Hi,

Happy Friday. Today’s updates:

* My Sunday class will be the fourth and final week of *Biblical Women You Want to Know, but Probably Don’t*. It will be on [my new Facebook page: “Scott Engle - St. Andrew UMC”](https://www.facebook.com/Scott-Engle-St-Andrew-UMC-110365790736617/?modal=admin_todo_tour) at 11am CDT Sunday. On Aug 9, we will begin a new series, *Living Hope*.
* My 3pm Monday class on Matthew and my noon Tuesday class on Genesis will meet next week, both on [my new Facebook page](https://www.facebook.com/Scott-Engle-St-Andrew-UMC-110365790736617/?modal=admin_todo_tour).
* The links to my on-line classes, the video recordings of the classes, the class audio podcasts, and the archive of these daily emails can all be found at [www.scottengle.org](http://scottengle.org/scotts-weekly-classes/). All the postings are up-to-date.
* The Weekly Bible Study is attached.

I know that we all thirst and hunger for the end of this pandemic and a return to something like “normal,” but do we thirst and hunger for God before all else?

***Psalm 34:1-8; 17-19 (The Message)***

**I bless God every chance I get; my lungs expand with his praise.**

**I live and breathe God; if things aren’t going well, hear this and be happy: Join me in spreading the news; together let’s get the word out.**

**God met me more than halfway, he freed me from my anxious fears.**

**Look at him; give him your warmest smile.**

**Never hide your feelings from him.**

**When I was desperate, I called out, and God got me out of a tight spot.**

**God’s angel sets up a circle of protection around us while we pray.**

**Open your mouth and taste, open your eyes and see—how good God is.**

**Blessed are you who run to him.**

**Is anyone crying for help? God is listening, ready to rescue you.**

**If your heart is broken, you’ll find God right there; if you’re kicked in the gut, he’ll help you catch your breath.**

**Disciples so often get into trouble; still, God is there every time.**

***Psalm 63:1-8 (NRSV)***

**O God, you are my God, I seek you, my soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water.**

**So I have looked upon you in the sanctuary, beholding your power and glory.**

**Because your steadfast love is better than life, my lips will praise you.**

**So I will bless you as long as I live; I will lift up my hands and call on your name.**

**My soul is satisfied as with a rich feast, and my mouth praises you with joyful lips when I think of you on my bed, and meditate on you in the watches of the night; for you have been my help, and in the shadow of your wings I sing for joy.**

**My soul clings to you; your right hand upholds me.**

In Psalm 63, the psalmist stands with open mouth, thirsting for God, hungering for God, praying to God, praising God. He thinks about God at night, in the dark. The psalmist’s soul clings to God like a child that clings to its mother. The psalmist lifts up his hands to God, calls God by name, and trusts God. What a powerful image of someone who has given themselves over to God completely, holding nothing back. Someone who has dropped all pretensions to self-sufficiency. Someone who has transcended the world’s appetites.

Likewise with Psalm 34. *Living and breathing God!* “Open your mouth and taste how good God is.” No wonder the psalmist can’t wait to get the word out. He has found his true home and met the God who has always been there.

Do the psalmists describe your own relationship with God? For what or whom do you hunger? What do you think about at night? For many Christians, these images can be a bit intimidating or at least very “other,” certainly not describing themselves. The world seeks to cultivate very different appetites in us and often succeeds.

Yet, such joyful thirsting and fulfillment is not some impossible ideal nor the privilege of a special few. Rather, it is available to us all. God desires it for us all. It is this for which we were made and for which our souls long.

The seven holy habits, including prayer, are long-practiced disciplines that are necessary to our spiritual growth, to becoming people who live and breathe God.

Still, for many of us, the question is where do we begin?

*How to pray (and how not to)*

In the very center of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus turns to the subject of prayer. But before teaching his disciples to pray, Jesus warns them about the basics. They are not to be hypocrites. They are not to pray so that everyone can see what good “pray-ers” they are. They are not to pile up a bunch of empty phrases in their prayers. In all this, Jesus is pushing his disciples toward prayer that is grounded in sincerity and honesty, humility and forgiveness – these are the basic ingredients of prayer that is grounded in true faith! Why?

Because prayer is conversation with God; conversation that must be grounded upon trust. So, just as we strive to be sincere and forthright with those we trust, there can be no hypocrisy or deceit in our prayers to God. The psalmists are sometimes incredibly angry with God and they don’t hesitate to voice their anger. Of course they don’t hesitate; they trust God!

Though prayer consists of more than our words (see the textbox above), setting aside time for deliberate prayer is important, even essential. Here are a few tips that many Christians have found helpful as they work toward a deeper prayer life:

* *Don’t just think the words . . . say them.* A wandering mind is one of the biggest hurdles to a rich prayer life and it happens to all of us. Actually speaking the prayer will help you stay on track.
* *Don’t just pray about what you’d like God to do.* Tell God how you feel. Make time to give thanks and even to be honest with God about your mistakes or failures. Try to be specific in your prayers.
* *Keep a prayer list.* Most of us trouble remembering everything on the fly.
* *Pray in this way daily . . . and don’t be afraid to start small*. Even five minutes a day is a start. Too many people never start because they intimidate themselves right from the beginning.
* *Say grace before each meal.* This seems like such a small thing, but you’ll find that it helps you to stay more aware of God all day. If the setting is inappropriate for you to pray aloud, even a silent word of grace will be meaningful.

May we be a praying people!!

*A bit more: what is prayer?*

We pray when we plead to God for help in times of need. We pray when we thank God for all we have and enjoy. We pray when we praise God. We pray when we reveal to God our concerns for others. We pray when we pause to reflect upon the deep love that God has for us all. We pray when we offer our own love to God. In his book, *Prayer*, Richard Foster writes about 21 forms of prayer. But even Foster does not exhaust prayer’s meaning. Prayer is all this and more.

It is very easy for us to fall into the trap of thinking that prayer consists only of the words spoken to God. But Paul can urge the Thessalonians to “pray without ceasing” because he knows that prayer is not a paragraph but a life. When we live with God at the center of all we do, when we live in oneness with Jesus Christ, we are living a life of prayer, a life of constant conversation with God. Sometimes this conversation is spoken aloud (at least on our end!). Sometimes this conversation is spoken in silence. And sometimes this conversation is only felt. Indeed, there are times when God carries us in this conversation. Paul wrote this to the Christians in Rome: “And the Holy Spirit helps us in our distress. For we don’t even know what we should pray for, nor how we should pray. But the Holy Spirit prays for us with groanings that cannot be expressed in words. And the Father who knows all hearts knows what the Spirit is saying, for the Spirit pleads for us believers in harmony with God’s own will” (Romans 8:26-27, NLT).

‘til Monday, grace and peace,

Scott