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Jesus' Prayer

“Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed.” (Mark 1:35)

When I was in college, Coach Meyers taught me how to serve and volley. He taught me the rules of the game and how to keep score. He didn't just say, “Go Play Tennis!” He taught me the fundamentals. When I was much younger, Mrs. Slade tried to teach me how to play the piano. The operative word there might be “tried.” She gave me scales to practice and started me off with John Thompson's most basic book for beginners. However, I was much more interested in baseball and, well, anything but sitting on a piano bench on a spring afternoon.

Who taught you how to pray? As you were growing up, who taught you how to pray in a meaningful and satisfying way? This is a question that more and more I ask young and old alike. What I am discovering in their answers is there are definitely people who teach us *to* pray but *how* to pray is a different matter.

Jesus, of course, gave us one prayer to teach us how to pray, which we examined on Day 9 in “The Disciples' Prayer.” All of this left me wondering, though: How did Jesus pray? When did He pray? What kind of things did He most often pray about? Who did He pray for in His life?

Study the prayer life of Jesus and, in answer to those questions, you will see four clear patterns: 1) Jesus would frequently withdraw for a time of prayer; 2) His prayers were intertwined with thanksgiving and praise; 3) He was incredibly honest with God;

and 4) He interceded for others. It is a model that is beginning to change my own prayer life.

Withdrawing

Jesus frequently withdrew from people and the crush of ministry demands to fellowship with His Father in prayer and gain wisdom in making key decisions. Before He chose His disciples, He withdrew to pray (Luke 6:12-16). When the crowd pressed in on Him with their own agenda to make Him king, following the feeding of the 5,000, He withdrew to a mountain to gain perspective through prayer (Matthew 14:13-23). As He prepared for His final journey to Jerusalem, He withdrew to a mountain with three friends for prayer (Luke 9:28-36). The one time of withdrawal that touches me the most is found in Mark 1:32-38:

“That evening after sunset the people brought to Jesus all the sick and demon-possessed. The whole town gathered at the door, and Jesus healed many who had various diseases . . . Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed. Simon and his companions went to look for him, they exclaimed: ‘Everyone is looking for you!’ Jesus replied, ‘Let us go somewhere else—to the nearby villages—so I can preach there also. That is why I have come.’”

Jesus found strength in withdrawing to

pray and spend time with His Father. Henri Nouwen in his book, “Out of Solitude,” sheds this insight:

“In the morning, long before dawn, he got up and left the house, and went off to a lonely place and prayed there.” In the middle of sentences loaded with action—healing suffering people, casting out devils, responding to impatient disciples, traveling from town to town and preaching from synagogue to synagogue—we find these quiet words . . . in the center of breathless activities we hear a restful breathing. Surrounded by hours of moving we find a moment of quiet stillness. In the heart of much involvement there are words of withdrawal. In the midst of action there is contemplation. And after much togetherness there is solitude . . . somewhere we know that without a lonely place our lives are in danger. Somewhere we know that without silence words lose their meaning, that without listening speaking no longer heals, that without distance closeness cannot cure. Somewhere we know that without a lonely place our actions quickly become empty gestures. The careful balance between silence and words, withdrawal and involvement, distance and closeness, solitude and community forms the basis of the Christian life and should therefore be the subject of our most personal attention” (pp.13-15).

Thanksgiving and Praise

The life of Jesus was marked with prayers of thanksgiving, sometimes at the most difficult of moments. There is one prayer that He would pray twice—once during a difficult moment, and another time during a moment of joy. When the people of Korazin and Bethsaida rejected Jesus and His miracles, He pronounced a curse upon them. Then, amazingly, He offers this prayer,

“At that time Jesus said, ‘I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, for this was your good pleasure’” (Matthew 11:25-26).

When the 70 returned from a successful mission, they declared to Jesus, “*Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name*” (Luke 10:17). At that moment He would speak the same prayer that He had spoken in response to those who had rejected Him and His miracles.

His consistency in life and ministry humbles me. He was able to see a reason to rejoice and even give thanks in any situation. Even in the face of great sorrow or betrayal, we see Jesus giving thanks to His Father. At the tomb of His beloved friend Lazarus, in the midst of many tears, including His own, His heart is filled with thankfulness as He anticipates what His father is about to do:

“Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me” (John 11:41).

Even before the resurrection of Lazarus, Jesus was thankful in prayer.

I see in the life of Jesus exactly what Paul was talking about when he said,

“Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God” (Philippians 4:6).

I find this one of the most difficult aspects to include in my daily prayer life—a thankful spirit, no matter the circumstances.

The other prayer of thanks that astounds me is the one heard as we prepare for Holy Communion: “On the night when He was betrayed, Jesus took bread and when He had given thanks, He broke it and gave it to them “ In the face of betrayal, Jesus gives thanks. Hours before His arrest, the brutal beating and His death and agony upon the Cross, Jesus gives thanks!

Honesty

Another characteristic of Jesus' prayer life was His incredible honesty. Outside of the Cross, one of the most common pictures that are placed in the chancel of a church is a picture of Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane. Those two symbols—the Cross and the Garden are reminders of Jesus' honesty in prayer.

When He brought His disciples with Him to the Garden, He was distressed to His inner most being (Mark 14:32-33). In His agony, He seeks another way:

“My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will” (Matthew 26:39).

Jesus was expressing an honest tension inside of Him: I do not want to go through this and yet I want to follow your will in it.

Another honest prayer comes from the Cross. Jesus cries out with words that fall on my ears in an unsettling way: *“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Mark 15:34)*. Gone is the intimate reference to “Father,” replaced by the impersonal, “My God, My God.” There He hangs, pouring out His honest and deepest pain.

God can be honored in honest prayers. You and I can be strengthened in honest prayers. In both of Jesus' prayers, I see Him stronger afterward. In the Garden, He would leave His disciples saying,

“I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world, you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world” (John 16:33).

Do you hear His confidence in those words, *“I have overcome the world”*? He was already assured of victory because He had submitted to the will of His Father. Satan held nothing over Him. There was the suffering He had to face, of course, but the battle had been won for Jesus when He had in honesty poured out the tension within and submitted himself to His Father's will.

Intercession

The other key part of His prayer life that I find woven throughout Scripture is that of intercession. A key element of His ministry on earth and now before the throne is to intercede for us:

- He prayed that Peter's faith would be strong and not fail (Luke 22:31).
- He prayed for the young man possessed by a demon (Mark 9:29).
- He prays for us even now before the throne (Romans 8: 33-34 and Hebrews 7:25).
- He prayed on the Cross, asking for forgiveness for those crucifying Him (Luke 23:34).

One other time of intercession where Scripture allows us a very intimate look is during His final hours before His arrest. We seem to have a fascination with the final hours of a person's life. What did they eat? What did they say?

What was on Jesus' mind? Take a look at John 17 and the following outline of what Jesus prayed about that evening. We can use it as an outstanding model for our own prayer life today:

- In John 17:1-3, Jesus prays *for the glory of His Father*. He wants God to be known and recognized by people. He was more concerned about God than Himself. He was willing to decrease at that moment as long as all the attention would be directed to the Father.
- In John 17:4-8, Jesus prays *about His mission*. Jesus had a clear sense of what His life was to be about, and He talked to the Father about it. Each of us has a different and unique mission given to us by God. It is good to talk to God about that in prayer so that we stay on course with the ministry He has called us to serve in our life.

- In John 17:9-19, Jesus prays *for His inner circle of friends*. Who is in your inner circle of friends? Jesus prays that they will be protected from the evil one, that they experience joy in life as He has known it and that they live with a sense of purpose, having been set apart and sent by the Father.
- In John 17:20-22, Jesus prays *for future generations* who will yet believe in Him. That includes you and me. That night, as He faced the agony of the Cross, you and I were on His mind and heart. Who are the future generations that you can be praying for even now? Future sons-in-law or daughters-in-law? Future children or grandchildren? Future believers from your neighborhood or workplace?
- In John 17:22, Jesus prays *for the world*. The term “global view” is not new to Jesus. Long ago, He was praying for the world, that they might know Him and bring glory to the Father. His passion causes me

to search and ask, “For whom in the world do I pray, that they might come to faith in Him?”

When I consider what Jesus prayed for on that night, I see the very heart of the Ablaze! Initiative: Praying for the glory of the Father. Praying for the mission and purpose He has given to us. Praying for the opportunity to share the Gospel of Christ with our inner circles. Praying for the world, that they might know Jesus.

My tennis game is very rusty these days.

My piano playing is confined to chopsticks and one-finger melodies (as long as there are not too many flats).

My prayer life is blessed daily by the example of Jesus.

Prayer: Jesus, in the crowdedness of this day, show me the blessing of withdrawing and spending time with you in prayer. Help me to learn how to grow in my prayer life that it would be marked with thanksgiving and honesty. Open my heart so that I might be touched by the needs of others and carry them to you in prayer. In your name I ask this. **Amen.**

Challenge: Using Jesus’ outline, pray this day for the glory of the Father, your mission in life, your inner circle, future generations, and the world.

Scripture Reading: John 17

From the Book of Concord: “Therefore, there is and remains in Christ only one single, divine omnipotence, power, majesty, and glory. They are the characteristics only of the divine nature; they shine forth, reveal, and show themselves fully, but spontaneously, in, with, and through the exalted assumed human nature in Christ. Just as in glowing iron there are not two kinds of power, to shine and to burn, but the power to shine and to burn is the characteristic of the fire. Nonetheless, because the fire has been united with the iron, it demonstrates and reveals its power to shine and to burn in, with, and through the glowing iron in such a way that even the glowing iron, on this basis and through this union, has the power to shine and to burn, without any transformation of the essence and the natural characteristics of fire and iron” (Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration, Article VIII: Person of Christ, p. 628.66).