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## Heart and Soul ... A Weekly Meditation

December 13, 2015

### A Fresh Approach to Prayer

*“Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he finished, one of his disciples said, ‘Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples.’”*

Luke 11:1 (Common English Bible)

In the late 60’s and early 70’s *The Newlywed Game* was a popular television show. The show would place newly married couples against each other in a series of revealing question rounds that determined how well the spouses knew or did not know each other. There would be two rounds; the wives taken off stage first while the husbands were asked three questions. The wives were then brought back into the studio and asked for their answers to the same three questions. Once the wife gave her answer, the husband revealed the answer he gave – written on a blue card - in her absence. Five points would be awarded to the couple that shared the same answer. The roles were reversed in round two, the wives asked to answer questions about their husbands. The couple that had the highest score at the end of the show won.

Imagine a similar game that put to the test how well we know God, how well we understand God’s purpose for our lives. I suspect many of us would be embarrassed. Here, in Luke’s Gospel, the disciples came upon Jesus when he was praying. Tremendously moved by what they saw, the disciples asked Jesus to teach them to pray. There is no hint in this passage that the disciples witnessed answers to Jesus’ prayers. Results weren’t what caught their imagination. There was something else. Something that went much deeper.

If we dispense with the notion that prayer is only about answers, that prayer is simply presenting pleas when we are in need, in danger or a crisis, our eyes are cleared to see what the disciples saw when they came upon Jesus at prayer. In Jesus’ prayer the disciples saw a concentration and absorption into a relationship with God of which they had no experience. Jesus’ prayers demonstrated a deliberate and sustained cultivation of a relationship with God that would put Jesus in the winner’s seat of *The Newlywed Game*. What is clear in this passage is that the disciples wanted the same.

Perhaps the greatest difficulty with prayer today is that many are simply out of touch with God. Prayer is reduced to instinct rather than habit, to approaching God out of need rather than a regular cultivation of a personal relationship with our creator. And that is our deepest need - to renew our acquaintance with God. Prayers that flow from instinct tend to be self-centered. The prayer of Jesus is God-centered. It is prayer that takes time to cultivate and requires extraordinary perseverance. But once this fresh approach to prayer is mastered don’t be surprised if another approaches you and asks, “Teach me to pray like that.”

Doug Hood