

BULLEEN BAPTIST CHURCH

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"TEACH US TO PRAY" Study 2, Sunday, February 21, 2010
"Basic Prayer Principles." (Luke 9:28-36)

Notes by Rev. Gary Lockyer

Introduction to Today's Study

"Prayer is the divine enigma - that marvellous mystery hidden behind the cloud of God's omnipotence."

That would intimidate anyone who would dare pray! Dick Eastman redeems himself by continuing:

Basically prayer is the simplest act that we can perform. It is communicating with God our Father.
"The Hour That Changes The World." p17

Eastman is making the point we emphasised in Study 1 when we asked which statement about prayer was true:

*"Prayer is so **profound**, we will spend a life time learning ... if we can."*

OR

*"Prayer is so **simple** even a little child can pray."*

Of course it's not an "either / or" answer. Both are true. We have a tendency to see complications and miss the simple things.

In our Text today, Peter is so thrown by what he sees when Jesus is praying - his appearance changes, his clothing "flashes like lightening" and Moses and Elijah join him in deep conversation. Peter doesn't know what to do or say. He offers to build some temporary shelters!

As the men were leaving Jesus, Peter said, "Master, it's good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters - one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah." (He did not know what he was saying.) **Luke 9:33**

The Father suggests a more simple reaction:

A voice came from the cloud, saying, "This is my Son, whom I have chosen; listen to him." **Luke 9:35**

Instead of being OVERWHELMED, and rush off into useless activity, Peter was invited to recognise the authority of Jesus, and to be OBEДИENT in the things that matter!

So, this morning we are going to consider a few Basic principles of prayer to encourage us.

PRINCIPLE 1 : THE MAIN PURPOSE OF PRAYER

Prayer is not the mastery of a bag of spiritual techniques or formulae. It is an act of INTIMACY between the lover (God) and his beloved. (YOU!).

Growth in prayer doesn't come as we know more about PRAYER, but as we know more of GOD! and not an intellectual "knowing", but a personal knowing.

A. The Example of Jesus

... Jesus ... took Peter, John and James with him and went up onto a mountain to pray. **Luke 11:26**

When Jesus takes time to pray, he is not performing a DUTY, but maintaining a RELATIONSHIP.

His prayer life is an expression of his relationship with his Father and he needs to be alone with him and enjoy his presence and fellowship.

Jesus makes some pretty explicit statements about the closeness of that relationship:

"I can do nothing on my own. The Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does. For the Father loves the Son and shows him all he does. **John 5:19-20**

Maintaining that relationship is therefore his major priority as it defines both who he is and what he may accomplish:

I do nothing on my own but speak just what the Father has taught me. **John 8:29**

B. The Invitation To Us

... God ... chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons ... to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. **Ephesians 1:3-6**

Such INTIMACY not limited to Jesus. His stands as the model, but we are invited into the CIRCLE!

For example, listen to Paul:

... I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ ... I want to know Christ ... becoming like him ... **from Philippians 3:7-10**

Authentic Christianity is not learning a set of doctrines and then stepping into cadence with people all marching the same way. Nor is it simple humanitarian effort for the less fortunate. It is a walk, a supernatural walk with a living, dynamic, communicating God." Bill Hybels

PRINCIPLE 2 : BE HONEST

We noted in last week's Study that the Lord's Prayer invites us to be TRANSPARENT when we pray "Forgive us our sins."

Jesus warned his Disciples not to be like the hypocrites who delight to perform in public:

When you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. **Matthew 6:5-6**

We may not stand on corners praying in order to display our superior spirituality ... but we can just as easily put our masks on and pretend to be someone we're not. Paul Miller, in his book, "The Praying Life" suggests that in prayer we should "come MESSY" That's what little children do when they come to their father's open arms:

"They come as they are, runny noses and all ... they say just what is on their minds."

Miller suggests that it's important to come to God as we are. If we don't we are artificial and unreal.

If the "Real Us" doesn't show up, then we deny God the opportunity of working on the "real ME" and our relationship with him will not develop because we've fallen for the world's line that you have to be ATTRACTIVE to be LOVED

PRINCIPLE 3 : PRAY AS YOU CAN (NOT AS YOU CAN'T!)

This is an extension of Principle 2! If we say, in defeat, "I can't pray very well." we will likely:

Not pray at ALL, or if we do, adopt a FORMAL "prayer language" to hide behind.

In all that we do, we gain skill & experience as we proceed. Our first steps at anything we attempt are often hesitant and uncertain. So it is in prayer. Prayer is the journey of a lifetime. Should we judge our efforts by the distance yet to travel, we will too easily become discouraged. Worse yet, embarrassed by our faltering attempts (as we judge them), we too quickly imagine that God is also embarrassed!

A baby's early attempts at communication are not held against it at High School graduation! Parents are thrilled even at sounds that are meaningless to the casual listener. There are no exams in prayer, and God's reaction is just as any other parent's. So "pray as you can, not as you can't"

PRINCIPLE 4 : GRACE

Grace is the basic element of our relationship with God:

For it is by grace you have been saved ... not by works, so that no one can boast. **Ephesians 2:8-9**

In prayer, this means we cannot BARGAIN with God on the basis of human merit, ability or morality, God does not answer prayer because the pray-er is sincere, religious, talented, good-looking or possesses a pleasing personality.

God engages us in prayer because he DELIGHTS to do so