

3. Heart to Heart

Understanding Prayer

Where are you coming from?

- What's your experience of prayer been?
- Have you ever felt close to God in prayer?
- Is prayer something that comes easily, or do you wish you could get better at it?

What Gives?

The original twelve disciples spent over three years up close and personal with Jesus, the most impressive human being to ever live. They had ring side seats as his speaking drew thousands, they saw him performing miracles, they watched him heal the sick and when he raised someone from the dead, they were there.

Yet the gospels tell us that they only asked him to teach them one thing.

It wasn't how to speak, how to delight crowds, how to perform miracles. It was how to pray.

That's what they found most impressive about Jesus. They saw him withdraw and pray on his own. He often went to solitary places to spend time with his Father. The passion, the intimacy and the effectiveness of his prayers - these were the things that captured the disciples' imagination and gave them something to aspire to.

The Key

Read Luke 11.1-4

One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he finished, one of his disciples said to him, 'Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples.'

He said to them, 'When you pray, say:

"Father, hallowed be your name,

Your kingdom come.

Give us each day our daily bread.

Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us.

And lead us not into temptation."

We call this the Lord's Prayer, but really it should be called the Disciples' Prayer - after all, Jesus had no need of forgiveness of sin. But he gave it to the disciples to help them, and us, develop a prayer life like his.

The key to understanding this passage is to note that the disciples gave Jesus a very specific request: teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples. The way that John taught his disciples was through a practice common to Rabbi's of the time, and that's the cue that Jesus took. Essentially this prayer is a Headline Prayer. Each different line is a cue for a different type of prayer.

Discussion

- Why does the prayer start off focusing on God and his character? What does this accomplish?
- What does it mean to pray for God's Kingdom to come? Another version of this prayer in Matthew's Gospel adds the words, 'Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven'. What does this mean? Doesn't God's will just happen anyway?
- In your situation, what would constitute 'daily bread'? What sort of prayer is this and why don't we start with these kinds of requests?
- Why does Jesus wait so long to lead us into examining our sins? Is it okay to pray for all the other things first, before getting all the negative stuff of our own chests? Why is God's forgiveness of us linked with our forgiveness of others?
- Why does Jesus end with temptation? Isn't that a bit of a downer? And does God ever actually lead us into temptation? Matthew ends with the words, 'but deliver us from evil'. What does this mean for us?

What Next?

There are many ways to pray and the Bible is full of them. You can send out short 'arrow prayers' during the day. You can spend time in silence and contemplation. You can pray with singing and you can pray with your physical body. The Bible encourages us to be in an attitude of prayer at all times of the day.

But this simple Disciples' Prayer is a good spiritual discipline to develop. A daily journey that connects your heart to God's heart and enables you to grow in faith.

Learn to walk through the Five Sections.

1. God's Goodness

Start by focusing on God's character and goodness. Thank God for being your Father. Consider and name the things that make him special - hallow His name. List the things He's done for you and all the things you can be grateful for.

2. God's Kingdom

Secondly, pray for the world with all its issues, problems and pain. Pray that God's perfect Kingdom - his dream for humanity - would come more and more fully into those situations. Pray for friends and family. Pray for God's will to be accomplished in your world and with those that you love.

3. My Needs

Pray for your challenges and opportunities this day. Consciously ask God to come close to you and help you with the things you face.

4. My Sin

Ask God to show you where you've failed and fallen. Spend moments in quiet reflection and ask for God's forgiveness and cleansing. Take time to forgive in your heart the ones that have wronged you and those that you still feel hurt by.

5. God's Help

Pray for God's strength and Spirit to live the way He's called you to live. Name the areas of struggle and temptation before God your Father and ask for His power to overcome. Pray for your Father to protect you from the insidious oppression of evil.

Goals for the week:

- Decide on a regular time that you can set aside during the week to pray through the Disciples' Prayer. Develop a routine that works for you.
- Determine how much time you're going to aim for. Start somewhere between 5 minutes and 15 minutes.
- Pray through the 5 sections - God's Goodness, God's Will, My Needs, My Sin, God's Help. Knowing the words to the prayer helps you remember what comes where. Which is the whole point of the prayer, really.
- Make a note of little answers to prayer as they come up.
- Expect God to meet with you, heart to heart.