

The Prayer Connection: Divine Communication

Lesson 2

GROW DISCIPLESHIP CURRICULUM

Engaging the Learner

Stacy rolled her eyes as she struggled to uncross her legs. After untangling herself from the lotus position, she leaned off her pillow and blew out the two candles she'd lit fifteen minutes earlier. As she pulled the curtains open, sunlight streamed in, illuminating the swirls of smoke still hanging in the air.

"Well," she sighed, "that didn't help my praying any, but at least the room smells nice."

Stacy grew up in a very "spiritual" home, but her parents, former hippies, never put much stock in organized religion. While searching for her spiritual identity in college, Stacy had attended a Catholic church, a Buddhist temple, a mosque, and a synagogue. She had enjoyed aspects of all these religions, but none fit her comfortably. That is, not until recently. Jerry, her new boyfriend, was a Protestant, and they had begun attending church together.

At Jerry's church, God seemed so close. Stacy especially enjoyed the prayer time. Sometimes Pastor Morris would lead the congregation, suggesting topics to bring before the Lord and areas to be thankful for. Stacy felt she was really communicating with God during those times. She knew she should be praying at home too, but it felt so different outside of church. She tried to remember the areas Pastor Morris had led in, but they seemed stale, old somehow.

So there she sat, legs crossed and candles lit, trying to conjure up something to pray. The week before she'd tried nature walks. The week before that, early morning readings from the Book of Common Prayer. Stacy wanted to talk to God more than anything, but she needed someone to help her know what to say and how to say it.

Exploring the Lesson

No discipline we can acquire is more beneficial and shaping for our spiritual lives than prayer. Unfortunately, none of us is born knowing how to pray. New Christians or faith seekers often find difficulty "getting the hang" of praying. Similar to young children learning to communicate through speaking, we must learn how to talk with God in prayer.

Fortunately for us, Jesus' own disciples also had a problem knowing how they should pray. They came to Jesus and asked Him for guidance. His answer, known as the Lord's Prayer, is recorded in both Luke 11:1-4 and Matthew 6:9-13. Take a moment to read Matthew 6:5-14 now. We will take the Lord's Prayer as a step-by-step guide to praying, allowing you to learn to pray as Jesus taught two thousand years ago.

God's Presence

First, take a moment to realize you are in the presence of God. The prayer begins "Our Father who is in heaven"(6:9). Although you may not always be aware of it, God is all around you and in you. Acknowledge Him. Sit in His presence, aware of His love. Your approach to this may vary. Read a psalm,

look out a window at His creation, or meditate on the life of Christ. We will look at several more specific techniques for realizing God's presence in the "Enhancing Your Life" section following this one.

The amount of time you spend in this first step of prayer will vary according to your other time commitments and the preoccupations and issues you are praying about. Still, even if briefly, it's important not to move to the second step until you have fixed your thoughts on God and are filled with the realization of His presence.

Worship

The second phrase in the Lord's Prayer is, "Hallowed be your name" (6:9). Having sat in God's presence, now it is time to worship Him. Think about the kind of God you serve. Dwell on His goodness. What specific things has He done in your life? The Bible tells us that all good gifts come from God. What good things has God given you in your lifetime? Allow yourself to be filled with praise to God for all these gifts. Express these praises, thanking him for each one individually. You may also read scriptures dealing with God's majesty, love, or power. Several psalms do this well. Worship should be an enjoyable time. You are setting aside a few minutes to get better acquainted with God. Focus on this communication.

Transformation

The next stage is bringing your will into alignment with God's. Jesus expresses this stage like this, "Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven" (6:10). The goal of this section is *transformation*. You are praying that your desires, wishes, and goals will be transformed into His desires, wishes, and goals for you. Although losing your ambitions can be painful at times, it is built on an understanding of the kind of love God has for you. You have just finished the "Worship" stage--recounting the great gifts God has given you. Because of all God has given and who He is, you know His will is the best thing that could ever happen to you, your loved ones, and our world! The highest prayer you can pray is for God's will to be accomplished.

In this stage you will discover the mind of God concerning issues in your life. You must allow God to realign your desires to harmonize with His. As you allow Him freedom, God will instruct you in how to cooperate with Him in bringing about His will. Consistent openness to God will develop a spirit of obedience in your life. This spirit will allow God to fill you with the strength necessary to be an obedient child, lovingly carrying out the will of God.

Your Needs

"Give us today our daily bread" (6:11). The fourth step in prayer is telling God what you need. Having just yielded yourself to God's will and entrusted yourself to His care, now freely ask God to supply your needs. He wants to. And don't be concerned that they are too small or too big to present to Him. They have importance to Him because they are important to you.

Don't instruct God on how to fulfill your request. He is God and will have considered your solution along with countless others you won't have foreseen. Grant Him the freedom to creatively meet your need. Finally, while you are praying, focus on His power to meet your needs rather than on the needs themselves. Placing the need in perspective with God's power will help bring you peace.

Forgiveness

Next, the Lord's Prayer models confession and the granting of forgiveness. Jesus prayed, "Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors" (6:12). This two-part stage is one of the most vital if your prayers are to be effective and you are to grow spiritually. The first half is the specific admission to God of the wrongs you have committed and asking His forgiveness for these wrongs. God wants to take your guilt and provide forgiveness, but confession is a necessary part of this process.

The second half of this stage is forgiving others who have wronged you. Forgiveness is necessary no matter the circumstances. Now is the time to deal with anger, malice, hatred, and the desire for

vengeance. Just as God has forgiven you when you knowingly did wrong, He expects you to do the same for others. Keeping current in these areas will free you for spiritual vitality in your prayer life.

Guidance and Protection

“ And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one” (6:13). In the final stage of the Lord’s Prayer, we are to ask for God’s guidance and protection. As part of this, you will want to ask God to do several things. First, ask God to reassure you that you have nothing to fear from any evil. He is more powerful than evil, and His power is available to you! Second, ask Him to help you take your focus off temptations and evil and place it squarely on God. Third, ask God to help you establish discipline in your thoughts, conversations, actions, and attitudes in the areas where you are being tempted. While God will protect you from evil, He will not force you to do good. Your self-discipline must be strengthened so you will not guide yourself into temptation. Last, ask God to reveal to you His perspective on your life and help you accept His standards for what should or should not be part of it.

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Enhancing Our Lives

Do you desire the rich prayer life and spiritual vitality God wants for you? Like Stacy, have you tried a number of religious paths and prayer techniques, hoping one will lead to a breakthrough? Prayer can be the communion with God you crave. Like other disciplines, it does require time and effort, but you don’t have to search for the “right” way. Jesus left instructions for us in the Gospels. If you will begin with the following techniques, your prayer life will move from confusing and tedious to joyful and transforming. Here’s how.

Begin by repeating the Lord’s Prayer from Matthew 6:9-13 out loud. Then, move through the following steps.

How to move into the realization of the presence of God

Use one of the following methods.

A. Imagine God is within your physical heart. Think of His presence pushed out with every beat of your heart, expanding until He permeates your entire body. Feel Him in your fingers, toes, and the hair on your head.

B. Visualize God as a bright ball of yellow fire. He is descending down upon you until you are completely surrounded by His presence.

C. Envision Jesus coming into the room where you are. Greet him warmly. Offer him a chair. Begin talking to him aloud

How to Worship God

A. Tell God the things you admire most about Him. These might include His love, mercy, kindness, forgiveness, stability, continual presence, helpfulness, etc.

B. Thank God for something good He brought into your life. Again, remember all good things come from God. This might be a good job, good friends, your church, or food to eat.

C. Read Psalms 103, 104, or 105.

D. Thank God for your family.

E. Keep pictures of people that are significant to you in a stack. (You may want to keep them in a zip-lock bag.) Flip through some of these pictures during every prayer time, thanking God for the person and praying for him or her by name.

F. Thank God for the material blessings He has provided. Name several specifically.

How to transform your will to God’s will

A. Tell God what you honestly feel.

• Don’t try to sound religious or pious. God does not need to hear religious language. You won’t shock Him.

- He knows what you would prefer for your life, so openly ask.
- B. Test what you are feeling with:
- What the Bible says
 - What you think God would do
 - What you know is ethically right
 - What you know the intelligent decision is
 - Council from a minister or trusted Christian friend
- C. Tell God you know that what He wants for you is the best. Go ahead and say it, even if you're not quite sure you believe it yet.
- D. Remind God (and yourself) that you have chosen to do His will in your life.
- E. Tell God you will do His will even if it is contrary to your own.
- F. Ask God for the grace to do His will His way.

How to tell God your needs

- A. Ask yourself what matters most to you. Share that thing with God.
- B. Tell God what is bringing you the greatest pain. Give that issue to Him.
- C. Right down a list of needs or problems in your life. Pray over that list, giving each item to God.
- D. As you give these burdens to Him,
- Know that you may pick up these worries again
 - Ask Him for relief for awhile
- E. Tell God that you know He can meet each of your needs.

How to be right with God and others

- A. Confess any known sin. Ask God to bring to your mind any wrongs you have committed. Don't get bogged down looking for every possible transgression. You know when you have done wrong. Confess these instances and move on.
- B. Admit your failures and ask God for forgiveness.
- C. Accept God's forgiveness and know you are right with Him.
- D. Ask God to give you a forgiving attitude. Some offenses may be impossible for you to forgive on your own. At those moments, you will need God's strength. With His help, you can forgive.
- E. Has a co-worker or family member said or done something to hurt you? Are you carrying a grudge or personal slight? Pray for that person.
- F. Ask God to assist you in interpersonal relationships. Allow Him to reshape your personality and control your interactions with others.

How to gain guidance and protection

- A. Ask God to lead you to godly people and influences. Spend some time thinking of such people. Make a list of these people and determine to foster relationships with them.
- B. Consider what activities or places may trigger sin in your life. For instance, going out with a certain group of friends may lead you to drink. Determine to cease participation in these activities.
- C. Pray for insight to avoid spiritual problem areas.
- D. Pray specifically for protection for you and your family members both physically and spiritually.
- E. Share with God the rich rewards you experience in living a godly life. Thank Him for His protection.

Outline for Small Group Discussion or Personal Reflection

All questions and exercises are useful for either personal or small group reflection. While exercises marked with an asterisk (*) are written specifically for a small group leader, an individual learner can easily modify the exercise for his or her personal study.

Engaging the Learner

Why would Stacy have lit candles and sat in the lotus position to pray?

Have you tried other religion's celebrations or services in your spiritual journey?

Do you have any struggles in your prayer life? What are these?

Exploring the Lesson/Enhancing your life

*Read Matthew 6:5-15 to the class.

God's Presence

Is there anywhere you can go to pray and not be surrounded by God? Indwelt by God?

What are some of the techniques you can use to focus on God's presence?

*Ask class members to share a technique that was especially helpful for them and a technique that didn't work well for them.

Worship

What are some reasons to worship God in prayer?

*Divide the class into pairs, giving each group a pencil and paper. Assign to each group Psalm 103, Psalm 104, or Psalm 105. Have the groups list everything the psalmist praises about God. Next, beside each item on the list, have each group list a contemporary example of the same characteristic. Keep the list for a later activity.

Transformation

*Give each class member paper and pencil. Have every class member make a list of areas in his or her life where God would like to make changes. Keep the list for a later activity.

Your Needs

Why should you trust God with your needs? Which needs are appropriate to bring before God?

*Ask the class, "When was the last time you were short on food to eat?" Suggest that in our North American lives, basic physical needs usually do not go unmet. However, our society does a poor job meeting many of our emotional and spiritual needs. Discuss what these might be as a class (examples: intimacy, companionship, fulfillment, etc.). Write these needs on a board, explaining that we can give these daily needs to God as well.

Forgiveness

Why should we forgive other people who have wronged us?

*Ask, is it hard to forgive people who have harmed you? Have each class member think if there is anyone who has wronged him or her. Next, have the class write down the list of people they are angry with and why. Keep the list for later use.

Guidance and Protection

Why do Christians have nothing to fear from evil?

Why do you need to establish discipline in your thought life?

*As a class, list on a chalk or dry erase board areas where class members feel vulnerable, either spiritually or physically. Also list worries that the class members have regarding family members.

*In closing, lead the class in the Lord's Prayer, pausing after every phrase for class members to pray for those areas in their own life. Members should use the notes they have made, as well as notes made as a group to help them with this assignment.