

The Heart's True Home

WEEKLY BIBLE STUDY

1st in a three-week series on prayer

February 16, 2014

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Psalm 34:4-8 (NRSV)

⁴I sought the LORD, and he answered me,
and delivered me from all my fears.

⁵Look to him, and be radiant;
so your faces shall never be ashamed.

⁶This poor soul cried, and was heard by the LORD,
and was saved from every trouble.

⁷The angel of the LORD encamps
around those who fear him, and delivers them.

⁸O taste and see that the LORD is good;
happy are those who take refuge in him.

Matthew 6:5-15 (NIV)

⁵“And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. ⁶But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. ⁷And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. ⁸Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

⁹“This, then, is how you should pray:

“ ‘Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,

¹⁰your kingdom come,
your will be done,

on earth as it is in heaven.

¹¹Give us today our daily bread.

¹²And forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.

¹³And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from the evil one.’

¹⁴For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. ¹⁵But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.

Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount is training in the kingdom. And what lies at the center of the training? Prayer. Specifically, the prayer Jesus taught his disciples to pray. The prayer we still pray together every week when we gather to worship our Lord.

Why pray? The reason is simple. We pray because our heart seeks its true home and its true home is the heart of God.¹ God longs for our presence. After Adam and Eve made their fateful decision to turn away from God, God came to the garden, calling for Adam, seeking him. In much the same way, God invites each of us to come to him, to come home, to return to the way of life for which we were made. Our hearts hear God’s call, but we’ve turned so far away from God that the call is somehow muffled. It is a little like hearing a phone ring, but being unsure where the ring is coming from, much less who is on the other end of the line. We might search all over the house and yet never look in the right place.

We have restless, yearning hearts that seek peace and joy and fulfillment. We spend much of our life looking one place after another for something that will make us happy

¹This beautiful phrase, “the heart’s true home,” is from Richard Foster’s book, *Prayer*.

or joyful or content, often in all the wrong places. But, in truth, our restless hearts will only find their rest in God.

Coming home

Writing thousands of years ago, the psalmists expressed our hearts' seeking after God, "O God, you are my God, I seek you, my soul thirsts for you. . . My soul clings to you." The heart of the psalmists' prayer, indeed all prayer, is a loving relationship . . . between God and me . . . between God and you . . . between God and all those who seek their heart's true home.

Richard Foster uses familiar, yet powerful, imagery to describe this home. "We do not need to be shy. He invites us into the living room of his heart, where we can put on old slippers and share freely. He invites us into the kitchen of his friendship, where chatter and batter mix in good fun. He invites us into the study of his wisdom, where we can learn and grow and stretch . . . and ask all the questions we want. He invites us into the workshop of his creativity . . . he invites us into the bedroom of his rest . . . where we are known and are known to the fullest. . . . The key to this home, this heart of God, is prayer."²

Prayers built upon trust

In the Bible, trust is a good synonym for faith. When we say that we have faith in Jesus Christ, we mean that we trust Jesus – completely and utterly. Now, all of us are experienced at building trusting relationships with others, or at least trying to. We know that building trust is not easy. It takes time. We risk trusting a person in small matters so that we might come to trust them in large matters. We know that trust is fragile. Trust takes a long time to build but it can disintegrate in a moment of betrayal. We know that trust must be cherished and protected. And . . . we know that hypocrisy and empty talk are not the way to build trust.

"Hallowed be your Name"

I remember reading once a child's rendition of the Lord's prayer. As I recall, God's name was Harold! Now, I doubt many of us make that mistake, but I do suspect that we tend to blow right past "hallowed be your name" with little awareness of what it means.

This phrase could just as easily be translated "set apart your holy name." Perhaps Eugene Peterson gets even closer when he renders the phrase as "reveal who you are" in his paraphrase, *The Message*. For the ancient Hebrews, the name and the person are much closer in thought than for us today. In the Bible, the name of God is virtually indistinguishable from the person of God. When we pray that God's name be hallowed or holy or sanctified or set apart or revealed, we are praying that God would let all the world see that he is the one true God. We are praying that God will usher in his kingdom in all its fullness– so that even God's enemies would come to honor God's name.

Prayer is conversation with God; conversation that is to be grounded upon trust. Indeed, prayer builds such 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.

It is in the context of this deep, abiding trust in God that Jesus' teaches his disciples the Lord's Prayer. He points them toward God's kingdom and teaches them to rely completely upon God, even for the bread they eat. The disciples are to trust in God's forgiveness, even as they forgive others. Condemned by the Nazis, a modern-day disciple, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, would pray, "I put my trust in your grace and commit my life wholly in your hands."

Whether we are praising God or thanking him. Whether we are confessing or asking. Whether we come to God with a peaceful heart or an angry one. In all this, we trust that God loves us and hears us and answers us. The basic ingredients of prayer are the ingredients that

²from the introduction to Foster's book, *Prayer*, p. 1-2.

build trust between two persons: honesty, sincerity, caring, thanking, appreciating, loving, serving . . . add to this list yourself. And in the end, pray with a trusting heart.

It is with such a heart that we are to pray the Lord's Prayer, even as we pray it together and often aloud. It is the prayer Jesus taught his disciples. Here is an overview.

*The Lord's Prayer*³

Jesus spoke more often about the Kingdom of God than about anything else. Not surprisingly then, the Lord's Prayer is a kingdom prayer. In his sermon, Jesus trains his disciples for the kingdom; in this prayer, Jesus teaches his disciples to pray for its arrival.

Prayer is theology and theology is prayer. What we pray for reveals our deepest beliefs about God and ourselves. One way to approach the Lord's Prayer is to think of it as being in two parts. In the first part, we express our desire for the arrival of God's kingdom so that the will of God will be done, so that God's desires for his creation will be realized. This is not some other-worldly thing – God's will is to be done on earth, as it is in the kingdom of heaven. Think of it as the merger, or marriage, of the two – our world is to be transformed into the full expression of God's love and creative power, a world free from sin and death, misery and tragedy.

In the second part of the Lord's Prayer we turn to our own lives, admitting that it is God, not we, who provides today and every day even the basics of life – like bread. We pray that God will shelter us from the trials and tests that come at us so often in a world still rocked by pain and suffering. We even pray for our rescue, not from some abstract idea of evil, but from the foes of God that threaten all goodness and mercy. All this is to be God's doing. Nonetheless, we recognize our own part in this as well. We confess to God our understanding that God's forgiveness of us is somehow bound up with our own forgiveness of others. We are not to be bystanders sitting out God's war against evil. We are not to be escapists watching the world sink ever deeper into godlessness. We are to be the light to the world, the ones through whom God accomplishes the very things for which we pray!

Questions for Discussion and Reflection

1. What do you hunger for in life? You might make a list. How would this list compare to the list you would have drawn up earlier in your life? How might this list compare to the list you imagine you'll make later in your life? Our appetites change as we get older. The hunger gets deeper. It can no longer be satisfied by a new dress or a new game. What hungers do you see in others? Is there any evidence, any sense, that this hunger is spiritual? How does a spiritual hunger differ from a physical or emotional hunger? It seems odd to think that we should ever desire hunger, but in your own life, do you hunger for God? If you don't hunger for God it can only be because your hunger has been satisfied or you've yet to experience the joy of a deep desire for God. How might we go about becoming hungry for God?
2. In reflecting on the Lord's Prayer, Eugene Boring notes that our prayer language is not "informational." How could it be? What can you tell God that he doesn't already know? Jesus teaches his disciples that prayer language is "confessional." By this we don't mean merely the listing of all our sins. Instead, by "confessional" we mean language that expresses our deepest faith and convictions. Boring calls it the "insider language of the community of faith." We don't pray for our "daily bread" because we think God doesn't know this or even to persuade him to provide it. Jesus taught us to pray this way so that we might confess to God our need of and dependence upon him. Discuss what you think Boring means by "confessional language." Does this perspective help to free you from some of the hesitations you might have about prayer? How might this perspective reshape your prayers?

³The Lord's Prayer will greatly repay slow praying and thoughtful reflection. Two excellent and brief books on the Lord's Prayer are *The Lord and his Prayer*, by N.T. Wright and *Lord, Teach Us: The Lord's Prayer and the Christian Life*, by William Willimon and Stanley Hauerwas.

Daily Bible Readings

Before reading each passage, take a few minutes to get a sense of the context. Your study bible should help. Jot down a few questions that come to mind from your reading of the passage.

Monday, Psalm 16 “You show me the path of life. In your presence there is fullness of joy.”	Tuesday, Psalm 91 “My refuge and my fortress; my God, in whom I trust.”
Wednesday, Luke 11:1-8 Luke’s version of the Lord’s Prayer; Jesus teaches about the value of persistence.	Thursday, John 17 Jesus’ final prayer. Read this in light of the Lord’s Prayer. Can you see any similarities?
Friday, Matthew 4:23 – 7:28 The entire Sermon on the Mount. Please read it in one sitting.	Weekly Prayer Concerns

Scott Engle’s Weekday Bible Classes

Join us whenever you can. Each week’s lesson stands on its own. This is very “drop-in.” Bring something to eat if you like. Bring a study Bible. On occasion Scott has to cancel class, so if you are coming for the first time, you can check www.scottengle.org to make sure the class is meeting.

Monday Evening Class – now studying Romans

Meets from 7:00 to 8:15 in Piro Hall

Tuesday Lunchtime Class – now studying Exodus

Meets from 11:45 to 1:00 in Piro Hall

Scott’s 11:00 Sunday Class in Festival Hall

This is a large, lecture-oriented class open to all ages.

Special Event on February 16:

A presentation and discussion of medical ethics in 2014 with Steve Love, President and CEO of the DFW Hospital Council and Dr. Robert Fine, Director of the Office of Clinical Ethics and Palliative Care at Baylor Scott & White Health.

Beginning next week, February 23

Seven Events That Shaped the New Testament World

Scott’s Weekly Bible Studies are available at www.standrewumc.org. Just go to “worship” and then “sermons.” You’ll find the study with each week’s recorded sermon. There is also a complete archive of the studies at www.scottengle.org

Sermon Notes
