation; it is much more about consent than initiative.

Prayer is to be “rhythmic” in our lives.

“Any of you in stressed, satisfied, sick, sinful?” Pray! (James 5:13-16)

The Bible’s offers us, not strategies and formulas and directives, but people praying. Utilizing every circumstance, both delightful and dire, to share it with God; to rehearse our dependency and his care.

I need the process of prayer even more than I need the results of prayer.

I realize that my needs have a way of ‘driving me’ to God, but once I’m there--- once I am present with him--- I become aware of a greater need, a deeper desire: to engage the God who is with me... who is for me.

When I pray in my helplessness, I am learning the art of surrender. When I pray in my hopelessness, I am praying, not, for answers, but for a redemptive perspective.

“Lord, teach us to pray...” (Luke 11). This is the classic disciple/teacher posture. Interestingly, having observed so many of Jesus’ movements and heard so many of his teachings, the one that they found most intriguing was Jesus’ approach to prayer.

Jesus lived in a culture where prayer was already an integral part of their understanding as to how the world works. There was a direct correlation between the gods and their present experience of reality. The Gentile (“non-Jews”) belief was that if you were persistent enough and annoying enough, the gods might actually turn to see what’s going on [1 Kings 18].

Jesus offered the prayer as a means of keeping the Kingdom passions and priorities before them. It provided a summary of the movement and mission of God’s dream for his world.

The prayer is actually structured in way that encapsulates the highest value of the Kingdom, the *“greatest command”*, (which is two great commands): God love and neighbor love.

The prayer, first, orients us toward Father--- express our loyalty and desire to see his desires fulfilled-- and then, postures us toward the ‘other’.

God-ward: Name, kingdom, will

Other-ward: bread, forgiveness and deliverance

“Our Father...”

First, it’s actually a way of distinguishing themselves as followers of Jesus: not simply “God”, but God as Jesus’ Father; the one uniquely named in the Story. This God. Prayer, as a, *“to whom it may concern”*, appeal gets reduced to superstitious incantation.

Second, the way we address God not only indicates “with whom we are speaking”, but the nature of our relationship with that person. “Father” (Abba: “daddy”; most intimate expression used by a child) is the way in which Jesus almost always referenced God and he seemed to utilize it as a means of identifying himself: not just simply revealing who God was, but cementing his own sense of identity in God as his “son”.

Jesus says, *“Father is benevolent, proactive, caring, conscious, available, and needs no other motivation to respond to me other than his stated intentions toward me: ‘blessing’.*

“Hallowed be your name...”

Holy. Unique. One-of-a-kind. The one to whom we defer. Until we are able to hallow his name, we have nothing to locate us. We have no way of identifying *who* we are and *why* we are apart from our own interpretations and, in the process of dismissing God as unique, we inadvertently forfeit our own glory, as well.

It's about God's name and reputation, so often disdained and tarnished, being restored. Jesus is inviting us into a Story, where we as image-bearing creation, rightly represent and reflect the goodness and good intentions of the Creator to the world.

“Your Kingdom come, your will be done...”

Nothing about the prayer is ethereal. Every prayer we pray is concerned with something or someone that God desires to restore, in our home, our community, on our jobs, in our schools, in our government.

“Give us today...”

Admittedly, it's hard to pray this prayer with any sincerity when we throw away more food than most people even have access to and our pantries resemble something out of “*Doomsday Preppers*”. This Story competes and conflicts with our culture's assumption that we are “self-made”: ingenuity, hard work, leverage, education. *Why should I ask?* I'm earning it. I'm making my own way. Whether or not that is your reality, it is reality. Food, housing, clothing, adequate rent money, community, friendships. When I see those things as “graces” (gifts), I forfeit both my tireless anxiety and my need to control any of them. I rest.

“Forgive us as we forgive...”

God has to find a way to account for all of the ways that we “*fall short*” (Romans 3:23)... fail to live into the dream of God... in our own lives and in our interactions with others. In a broken and disorderly world, forgiveness is our only hopeful way forward. We have to find a more restorative way of interrupting the cycle of hurt/wound and retaliation. **Only forgiveness makes relationships possible.**

It's not about ignoring or dismissing or condoning wrong, but choosing to name it and, then, courageously absorb it for the possibility of relationship (as you well know, reconciliation is not always possible but it should always be our objective). Forgiveness does not require a response from the other, but reconciliation does.

“Lead us not...”

The request is not that we be spared from hurt, and things that test our faith and patience, but a recognition that we are prone to “*take matters into our own hands*”; when we do, we realize the often harmful side-effects.

In the Scriptures, the Greek words for “*test*” and “*tempted*” come from the same root. So, it's only as we understand the anticipated outcome that we are able to make the distinction. Temptation anticipates a response in which you succumb and realize the ruinous results [never used of God's interactions with us: James 1]. Testing is used to describe a situation in which some weakness is being exposed and you are being encouraged and empowered toward a healthier, more godly response.

Jesus knows that this is how the Kingdom comes in our lives: as we are tested; as our will collides with God's; as we remain loyal and trustworthy to God, even in the context of painful and confusing circumstances.

If you want to learn how to “*golf*” (fish, cross-stitch, _____), there's a global community that's been living into the practices for years which enables them to maximize their experience of the game.

I think I hear Jesus saying that the church should be a community of practitioners who can say, with the humility and grace it requires, *“If you want to learn how to live well--- if you want to flourish as a human being--- there is a community of people near you who are finding their true identity in God, who are learning to defer to his dreams/desires, who are validating the goodness of his ways, and who are adopting a, ‘not without you’, posture of welcome and inclusion”*.