

Prayer – Lanes and Lines

1. When it comes to prayer, a lot of us feel left out. Our experience doesn't seem as positive as all those answered-prayer stories we hear about in preacher stories.
 - a. Here's the truth: God is not a cosmic vending machine and your prayers are not coins. And that's a good thing.
 - b. Think of the spoiled brats, the petty tyrants we would become if everything we asked for was automatically given!
 - c. If that was the way prayer worked, WE would be God and HE would just be our employee. Yikes.
 - d. Still...we hurt when our prayers experience isn't the same as some of those around us. (I used to doubt them. I don't now)
 - e. And there's that promise: Promises to do whatever we ask him to do? Check the context. He was talking to the apostles. It wasn't a blanket promise and taking that promise out of context has ended a lot of prayer lives.

2. Prayer is mighty – and it does change things. One of the first things it changes is your isolation. As we go through these 40 days of fervent prayer, I want you to notice something about the prayers: they are not nearly as “me” focused as most of our prayers are (am I assuming too much?).
 - a. [ONE] Prayer is about the community, not the individual.
 - b. Jesus promised to be with us in groups. And when groups made a decision, he said he would also agree.
 - c. And yet, it is so difficult to keep prayer from sliding toward the highly individual. Bless me, guide me, give me...

3. We sometimes need to pray in a closet, as Jesus said. But even there, prayer is a community event. In fact, it is one of the fastest ways to build a solid, loving community.
 - a. The prayers for those in my classes when I was in Jr. High.
 - b. Prayers for waiters and waitresses, those we come into contact with. Builds a bond between you.

- c. What would it do to your outlook and place in this community if you dedicated yourself to praying for the people here? Elders, the people in the pew with you, those you see on the platform...?
 - d. What if those prayers were done daily, in community? Or with the goal of establishing community with others, especially your enemies? (Jesus didn't say don't have them. He said to love and serve them. That will take care of enemies by bringing them into community. Faith and Culture)
4. But what if you struggle with prayer? Let's move beyond the Prayer of Jabez-style fantasies and self centered prayer. Let's get past repetition of phrases that have long lost their meaning. Let's learn what kind of prayer God is looking for.
5. **[TWO]** God wants to spend time with you. God wants you to learn about Him and to want what He wants. He wants you to see the world the way He sees it. And prayer is where that happens.
6. **[THREE]** Pray step by step. We usually pray for a complete solution without allowing time or space for a process.
- a. we want uncle Charlie, who has never shown any interest in religion, to become a born again believer.
 - b. We want a dysfunctional family to become a model of peace and love.
 - c. We want the loved one with cancer to be completely healthy.
 - d. These prayers are fine... but don't forget the journey. John 14-16 has several promises about answering prayers, but it also promises persecution, pain, and death.
 - e. This is a journey we are walking with Jesus. How did we get to the point where we expect better treatment than he got?
 - f. **[FOUR]** The complete solution to any problem is Jesus Christ and that has already been given. We work in the details, the journey, daily from house to house.

7. About that “journey” thing – when you go to God in prayer, He might want to involve you in the solution. You might have to become active. **[FIVE]**
- a. To Peter in prison, “Rise up quickly.”
 - b. To Gideon on the threshing floor, “Arise in the strength you already possess.”
 - c. A depressed Elijah is told “get up and eat.”
 - d. When Herod starts killing children, Joseph is told to “go quickly.”
 - e. Philip was told “go hitch a ride in that chariot.”
 - f. When angels appear in answer to prayer they never leave you the option of doing nothing.
 - g. “Bless them”? Are you willing to be the conduit of that blessing?
 - h. When the disciples were wondering about how to feed the multitudes, Jesus said, “Get them something to eat.”
 - i. C.S. Lewis said “It is always easier to pray for a bore than to visit him.”
8. **[SIX]** Often, the difference between those whose prayers are answered and those who more often get only silence is that the former are active, seeking out a way to carry out God’s purposes by His means.
- a. Active prayer is setting up a rendezvous with God. How can God meet that need? What does He want for this person? For the community?
 - b. That changes prayer from being a private, personal event to a community building powerhouse.
9. Are you only praying when there is a crisis? When dropping to your knees is only a way to dodge a blow, you are in trouble.
- a. Think about it. If God were to swoop in every time we hit difficulties, we would learn nothing about how we got into such a problem in the first place (lottery winners are usually worse than broke within two years).
 - b. No good parent wants to subsidize their child’s irresponsibility. (few of us die of natural causes. We die a bit at a time, unraveling through our habits)

- c. God wants us to learn from our mistakes – and that means we need to experience some consequences. (and the “us” might be the community, not us as individuals.
 - d. It’s nice to be saved from disasters, but we really need to get the point.
10. God wants to do more than help us – He wants to transform us. Look at John 14-16 and see in what context the prayer promises were in. Jesus is talking about bringing glory to the Father, the coming of the Spirit, and living in the Spirit in order to bring much fruit to the Lord.
 11. [SEVEN] Aim at what God is aiming at. Make spiritual growth and love the core element, the target, of every prayer.
 12. Break down your big problems into smaller steps.
 13. Move out of the couch potato school of prayer and into setting a rendezvous with God.
 14. Use prayer to learn from your trials – not just escape from them.
 15. And turn your prayers from yourself to the community, daily, and from house to house.