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Mark 14:32-42
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WHAT WOULD JESUS DO ABOUT MY PRAYER LIFE?

The question being asked is what would Jesus do about my prayer life? Sometimes I think Jesus would respond by asking, “What prayer life?” I have always battled to be a person of prayer in the manner I want to be.

I am convinced that prayer works. I am convinced it is the main avenue we have as Christians to be transformed into the image of Christ and be empowered to impact our world. I am convinced that a passion for prayer must lie at the heart of any church fellowship that seeks to see God active in their midst and see His kingdom built in peoples lives. Yet in the midst of all of this belief – I still battle. My prayer life fluctuates. Some times it is great, other times it dries up!

I know many of you have the same battles in your own prayer life – you are not alone! So when I preach on prayer it is always a helpful nudge in the back for myself and I hope for you also.

In the Bible, Jesus taught several times directly on the issue of prayer. It was never to convince people to pray, rather to give encouragement to remain persistent in prayer, to be people of boldness and faith when they pray and even to give insight into the form or manner that prayer should take.

Perhaps the most well known of these passages is what has become known as “The Lord’s Prayer”.

I find it strange and rather sad, that the very abuse of prayer that Jesus was trying to correct when he taught these verses, has now taken a strong hold over the way we understand these passages.

Just preceding the verses we know as the Lord’s Prayer, Jesus tells people not to be like the ‘hypocrites’ who love to pray publicly so as to get recognition from those who see and hear them. He also tells people not to pray like pagans who babble on and think they will be heard due to their many words. Strange then that we have now turned the following words of Jesus into a prayer that is prayed most often in public and also by many who have no real understanding of what it means to follow Christ, yet pray these words, sometimes very often, thinking that they may cause God to hear them.

Jesus didn’t teach these words so they could be put into a prayer that is prayed by rote by his followers! Rather it is within these words that he gives us wonderful insight into the very nature and manner of prayer itself.

Let’s unpack the verses and see what Jesus is saying to us about prayer.

“OUR FATHER, WHO ART IN HEAVEN”

When we pray, we are not praying as Christians to a God who is somehow remote from us. Prayer is ‘Family Communication’! God is our Father twice over – once because He created us in the first place and again because He has adopted us into His family through faith and belief in Jesus. We are not dealing with an uninterested spiritual power who may or may not pay us attention! We are children speaking to our Father – whose love for us is steadfast.

Now it is also important here to understand the phrase “who art in heaven”! This is not God’s postal address! Jesus is not trying to put our heavenly Father in a particular location, rather he is speaking of the elevation of God above mankind in regards to status and the separation of God from the corruption and sinfulness of this earth.

‘HALLOWED BE THY NAME’

To ‘hallow’ something is a term which means to ‘revere’ (hold in awe) something because it is Holy. This is what the book of Proverbs means when it says, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom” (Prov 1:7)

We are to keep an attitude of reverence towards God our Father. Yes, He is our Father and we are to delight in our family relationship with Him, but we are not to allow ourselves to begin to treat Him with the casualness and perhaps even the contempt that often creeps into our earthly family relationships.

We are not to forget with whom we are dealing. In the Bible, whenever a person had even a vision of the presence of God, they were always overcome with His glory and His majesty. Sometimes they even fell to the ground where they remained unable even to move due to the awe and majesty of God’s presence.

Now the struggle for us, who have never had such visions or visitations, is that we are still relating to the same awesome and incredible God, and we must strive to keep ourselves aware of this truth.

God’s name stands for His nature and character, so this verse is ultimately a petition that God would be universally revered and honoured in our world.

Therefore, when we pray, we must be sure to hold God in the respect and awe He deserves. We don’t grovel or come in terror when we pray, but remember to think about what our attitude and prayer is conveying to God about His position in our lives!

‘THY KINGDOM COME, THY WILL BE DONE ON EARTH AS IT IS IN HEAVEN’

What an incredible sentence! This statement sums up all the activity of God ever since sin entered human existence and the relationship with God was broken. Right from Genesis Chapter 12, the whole story and theme of the Bible is about God restoring His rule and reign (Kingship) back over the hearts and minds of mankind whom He loves and who were created for the purpose of relationship with Him. God’s kingdom is not based in geography; rather it is based in the hearts and minds of people.

When Adam and Eve were lured into disobedience by the deception of Satan, they, and all their descendants fell under the power of sin and spiritual powers of evil that exist in our world. The establishment of God’s kingdom is about the restoration of what was lost at that time. God’s kingdom has come in a person’s life when they have been rescued from the powers of Satan’s kingdom and restored to live under God’s Kingship.

When this happens, it is evidenced by God's will being done in a person's life. When a person is living in relationship with God, then that relationship is characterised by that person living according to God's values and God's standards. Not their own opinions, not the latest cultural trend or the latest philosophical influence. Now God as King of our lives sets the agenda!

So how do we know if God's kingdom has come? We will know it by whether His will is being done!

So when we pray – are we praying with this truth in mind? Are we praying for God's will to be accomplished in our own lives and in our world? Prayer for the Christian is about seeing God's will done rather than our own will! Think of your homes and workplaces, what would God want to happen in these places? What about in your own lives, what would God be wanting to happen there? Pray for it!

We should also be praying for others that they would come to know the kingdom of God in their own lives. This is to be the great theme of our lives as Christians. Our passion is to see God's kingship restored over people's lives everywhere. God doesn't do this like some conquering dictator, it only happens when a person willingly invites God to take that position in their lives, yet we play a vital role in this. People need to know and hear of God's love and grace and of the possibility to have relationship with God. Pray for them!

“GIVE US THIS DAY OUR DAILY BREAD”

Now the emphasis changes. Here Jesus raises the issue of our dependence on God for the supply of our own needs. It is important to note that it is the second time that Jesus has used the term 'our' rather than 'my' in this teaching. It seems clear that Jesus is trying to get people to think less selfishly and in a more community mindset. God is not just my Father – He is 'our Father' None of us can own Him, rather He has claim to us! In this verse, Jesus is saying we should be praying not just for the needs you have personally, but also for the needs of others.

It is also important to note than Jesus speaks here of 'daily bread'! This is not just speaking about our need to be able to have toast in the morning or sandwiches at lunchtime. The term 'bread' covers all our daily needs. However the emphasis is certainly on the immediate rather than the long term! Jesus is teaching us to have faith in God's daily provision and to bring these needs to Him in prayer. In many ways, the desperate ways that we work to secure our future is a lack of trust in God's ability to provide. This is not to say we can't be wise with our money. However, God is to be our security and we must see Him as the provider of all our needs.

“AND FORGIVE US OUR SINS AS WE FORGIVE THOSE WHO SIN AGAINST US”

Now we come to the hard part! The fact that we all need to experience forgiveness from God is not difficult to cope with. Most of us are only too aware of our own failings, weaknesses and sins, and the good news of the gospel is that God is a merciful and forgiving God. Through faith and belief in Jesus, we can experience God's forgiveness and cleansing from all our sin.

However, there are some important details that God attaches to His forgiveness that we must not overlook. We are told in the New Testament that repentance (a turning away from sinful behavior) and confession (owning up to what we have done before God) are important factors in forgiveness. Here Jesus speaks of a third aspect which is highlighted several times in his

teaching. The principle is that God will act towards us in the measure that we act towards other people. This is very significant and important to understand. Jesus is NOT saying that we can earn our forgiveness from God by forgiving others. The words are not "...forgive us our sin because we have forgiven those who sin against us", rather the word "as" is used! It is not that we can earn it, but we can certainly impact the measure of forgiveness that we experience by our attitude to others.

This principle is powerfully taught in the parable of the unmerciful servant. A servant has a huge debt cancelled by his master and then goes out and finds someone who owes him a few dollars. Rather than canceling this small debt in the manner which he had just experienced in a huge way, he has the man thrown in prison till he can pay the money. Unfortunately for the servant, word got back to the master about what he had done and the master was furious. Due to the servant's lack of compassion and refusal to pass on the experience of forgiveness of debt that he had received, the master reinstated the huge debt and had the servant thrown into prison until it was paid. Then in brutal honesty – Jesus said, "So shall my heavenly Father treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart" (Matt 18:35).

We don't really have any choice. If we want to know God's mercy in our own lives we have to let go of our resentments and bitterness towards others. Judgement is God's right, not ours! When we come in prayer, we must examine our hearts and invite God's Holy Spirit to show us any resentment, bitterness and unforgiveness that we are harbouring. We must choose, as an act of our will, (not necessarily our emotions) to let go of our right to want to punish and speak the words of forgiveness towards that person that God is waiting to hear.

We will never live in the personal freedom that God intends if we refuse, and resentment can take a terrible toll in our lives.

"LEAD US NOT INTO TEMPTATION, BUT DELIVER US FROM EVIL (THE EVIL ONE)"

There are two aspects to temptation that the Bible highlights. Temptation can be seen as an enticement to evil, which happens through the desires of our own selfish nature and also through the direct enticement to sin from Satan. It can also be understood as a 'testing' or 'trial' that God allows to refine and develop our Christian character.

Now the New Testament is very clear on the fact that God doesn't in fact 'tempt' anyone, (James assures us that God does not entice us to evil). So temptation is something we experience due to our own selfishness or the fact that we are humans whom Satan seeks to corrupt – but it is allowed by God to test and strengthen us.

This part of the Lord's Prayer is the human plea to be spared the trial and testing that God allows. None of us humanly seek this testing from God. Even Jesus cried out in the garden of Gethsemane to be spared the coming trial, yet he also said, "Not my will but yours be done" (Matt 26:39, 42).

This concluding verse in Jesus' teaching prayer, can be best understood in the light of that prayer prayed by Jesus in the garden. It is a cry to be spared the trials of temptation and also a prayer for our deliverance through temptation. That we would be strengthened and come through victorious! The reality is that we will be tempted and there is no sin or failing in that. Even Jesus was tempted! However our prayer should always be that God would have His way in us via the trial. That our characters would be refined and changed through the process rather than it just being a trial that we go through and often fail!

What struggle are we going through at the moment? What temptation are we facing? Make sure we are bringing it to God in prayer. Pray for God's will to be done in your life through it, and pray for wisdom to understand what that might be!

I hope that you will see the Lord's Prayer differently now. It is not just a collection of verses that we are to pray by rote as a set prayer. You can do that by all means, and it is probably a very good way of memorizing what Jesus is teaching here. However we are called to unpack it and allow the bigger truths contained in it, to impact and shape our whole prayer life.

Blessings in Jesus
Brian

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STUDY 5. NOTES FOR LEADERS

See Matthew 6:1-14. Jesus' teaching here is in the context of 'raising the bar' as far as expectations of discipleship are concerned. After dealing with the inner expectations of discipleship (anger, divorce, adultery etc), he now turns to the 3 main "tests" of Jewish piety; almsgiving, fasting and prayer.

The theme is consistent. Jesus is not concerned with the external observances of the tests, but rather with the inner attitudes. The public displays of piety count for little unless they are backed by an inner sincerity. Rather than public displays, Jesus encourages private expressions of devotion that cannot have the applause of people as its motivation.

Jesus stands in the tradition of the prophets who also condemned public rituals that had 'no heart'. (See Isaiah 1:10-17). Jesus is not condemning public giving, prayer or fasting. He is making the point about the motivation for the public display of piety, not the display itself.

1.
 - a. When does prayer come easily for you?
 - b. When do you find it difficult to pray?
2. **Read Matthew 6:5-8.**
 - a. Do you attend church/public prayer meetings? Why? Why not?
 - b. Do you find it easy to pray in such gatherings?
 - c. Do you think Jesus is condemning such prayer meetings in these verses?

This question is asked to urge the group to think back to the original context of Jesus' teachings here. He is condemning the reward motive in public prayer, not public prayer in itself.

Many of the Jewish prayers were ritualistic and certain prayers were prescribed to be spoken at certain times of the day. There could have been a temptation to gabble them off without a thought for their meaning. There were specific prayers prepared for certain occasions and extempore prayer was rarely used by a practicing Jew. Jesus' comments are aimed at the tendency for the public rituals to become empty and meaningless.

3. **See verse 7.**
 - a. Jesus appears to be condemning long prayers. Why? Can you pray for a long time?
 - b. Is praying the only way we can spend a long quiet time with God?

Rabbinical thought of the time was that the long prayer was more likely to be heard. Meditation, reflection, reading thoughts of others, etc are all of value in that personal quiet time. Note that Jesus reminds us that bringing our needs to God is not the essence of prayer, as he already knows them. Many have a concept of prayer that is limited to intercession for personal needs.

The Lord's Prayer (verses 9-13)

Some manuscripts include an addendum to the prayer. See the footnote in your Bible. The early Church probably used this pattern prayer in its liturgy and thus it could have been in danger of becoming another empty ritualistic prayer. There is a rhythm to the prayer that suggests liturgical refinement.

Note that the prayer starts with an affirmation of who God is, then turns to praying about our needs and necessities. The prayer has a feel of us asking God to bend our wills to His, not the reverse as is often the pattern.

4. What does the prayer imply about God?

Note that God is Father, but is also to be honored and treated with utmost respect. The prayer implies that God is both immanent and yet beyond us. He is concerned about our welfare and is the forgiving God who can strengthen us from the perils of testing times. He is the God to whom we can present our petition.

5. What does the prayer say about our relationships?

Note the aspects of forgiveness. It also prays for daily bread (needs) which may include the need for human fellowship/support. Note also the fact that prayer is communal. Ask the group to note the number of times the plural pronouns are used.

6. What does the prayer say about change? Who changes and how?

The prayer is not us changing the minds of God but God changing us. In the prayer God is in control of the Kingdom growth and the prayer implies that God is seeking to shape our lives so that we might be more consistent with his will. Note how “Hallowed be your name”, “Thy Kingdom come”, “Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven” are all saying the same thing in different ways.

7. What does the prayer say about our financial problems?

It asks God to provide basic needs. “Daily bread” has been interpreted in various ways. Communion? The Word of God? Jesus himself (“The bread of life”)? More than likely it is do with daily survival rather than just spiritual needs. “Daily” is a rare word in ancient Greek but implies we are meant to learn to live one day at a time. Cf Matthew 6:34. It is not only a prayer for ourselves... but for others as well. “Give us...”

8. a. What part of this prayer is easiest for you to pray?

Eg. Do you find it hard to see God as personal father?

b. What part is the most challenging for you?

9. **What would Jesus do about the following?**

The reading covers all of these situations!

- a. Jim attended the Church prayer meeting but felt intimidated by the elder who seemed to dominate the prayer time. The elder covered everything in the prayer, and the wonderful rich language of the elder in the prayer caused Jim to feel that all he could do was sit there in silence.

Jesus, according to our reading, is not too keen on long prayers that use repetitious language.

- b. The pastor called people to the front for special prayer, asking people who needed more resources to finance their dreams and visions to come forward.
Cf. “Give us this day **our daily** bread.”

Georgina decided that she was going to have a quiet time with God every morning, so got up early with her Bible and set aside an hour for reading and prayer. She confided to a friend that this wasn't working as she always fell asleep during the prayer time.

Note the shortness of the Lord's Prayer and the need for meditation expressed in the psalms. The group may share how pen and paper, music, other written prayers, all assist with prayer times.

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