

Daily Readings

These readings deal with the nature and character of prayer. The Study Guide readings allow you to dig deeper.

Monday, August 23 – Read John 14:1-7. This passage is one of the greatest promises in the Bible. Jesus says, *“I go to prepare a place for you... and will take you to myself.”* He compares “this place” to a mansion with many rooms. Imagine the most refined mansion you can imagine. Now multiply it by at least 1000. As you come to the end of your day, give thanks for all your blessings and remember what God wants for your life. With this in mind, what would you have done different this day?

Tuesday, August 24 – Read James 4:1-3. In this passage James speak to unanswered request. He says, *“You ask and do not receive because you ask wrongly.”* This is a tough passage. At the heart of these words is our attitude. James is speaking of the prayer that is asked for selfish reasons or the prayer that is asked by someone willfully separated from God by selfish interest. Throughout the Bible, true prayer is based in obedience. As Jesus says, *“Not my will, but Yours be done.”* What is the core motivation for your life and actions? Is there something separating you from God? Do you ask out of obedience to God?

Wednesday, August 25 – Read John 17:6-26. John records this long prayer of Jesus during the final days before the crucifixion. Here he prays first for the disciples and then for those believers who will believe because of the “word” of his followers. Reread this passage and carefully examine the desires of Jesus for the disciples and for those who will come after – those like us. Do we fit Jesus’ description? Is the love of God which is in Christ in us? In what ways will your family, friends, and co-workers see Jesus in you today?

Thursday, August 26 – Read Psalm 86. The entire book of Psalms could be considered prayer in one way or another. Five of the Psalms are identified as prayers (17, 86, 90, 102 and 142). In Psalm 86, we find the traditional call for help in the time of trial. But notice that it also include an affirmation of faith and obedience in God. This faith and obedience is repeated over and over again from the Old Testament to the New Testament as the heart of any true prayer to God. Can we name five ways that we are obedient to God each day? Share a meal with someone and discuss the manner and ways that we might show our obedience to God daily.

Friday, August 27 – Read I John 5:13-15. John reminds us that anything we ask in the name or will of Jesus shall be answered. Jesus name is not a “magic” incantation to be spoken over whatever we want, but rather a constant life choice of living and thinking in the will and name of Jesus. Remember the words of Jesus at Gethsemane, *“Not my will, but Yours be done.”* God does answer all prayers that are offered in the Name or will of Christ, but these answers come in the form of God’s Kingdom that we don’t always understand, but must trust God to fulfill. In what ways are you calling on the name and will of Christ today?



STUDY GUIDE & DAILY READINGS

Sunday, August 22, 2010

Questions for God — Prayer

How and why do we pray? (Week 4 of 5)

Matthew 6:5-8 — The Word from the Bible *(New Revised Standard Edition)*

“And whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, so that they may be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. But whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you. When you are praying, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do; for they think that they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.”

Matthew 26:39 — The Word from the Bible *(New Revised Standard Edition)*

And going a little farther, he threw himself on the ground and prayed, “My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet not what I want but what you want.”

Questions for God: Here are some of the questions.

1. When I pray, I don’t feel God. Why?
2. Can prayer really change things? Or does prayer change us?
3. If everything is God’s will – does prayer really matter?
4. How do I hear what God wants?
5. How do I know the difference between what God wants and what I want?

Matthew 26:30-35 - Jesus in Gethsemane

Leaving Jerusalem after the meal, Jesus and the disciples go out east of the city across the Kidron Valley, which separates the city from the Mount of Olives. At the Last Supper, Jesus predicts that the disciples will desert him, in fulfillment of scripture (Zechariah 13:7). But they will be restored in following his being raised, when he will go before, or precede, them to Galilee. Peter makes the idle boast that he will stand true to Jesus, but his claim is immediately discredited by Jesus’ prediction of Peter’s threefold denial. The prayer of Jesus models the obedience that we see through out the Bible concerning our approach to God. Jesus let’s his desires be known to God. He fully understands the suffering and the sacrifice that is coming, so he asked the human question, *“My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me.” But out of obedience, Jesus does not stop here, He continues, “yet not what I want but what you want.”* Or literally, *“...not my will but yours be done.”*

As much as any instruction on prayer that we get in the Old and New Testament, the example of Jesus shows us the foundational attitude for prayer – obedience to the wisdom and greatness of God’s plan. We may not understand God’s plan right now, but by faith we believe (as Jesus believed) that God’s plan is perfect.

Matthew 6:5-8

This instruction from Jesus precedes what we call the “Lord’s Prayer.” When Jesus says, *“Then pray like this...”* In these instructions we see three primary instructions from Jesus. 1) Our prayers should always point to God and not to ourselves and our desires. 2) Prayer is not for show, but is rather a humble approach to the greatness of God’s love and concern for us. 3) It is not the words, but the spirit in which the prayer is offered that is important.

Today’s Sermon: What is the nature and character of prayer?

The Bible is very careful in distinguishing the difference from the magical expectation of the pagan prayers to manipulate “the god” into the desires of humans and the spirit of obedience that is offered as a means of spiritual communion with the one God. As such, prayer is the attempt to achieve a close communication and oneness with God with or without words. The prayers of the Bible are designed as a means of personal contact to affect the nature and course of our relationship with God – not to “get what we want.” Prayer includes petition, confession, thanksgiving, praise, adoration, meditation, and intercession.

In Isaiah 6:1-13 we find the first clear testimony to an individual experience in prayer. Before this communication with God was characterized as a conversation – Moses talks to God about guidance, Abraham speaks with God about reason, and Jacob bargains with God. In this Isaiah passage there is a give and take that goes beyond words. The holy nature of God is shown through a spiritual worship type experience. Isaiah responds with words of confession and inadequacy. This confession leads to the assurance of cleansing and renewal. When Isaiah realizes God’s forgiveness, he then commits himself wholly to this God called work. Isaiah says, **“Here am I; send me!”** To which God commissions Isaiah with the simple affirmation, **“Go and say to the people...”**

This formula for prayer is repeated again and again out of obedience – worship, confession, cleansing, commitment and commission. Prayer most always ends with instruction and commissioning to do God’s bidding.

Prayer in the New Testament

Prayer in the New Testament is best represented by Jesus’ prayer in Gethsemane – surrender and obedience (see above). When we look at the Lord’s Prayer in Matthew 6, the focus is on God not on our desires. It is not that God does not answer our cries or intercessions, but rather that these answered prayers are given out of God’s goodness and our obedience. God does answer prayer, but the answered prayer is defined not by our will, but by the will and final victory of God in creation.

Mark records only that Jesus prayed at critical moments. It may be assumed that he joined in synagogue prayer (1:21; 6:2; etc.) and in the customary prayers at home celebrations like the Passover (14:17-26). Matthew records the **“Lord’s Prayer”** and includes the teaching of Jesus concerning prayer that is best made in seclusion, without piling up empty phrases, because God knows what we need before he is asked (vs. 5-8). Anxiety is a hindrance to prayer, which should be the expression of the whole person (vs. 22-25) in the service of one Master (vs. 24).

Luke primary includes the same teaching and prayers that Matthew and Mark include with some differences. Some have questioned these differences as a weakness of the New Testament writers. Instead they should be viewed as evidence that Jesus had emphasized prayer in all that he did and taught continually on communion with God. The differences are not inconsistencies, but rather different versions of Jesus teaching on the subject as different times and places. Like a lecture that is given on several occasions. The content does not change, but the words may change for the understanding of the audience.

John includes the longest prayer of Jesus in chapter 17. Here Jesus prays for the twelve disciples and then for those who will come to believe because of their words. Indirectly, Jesus is praying for us in this great “priestly prayer.” John wants us to understand that at the core of Jesus teaching on prayer is the complete communion and oneness with God. In chapter 15, he quotes Jesus using the vine and the branches as the example of our relationship with Christ. We are to be connected to Christ in all things – prayer is the base and core of this connection.

All of this is summed up in 1 John 5:13-15 in the belief, knowledge, and confidence the believer has in Christ, assuring him that in whatever he asks according to the will of the Son of God he is heard and answered.

Prayer in the Bible begins when it is clearly detached and distinguishable from magic, and it ends as a phase of complete communion with God in freely rendered obedience. From a predominant interest in material and worldly things, noticeable even in the Psalms, it rises to heights of self-offering, without ignoring the mundane and practical aspects of life. It becomes a matter of priority, as in the Lord’s Prayer.

Prayer in the Bible tends to move more and more toward thanksgiving and praise and consists increasingly in adoration rather than petition, more in contemplation than confession, yet more in the responsive activity of fellowship and not at all in mystical absorption.

Does God answer prayer?

The resounding answer is yes! God answers prayer. But the answered prayer is measured not on the standards of this world, but rather measured by the final victory that is coming to all creation. Our call is to obedience and faith till one day when we will see what God sees and experience what Christ experiences – then and only then will all things be clear. In the mean time – hold fast, pray with bold assurance, and have faith that God is good, the presence of Christ is with us and the Holy Spirit gives power to all who believe.

Prayer Focus

Trietsch is a praying church. This morning, as you worship, one of our prayer volunteers is praying for everyone in each section of our worship center. We believe that prayer changes lives and hearts for good and for God.

We invite you to join these volunteers by praying for those persons around you. We believe these prayers will have an immediate impact on those for whom you are praying.

The following prayers are for inspiration as you pray this week. ***Remember... someone is praying for you. Have a great week!***

The Jesus Prayer or Prayer of the Heart

The Jesus prayer entails the ceaseless repetition of the phrase:

***“Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God,
have mercy on me, a sinner.”***

Often it is compressed ***“Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me”***

or to the bare bones of the one word ***“Jesus.”***

History of the Jesus Prayer

The most normal form of unceasing prayer in the Orthodox tradition is the Jesus Prayer. Although the prayer has been in use for nearly 2,000 years as noted in the book ‘The Way of a Pilgrim’ written by an anonymous Russian author, most people came to know of Jesus Prayer from the classic, “Frannie and Zooey” written by J.D. Salinger. He describes the results: *Sometimes my heart would feel as though it were bubbling with joy, such lightness, freedom, and consolation were in it. Sometimes I felt a burning love for Jesus Christ and for all God’s creatures. Sometimes my eyes brimmed over with tears of thankfulness to God, who was so merciful to me, a wretched sinner.... Sometimes by calling upon the name of Jesus I was overwhelmed with bliss, and now I knew the meaning of the words, “The Kingdom of God is within you.”*

Use of the Jesus Prayer

This prayer can be repeated endlessly. Some people synchronize the prayer (especially the shortened version) with the breath — say “Lord Jesus Christ” on the in-breath, during which you invite God’s sanctifying presence, and “have mercy on me” on the out-breath, during which you expel your sins. At the end of the out-breath, you are momentarily out of air — helpless and dependent upon the divine mercy.

The Jesus Prayer can be used in three different ways. First as the verse used for the “prayer of the heart” in silence. Second as the continual mental and unceasing prayer of the faithful. And third as the brief prayer burst used to ward off temptations.

The Jesus prayer can be said under any circumstances. It is a very powerful prayer. In time it becomes “self-activating:” it moves from the mind into the heart where it sounds of its own accord, whether we attend to it or not; it even continues during sleep.

What the Words Mean

It is centered on the name of Jesus because this is the ***“name which is above every name.”*** (Philippians 2:9-10, Ephesians 1:21)

It addresses Jesus as Lord, Christ and Son of God because this is the center of the faith.

“Have mercy on me a sinner” is the publican’s prayer. When uttered with humble conviction, it brings divine justification. (Luke 18:9-14)

Invite someone to worship this week. You will be glad you did.

God is doing great things through the ministries of Trietsch.