

A Year of Spiritual Disciplines at Eagle UMC
February 2008

Prayer

What is Prayer:

Prayer is a conversation with God that involves both speaking and listening. It is opening our lives to God for change and yielding our desires to Him. Through prayer God will change the way we view other people, ourselves and events.

To understand how to pray, it's helpful to first look at the kinds of prayer. While there are many types of prayer, we will only cover the following: prayers of confession, supplication, thanksgiving and worship. There are also prayers that request God's intercession or help (praying for others).

Prayers of confession are important in developing our relationship with God. Just as parents want their children to be honest with them, so God want us to be honest with Him. There is nothing that we can hide from His view because He already knows what we have done. Confession is for our sake, not God's. It is the acceptance of responsibility for our behavior and our opportunity to ask God's forgiveness and help in doing better. "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." (1 John 1:9)

Supplication is the act of asking God for things in a humble and solemn manner. Prayer is our method of asking God for things. Prayer gives us the opportunity to communicate directly to God what we need and desire. (1 Timothy 2:1) While God already knows what we need and want, He wants us to ask Him for His help. He doesn't barge into our lives; He waits for us to ask for His help.

Another kind of prayer is the prayer of thanks. Part of developing a relationship with God is recognizing what He does for us and thanking Him for it. He provides for us and cares for us and has saved us from death. In return, we should thank Him. "Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God." (Philippians 4:6)

Worship is a large part of prayer. When we worship God in our prayers, we acknowledge His sovereignty and His greatness. (Daniel 4:34) Worship expresses our desire to have God rule in our lives and our love for Him.

Prayers of intercession are prayers for others. John 17: 20-21 "My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me."

How to Begin Practicing Prayer:

As with anything new, the spiritual discipline of prayer will take time to learn and improve. Do not be discouraged if you are only able to focus in prayer for a few moments as you begin. Over time and with practice, you will be able to converse with God more frequently and for longer periods of time. Below are a few steps to help you get started.

- **Create a setting that makes praying easy and natural.**
Some people like to kneel, others prefer sitting. Some people pray with music in the background, whereas others prefer quiet. You can use a Bible, spiritual book, memorized prayers or something you improvise. Writing in a journal can also inspire discussion with God.
- **Make a plan.**
It doesn't have to be elaborate, just something simple like "I will pray for 5 minutes while sitting in this chair." A plan helps you to overcome distractions.
- **Start praying.**
Sometimes it helps to use a memorized prayer or a scripture reading to begin. Or perhaps simply begin by telling God what is on your mind, if something in your life has you worried, excited, etc. Try your best to keep it simple; prayer should not be complicated. When Jesus taught his disciples to pray he told them to use simple, straightforward speech (Matthew 6:7-13, 7:7-11).
- **Take time to be quiet and listen for guidance.**
Over time, you will learn the most effective ways to pray.
- **Close your prayer.**
Again, a set prayer or reading can be helpful. Otherwise improvise a closing as a way of saying goodbye to God.
- **Make prayer a regular part of your schedule.**
Find the time, setting and method that work best for you. The more often you pray, the easier it will come to you. And remember, prayer is not something that is done only before meals, during church services or at night before we go to bed. "Pray without ceasing" (1 Thessalonians 5:17):

Ideas for more in-depth practice of Prayer:

Below are a few prayers or suggestions for each type of prayer

- **Confession**

Pray this prayer: "Lord, shine your Light on the dark-shadowed corners of my heart. Show me what I am hiding from you." Then listen and express to God the worries, guilts, hurts, etc. that come to mind. Ask God to forgive you for these mistakes, and to guide you to avoid them in the future.

- **Supplication**

Think of a problem or issue you have in your life right now. Whether it is problems making your car payment, health issues, a conflict with a co worker or just indecision about the direction of your life, remember no issue is too big or too small for God...He wants to help with whatever struggles you face. Tell God about it, and ask for his input. Be silent as you listen for his response.

- **Thanksgiving**

- If you do not already, say grace before your meals.
- Include Psalm 100 in your prayers
"Shout for joy to the LORD, all the earth.
Worship the LORD with gladness;
come before him with joyful songs.
Know that the LORD is God.
It is he who made us, and we are his;
we are his people, the sheep of his pasture.
Enter his gates with thanksgiving
and his courts with praise;
give thanks to him and praise his name.
For the LORD is good and his love endures forever;
his faithfulness continues through all generations."

- **Worship**

Since the Psalms were actually written as songs, try singing Psalm 100 when you pray.

- **Intercession**

- Go through a whole day offering a silent prayer for every person you come in contact with. Record what you have learned from that experience.
- So many people around us do not know the Lord. Make a list and start praying for the people you know who need to know God loves them. How can you share God's love with them

History:

• **How Jesus Prayed**

- Jesus prayed for guidance in places of quiet solitude
 - “Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed” (Mark 1:35)
 - “But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed” (Luke 5:16).
- Jesus prayed for His disciples and for all believers
 - “Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name-the name you gave me-so that they may be one as we are one” (John 17:11).
 - “My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you” (John 17:20-21).
- Jesus prayed in praise to God, the Father
 - “At that time Jesus, full of joy through the Holy Spirit, said, ‘I praise you, Father, lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, for this was your good pleasure’” (Luke 10:21).
- Jesus prayed prayers of thanksgiving
 - “While they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, ‘Take it; this is my body’” (Mark 14:22).
- Jesus prayed in a posture and with an attitude of reverent submission
 - “Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, ‘My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will’” (Matthew 26:39).
- Jesus prayed in times of anguish
 - “And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground” (Luke 22:44).
 - “About the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice, ‘Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?’--which means, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Matthew 27:46).
- How Jesus Taught the Disciples to Pray
 - Another example of how Jesus prayed may be found in “The Lord’s Prayer” located in Matthew 6:5-15.
 - When the disciple asked, “...Lord, teach us to pray...” in Luke 11: 1, this was a very significant request, because these disciples were already men of prayer. They had been watching Jesus, and saw that the marvel and mystery of His character was linked with His prayer life; this made them aware of how little they really knew about prayer.

- **Notable Quotations**

- Martin Luther - "I have no such business I cannot get on without spending three hours daily in prayer"
- John Wesley - "God does nothing but in answer to prayer"
- P.T.Forseythe - "Prayer is to religion what original research is to science"
- Catechism of the Catholic Church 2697
 - "Prayer is the life of the new heart. It ought to animate us at every moment. But we tend to forget him who is our life and our all. This is why the Fathers of the spiritual life ... insist that prayer is a remembrance of God often awakened by the memory of the heart "We must remember God more often than we draw breath."

Biblical Basis of Prayer:

- **Deuteronomy 4:7**

"What other nation is so great as to have their gods near them the way the LORD our God is near us whenever we pray to him?"

- **Philippians 4:6-7**

"Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

- **John 15:7**

"If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you."

- **1 Thessalonians 5:17**

"pray continually"

- **James 4: 3**

"When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures."