

IT'S TIME! ...an Urgent Call to Christian Mission
A mission study based upon the book by Daniel Vestal, Coordinator, Cooperative Baptist Fellowship

IT'S TIME! ... TO PRAY

Lesson 2

“The one who loves much prays much, and the one who prays much loves much.”
(Chinese Proverb)

Introduction

- If the Church is to follow God into the world, we must first discern where God is moving; otherwise, we will be misrepresenting *our will as God's*, *baptizing our* desires as God's.
- Prayer is one of the primary modes by which God communicates with us;
- It follows, then, that being missional necessitates an fervent, vital prayer life.
- In his book, *In the Name of Jesus*, Henri Nouwen writes, “If there is any focus the Christian leader of the future will need, it is the discipline of dwelling in the presence of the One who keeps asking us, ‘Do you love me? Do you love me? Do you love me?’ It is the discipline of contemplative prayer.”
- Contemplative prayer opens us up to the heart of God; it sensitizes us to the needs of those in our midst who are suffering from oppression, scarcity, and injustice; and it can slowly conform our will to God's will.
- In sum, fervent prayer avails much!
- Daniel Vestal writes that prayer is an act of love - we pray for people because we care about them.
- A Gallup poll revealed that over 75 percent of Americans pray.
 - That is an astounding number considering that less than 25 percent regularly go to worship services.
- “On a daily basis, Americans claim they are twice as likely to say ‘I love you’ as to say a curse word, and six times more likely to say a prayer than to take a drink.”(Fox News, 12/19/04)
- The bottom line for many people regarding prayer is this:
 - They want to know, “Can prayer actually do something to make my life different and better.”
- The whole concept of prayer is based on this one fact: ***God wants to communicate with us.***
- The real quest of prayer is to know God, and not to get stuff.
- God's response to our prayers is always consistent with His nature.
- Daniel Vestal is most insightful when he states:

“The fuel that causes the fire of prayer to burn is love. The passion that compels fervent prayer is love. The power that sustains persistent prayer is love.” (p.11)
- Thus, as Vestal concludes, “The more we love, the more we will pray.”

- This week as we continue our series on being missional Christians and a missional church, our attention is focused on the missional Jesus—our Master Prayer.
- As we learned last week, the first step in becoming missional Christians is to embrace the mind of Christ.
- Once that process of transformation has begun, we then begin to display the attributes of His life that will enable us to be agents of spiritual formation and transformation as well.
- Of all the wonderful things that Jesus taught us, perhaps among the greatest of these can be found in his personal prayer life and what he taught us about how to pray as well.
- The premise of our lesson this week is that if we want to be missional Christians and a missional church, we need to develop intensity, persistence, and urgency in our personal prayer lives, not unlike that of Jesus Christ Himself.
- Moreover, we must remember that such intensity, persistence, and urgency must be wrapped in agape love!
 - 1 Corinthians 13

1. Prayer as Listening to God

- Daniel Vestal encourages us to approach prayer as “a way of life that cannot be separated from an attitude of attentiveness.” (p. 12)
- We must assume a posture in which we learn to listen and listen to learn.
- Most important is the practice of listening and learning to let God communicate love.
- Prayer becomes a way of life in which we are in a position to continuously receive the free, unconditional love and grace of God.
- To do this, Vestal identifies three disciplines that will help us receive God’s love.

The Disciplines:

1. Solitude

- “Be still and know that I am God.” (Psalm 46:10)
- “There is a place of quiet rest, near to the heart of God.”

2. Divine reading

- Reflective, attentive, expectant
- Regular, systematic
- Anticipate meeting God

3. Abandonment

- “Let go and let God...”
- Give to God those things we cannot control or change
- Conscientious, intentional, continuous surrender

2. Prayer as Learning to Love

- One of the most wonderful aspects of our relationship with God is that the more love we receive, the more we are compelled (impelled?) to give that love to others.

- Vestal says that one way we do that is through prayer based upon petition and intercession.
- According to Vestal, prayer is “an act of love” as we enter “into the need and suffering of the world, sharing the same love that God has for the world, and then participating with God for the good of the world.” (p.14)
- He then offers seven practical suggestions to guide us as we learn “how to make intercessory prayer as act of love and a way of life.”
 1. Immerse yourself in practical service and personal witness where you live.
 2. Nurture friendships with individuals of a different culture and in different parts of the world than where you live.
 3. Learn as much as you can about the “life situation” of other people.
 4. Imagine Jesus being in the place of the one for whom your pray.
 5. Imagine someone very close or dear to you being in the place of the one for whom you pray.
 6. Imagine yourself as being in the place of the one for whom you pray.
 7. Embrace the struggles of learning to intercede as a necessary part of your own discipleship.
- This is Not Why We Pray
 - We do not pray to impress others.
 - In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says that people who pray publicly with the goal of being heard by others get just what they want: the other people hear their prayers, and God does not.
 - We do not pray in order to give God information.
 - It’s not as if we say, “Lord, we want to pray for Betty Smith, who is in the hospital with pneumonia,” and God says, “I’m so glad you told me– I did not know that!”
 - We do not pray to manipulate God; or to compel God to manipulate others on our behalf.
- So why *do* we pray?
 - ♦ The most concise answer is: obedience– we pray because God said to.
 - ♦ But why does God tell us to pray?
 - ♦ Like everything God tells us to do, it is for our good.
 - ♦ We need to have an active relationship with our Creator, and prayer is the primary means by which we nurture that relationship.
 - ♦ Counselors remind us that relationships take work, and the primary tool we use to do that work is communication.
 - ♦ The very same thing is true of our relationship with God:
 - we need to work at it,
 - to be invested in it,
 - to nurture it; and
 - prayer, which is communication with God, is the primary way we do that.
- So, *how* do we pray?
 - ♦ In Matthew 6:9-13, we find the most common version of what is often called the “model prayer.”
 - ♦ Luke records a different version in Chapter 11 and follows it with an interesting parable.
 - ♦ In Chapter 18, Luke provides an account of a second parable about prayer.

- ♦ So in both cases, the persons being petitioned– the stingy neighbor and the unjust judge– grant the request because of the *persistence* of the petitioners.
- ♦ So was Jesus teaching the disciples (and us) that by nagging God we will eventually get that for which we pray?
I don't think so.
- ♦ With both of these stories, Jesus is using a teaching method very common among the rabbis known as a *lesser to greater argument*.
- ♦ Basically it says: if *this* is true, how much more is *that* true?
 - E.g., “If a candle gives off light and warmth, how much more does the sun give off light and warmth?”
- In the parable of the uncaring judge, Jesus is saying, “If an uncaring, unethical judge will grant justice to a persistent widow, how much more will a loving, caring God be just, fair, even gracious, to those who faithfully pray?”
- In the parable of the stingy neighbor, Jesus is saying, “If a selfish neighbor will share, or give, because of a persistent request, how much more will a generous God give to and share with those who faithfully pray?”
- In fact, in Luke 11, Jesus expands his lesser to great argument with the analogy of parenting.
- He says, “Who among you, if your child asks for a fish, will give your child a snake instead? Who among you, if your child asks for an egg, will give your child a scorpion?”
- Then Jesus says, “If you, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will God give the Holy Spirit to the daughters and sons of God?”
- Of the truths in this text, there are two on which we should focus closely:
 - ♦ First, our culture focuses on the material and the tangible, but God focuses on the spiritual.
 - I think that our culture has influenced our practice of prayer in this regard.
 - When we say, “Lord, bless us, and make us prosper,” we mean material blessings, financial prosperity.
 - But what does Jesus say in the last verse of our scripture?
 - “How much more will God give us *the Holy Spirit?*”
 - We focus on the material, but God focuses on the spiritual.
 - So, *how* do we pray?
 - ♦ Second, God's top priority is relationships.
 - I said at the outset that prayer is the primary means by which we nurture our relationship with God.
 - Now be clear: the Bible repeatedly says that we can pray about anything; but if we hear what Jesus is saying here, at the top of our prayer lists should be, “Lord, give us the Holy Spirit. Dwell with us and in us so that we can have a relationship with you. As you have loved us in Jesus Christ, help us love you.” (Hopkins, 2007)
- I cannot honestly say that that is at the top of my prayer list every time I pray.
- Maybe the same is true for you.
- As we read in Romans 8: 26-27, Paul recognized this same truth:
- “We do not know how to pray as we ought.”

- Did you also notice how the preface to each of the versions of the “model prayer” (Matthew and Luke) began?

With the disciples saying to Jesus, “Lord, teach us to pray.”

- The implication is: we do not know how to pray as we ought:
 - ♦ We focus on the material rather than the spiritual.
 - ♦ We focus on self rather than on God.
 - ♦ We think of prayer as a way to manipulate circumstances or even God.
 - ♦ We mistakenly think that something is too small for God to care about or too large for God to handle.
- Sometimes it is the events, or circumstances, of our lives which hinder prayer.
- If we have lived very long, we have experienced a time when pain or grief or anger or fear or confusion– or some combination thereof– left us unable or unwilling to pray in any meaningful sense.
- In Romans 8:26-27, Paul gives us one of the most hopeful statements in the New Testament. Paul says:

When we are too weary, too sick, too hurt, too afraid, too angry, too depressed, too confused to even articulate a prayer, the Holy Spirit comes into the depths of our hearts and takes all of that jumble of anguish and emotion, which can only be expressed in groanings too deep for words; the Holy Spirit takes all of that and makes it into just the right prayer and carries that prayer from our hearts to the heart of God. (Hopkins)
- I don’t know of anything that is better news.
- Tony Hopkins tells the story of a little boy who was at the prayer rail of his church. As the minister walked by, he realized that the child was reciting the alphabet. After he had listened for a few moments, he said, “Son, why are you saying your ABC’s at the prayer rail?” The little boy said, “I don’t really know how to pray, so I come here and say my ABC’s, because I know that God will put the letters together to make the right words to make a good prayer.”
- No wonder Jesus tells us to have the faith of a child.
- If we will give our hearts to God in love and childlike faith, the words and the prayers– and the answers to prayer– will come.

Conclusion

Is this possible? Can we follow the example of the Master Prayer? Can we...

- Pray with that same frequency with which Jesus prayed?
- Pray with fervency, compassion, and passion?
- Pray with a powerful sense of urgency?
- Pray in obedience?
- Pray with complete and reverent submission?
- Pray victoriously?
- Pray with intimacy to the One who is our Father?
- Pray that in all things He would be glorified?
- Pray prayers of petition and intercession entering the lives of others and seeing their needs as Christ sees them?

- Pray that we would be sanctified and sent according to His call in our lives?
- Pray for unity and oneness that all might experience the power of His love?
- Pray with the same kind of love (agape) that Jesus had in His heart for each of us?"

Johann Sebastian Bach, perhaps the greatest composer of all times always began his compositions with a two-word prayer.

On his original manuscripts, you can see the letters "J.J." These letters stand for "Jesu juvet," the Latin words for "Jesus, help."

At the end of each Bach manuscript are three more letters that he always put there: "S.D.G.," which stand for "Sola Deo Gloria." In Latin these words mean, "To God alone be the glory."

As we continue our quest to be more missional in our lifestyle and in our church, may these words ring out to us each day!

Benediction

Gracious, Loving God,

A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z.

AMEN

Teachings from the Master Prayer

Jesus had an active prayer life. Engage with the following passages in which he prays or speaks about prayer. As you read the words, let them instruct and guide you to find approaches that can enrich your own prayer life.

As a beginning point, focus your attention on the book of Luke, which many see as the gospel of prayer, as it pictures Jesus in prayer at all the great moments of His life.

- ♦ Luke 3:21—He was in prayer at His baptism.
- ♦ Luke 5:16—He was in prayer before His first collision with the Pharisees.
- ♦ Luke 6:12—He was in prayer all night before He chose the twelve disciples.
- ♦ Luke 9:18—He was in prayer before the first prediction of His death.
- ♦ Luke 9:29—He was in prayer at the Mount of Transfiguration.
- ♦ Luke 22:41—He was in prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane.
- ♦ Luke 22:32—He told Peter that He prayed for him in regards to his time of testing.
- ♦ Luke 23:46—He was even in prayer on the cross.

The *times* that Jesus prayed were also many and varied.

- ♦ Mark 1:35—He prayed in the early morning.
- ♦ Matthew 14:23—He prayed at night.
- ♦ Luke 6:12—He prayed all night.
- ♦ Luke 9:16; 24:30; Matthew 15:36; 26:26-27—He prayed at mealtime.

Jesus also prayed for others.

John 17:11

I will remain in the world no longer, but they are still in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name—the name you gave me—so that they may be one as we are one.

John 17:20-21

My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me.

What is Intercessory Prayer?

Quite simply, intercessory prayer is the act of praying on behalf of others. The role of mediator in prayer was prevalent in the Old Testament, in the cases of Abraham, Moses, David, Samuel, Hezekiah, Elijah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel. Christ is pictured in the New Testament as the ultimate intercessor, and because of this, all Christian prayer becomes intercession since it is offered to God through and by Christ. Jesus closed the gap between us and God when He died on the cross. Because of Jesus' mediation, we can now intercede in prayer on behalf of other Christians or for the lost, asking God to grant their requests according to His will. "For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Timothy 2:5). "Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us" (Romans 8:34).

A wonderful model of intercessory prayer is found in Daniel 9. It has all the elements of true intercessory prayer. It is in response to the Word (v. 2); characterized by fervency (v. 3) and self-denial (v. 4); identified unselfishly with God's people (v. 5); strengthened by confession (v. 5-15); dependent on God's character (vv. 4, 7, 9, 15); and has as its goal God's glory (vv. 16-19). Like Daniel, Christians are to come to God on behalf of others in a heartbroken and repentant attitude, recognizing their own unworthiness and with a sense of self-denial. Daniel does not say, "I have a right to demand this out of You, God, because I am one of your special, chosen intercessors." He says, "I'm a sinner," and, in effect, "I do not have a right to demand anything." True intercessory prayer seeks not only to know God's will and see it fulfilled, but to see it fulfilled whether or not it benefits us and regardless of what it costs us. True intercessory prayer seeks God's glory, not our own.

The following is only a partial list of those for whom we are to offer intercessory prayers: all in authority (1 Timothy 2:2); ministers (Philippians 1:19); the church (Psalm 122:6); friends (Job 42:8); fellow countrymen (Romans 10:1); the sick (James 5:14); enemies (Jeremiah 29:7); those who persecute us (Matthew 5:44); those who forsake us (2 Timothy 4:16); and all men (1 Timothy 2:1).

There is an erroneous idea in contemporary Christianity that those who offer up intercessory prayers are a special class of "super-Christians," called by God to a specific ministry of intercession. The Bible is clear that *all* Christians are called to be intercessors. All Christians have the Holy Spirit in their hearts and, just as He intercedes for us in accordance with God's will (Romans 8:26-27), we are to intercede for one another. This is not a privilege limited to an exclusive Christian elite; this is the command to all. In fact, not to intercede for others is sin. "As for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the LORD by failing to pray for you" (1 Samuel 12:23).

Certainly Peter and Paul, when asking others to intercede for them, did not limit their request to those with a special calling to intercession. "So Peter was kept in prison, but the church was earnestly praying to God for him" (Acts 12:5). Notice it was the whole church that prayed for him, not just those with a gift of intercession. In Ephesians 6:16-18, Paul exhorts the Ephesian believers—all of them—on the fundamentals of the Christian life, which includes intercession "on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests." Clearly, intercessory prayer is part of the Christian life for all believers.

Further, Paul sought prayer on his behalf from all the Roman believers in Romans 15:30. He also urged the Colossians to intercede for him in Colossians 4:2-3. Nowhere in any biblical request for intercession is there any indication that only a certain group of people could intercede. On the contrary, those who seek others to intercede for them can use all the help

they can get! The idea that intercession is the privilege and calling of only some Christians is without biblical basis. Worse, it is a destructive idea that often leads to pride and a sense of superiority.

God calls all Christians to be intercessors. It is God's desire that every believer be active in intercessory prayer. What a wonderful and exalted privilege we have in being able to come boldly before the throne of Almighty God with our prayers and requests!

SOURCE: <http://www.gotquestions.org/intercessory-prayer.html>

What is prayer walking? Is it Biblical to go on a prayer walk?

Prayer walking is the practice of praying on location, a type of intercessory prayer that involves walking to or near a particular place while praying. Some people believe that being close to a location allows them to “pray nearer to pray clearer.” Prayer walks are taken by individuals, groups, and even whole churches. They can be as short as a block or as long as many miles. The idea is to use the five senses—sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch—to increase the intercessor’s understanding of prayer needs.

For example, if you walk through your neighborhood looking for things to pray about, you might come across a yard that is extremely untidy and rundown. This might prompt you to pray for the health, both physical and spiritual, of the residents inside. Some groups prayer walk around schools, prompting prayer for the teachers and students inside, for their safety and peace, and for the schemes of the devil in their school to be thwarted. Some people feel they can concentrate and direct their prayers more effectively by walking near the people and places they are praying for.

Prayer walking is a relatively new phenomenon, the origin of which is not clear. There is no biblical model for prayer walking, although since walking was the major mode of transportation in Bible times, clearly people must have walked and prayed at the same time. However, there is no direct command that prayer walking is something we should be doing. To believe that prayers offered in any setting, or while in any position, are more effective than those offered at another time or in another manner is not scriptural. In addition, while we may feel we need to be close to a location or situation to pray more clearly, our heavenly Father, who is everywhere at all times, knows exactly what needs are present and will respond to them in His own perfect will and timing. The fact that He allows us to be part of His plans through our prayers is for our benefit, not His.

We are commanded to “pray without ceasing” (1 Thessalonians 5:17), and since walking is something we do daily, surely part of praying without ceasing is praying while walking. God hears all prayers offered by those who abide in Christ (John 15:7), regardless of time, place, or position. At the same time, there certainly is no command against prayer walking, and anything that prompts us to pray is worthy of consideration.

SOURCE: <http://www.gotquestions.org/prayer-walking.html>. Downloaded 2-1-10.