

NEXT STEPS Message Series – Week 2 – PRAYER and Sacraments



Welcome everyone. We are so glad you are here. If you missed last week's message I invite you to go to our website and just click on Message series.

Last Sunday we kicked off the series *STEPS steps we need to take to grow/build* our faith . Simple steps - not *easy* but they are entirely *simple*.

We identified these specific STEPS, each of which are, in fact, *life style choices* choices that we think are essential to building and strengthening our faith. We said that these STEPS are all important to take because through them our relationship with Jesus can grow and he can change and transform us.

The steps we are talking about are not obligations. We said that as soon as you look at them that way you weaken their potential effectiveness. The steps we're talking about are aimed at *simplifying* not *complicating* your life.

STEPS we said is an acronym:

S is about service in a ministry. Jesus called himself a servant and that's what he wants his followers to be.

T is about treasure and giving. God is generous. God is a giver and we can use our money to become more like him.

E is engage which is about small groups. Faith is personal, not private. It needs to be lived out in a community of people.

P is the practice of prayer and the sacraments.

S Lastly we talk about sharing our faith. our faith actually grows as we share this message with others.

The steps are not necessarily taken in any particular order so neither will our series.

Today we're talking about **P**. The practice of prayer as an important step of faith probably doesn't shock you. **But here is what might surprise you: you may be praying wrong.** That can sound a bit offensive.

Is there really a right and a wrong way to pray? **There is.**

To help us understand that, we are to turn to the Letter of James. It was written as advice to all Christians to help them grow in faith and spiritual maturity. We're looking at the 4th chapter where he asks this very poignant question.

Where do the wars and conflicts among you come from?

James 4.1

This is a pretty good question. Why are there wars between nations? Why are the wars in our families at work? The news is full of conflicts that rage out in the wider world, but it isn't just out there, maybe it was in your house this weekend, **or your car this morning.**

Why does there have to be all this fighting? Perhaps - conflict comes from a lack of *resources or boundaries*.

- If your sons each had their own room they wouldn't fight
- If every department got their budget approved then there wouldn't be conflict.
- If they would just listen to one another the marriage could actually work
- If they would just sit down and talk the battle could end. Perhaps it comes from *ideology*.

But really those are just contributing factors to the real problem. James says: ***Is it not from your passions that make war? You covet but do not possess. You kill and envy but you cannot obtain.*** James 4.2-3

By "passions" he means, collectively, all the ways in which we want **more**. There is this disordered part in all of us that wants *what* we want, *when* we want it. We can be envious and selfish. There is conflict on the *outside* because there is a war in the *inside*. And this is where prayer enters the picture.

James says, ***You do not possess because you do not ask.*** James 4.2

Asking is about prayer. Sometimes we don't have- because we don't pray about it. How often does that happen. How many times have you got annoyed and angry with another but neither of you once stopped to pray about the situation.

We want something, we need something and we never even ask.

Or...

You do ask but do not receive because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions. James 4.3

Do you know why God answers some of your prayers with a resounding "no" ? James says you are praying for the wrong things, foolish or selfish things.

In prayer of course we bring our needs to God. And if we ask as he teaches us to ask, we'll receive a positive response. How do we do that?

Submit yourselves to God.

James 4.7

When you pray in a way in which you are submitting to God, a force of greater power and authority, that is a strategic decision aimed at success and victory. Then he comes to the main point of prayer:

Draw near to God and he will draw near to you. James 4.8

The point of prayer is not about getting what we want, or manipulating God to give us what we want. The point of prayer is drawing closer to God. so we can hear his voice and follow him.

Then he says,

Humble yourselves before the Lord and he will exalt you.

James 4.10

Go to God with a humble heart. Pray in a manner in which you confess that God is God *and you're not...*and he will exalt you.

- Approach God in prayer with a humble heart
- And you submit to him.

That's why kneeling is a great posture for prayer. - Use your needs and wants to draw closer to God. It's a life-long lesson to learn. It is a lifestyle choice to keep meeting God in prayer.

And when you commit to that lifestyle choice you will experience a significant reduction in unhealthy conflict in your life.

So how do we get better at prayer? How do we pray so that we grow our in a relationship with Christ?

First, you have to practice it. Prayer is just like working out. Do it rarely and its difficult (and you're probably not going to be any good at it). So, as a result, you don't *like* it. So, as a result, you do it even less.

When it comes to prayer, it is helpful to understand that most of us are beginners, the majority of Christians remain beginners, and that's OK. Acknowledging that will help keep us from becoming discouraged or impatient with our efforts.

Second, you need a plan to practice.

You need content. You need something to pray, something to say. Without content you start thinking about the Eaglesand dream of another super bowl or what you are going to have for lunch.

Find a daily devotional on the computer, there are so many out there, from Matthew Kelly to inspirational from the Jesuits that are great because they have a context for your daily prayer based on the weekend gospel or readings.

Third, identify a regular time and place to practice.

for your daily quiet time, find a *time* that works best for you. If you are a morning person do it first thing in the morning. If you are not a morning person, if you are no fun to be around in the morning, if even Jesus doesn't want to be around you in the morning then find a different time that works for you, a time when you can bring the most energy and application.

And then determine a **place** – a place where you can go and be alone with God. As you keep going to that place, whether it is your favorite chair at home, or somewhere quiet in your office, it will actually become a more sacred and holy place.

Then there is your weekly worship here at Mass, in which we receive the Word of God as he gives himself to us in Scripture and in Holy Communion.

Weekly worship is going to be far richer and rewarding, it's going to be the nourishment and encouragement it's meant to be if it is matched with that daily quiet time. In turn, the Eucharist can be the source and summit of a life lived with prayer.

We often think of prayer as a good thing to do, but not essential, except in times of emergency. Prayer is, in fact, the game changer when it comes to the better **you** you're aiming at...the one increasingly free from anger and pride, and war and conflict, because we're bringing that stuff to God instead of to our other relationship.

Prayer is essential if we're to win the war inside us, submit to God and grow as disciples. Discipleship is simply following the Lord, step by step. It's not perfection, We're not talking about perfection. None of us is perfect. It's not about perfection, it's about direction. It's following the Lord step by step... In the direction of discipleship.

A little bit more today than yesterday A little bit more tomorrow than today
And in the process our life is simply more successful. The steps are steps to life change.