

A Time to be Silent, a Time to Speak

Prayer is a universal human experience. In respect of prayer to God, it is the human desire to encounter the divine that prompts us to pray. It is God who initiates the conversation. His very being beckons us to him, and in response, we seek encounter.

Prayer is posture, silence, speaking and listening. Through prayer, God makes his eternal purposes known to us, and we receive the benefit of his companionship, love, forgiveness, compassion and care.

Prayer is a time to be silent –and let God speak to us. “Speak, Lord for your servant is listening” (1 Samuel 3:9) is a good principle and practice before we blurt in our requests.

It is also a time to speak, when we have first become still in the presence of God. He will listen to us –that is assured.

The words “A time to be silent, a time to speak” (Ecclesiastes 3:7) are a good maxim to reveal what true relationship and conversation with God should be like for us.

All of this will be our experience if we let God teach us to pray. All we have to do is to spend time with him.

Session 1: Our Father Matthew 6:5-15 (22 July 2007)

There are 2 forms of the Our Father prayer; the version we use today in our devotions is a compilation, with the later addition of the doxology (“For thine is the kingdom...”). The other version is found in Luke 11.

Read Matthew 6:5-15.

What is the content of the prayer here?

Why did Jesus feel it necessary to add the teaching in vv 5-8?

What is the purpose of keeping our words to a minimum when we pray?

If we never stop talking (v7) while praying, what is going on and what is not going on?

If God knows what we need already (v8) –then why pray at all?

Why “OUR Father”?

What is the first priority in the prayer?

What is God teaching us by this?

What are the requests for our own needs? What is this teaching us?

Jesus makes a special point about forgiveness (vv12, 14-15). Why is it so crucial?

How might this prayer be used daily – or throughout the day?

Why should we include this prayer in our worship?

In prayer, we enter God’s dimension and he enters ours

Session 2: How Great is God’s Mercy? Genesis 18:16-33 (29 July 2007)

From the human point of view, prayer starts as a conversation with God. As in all conversations, each person would be attempting to understand the other. We expect give and take, and if one party dominates, then it becomes mere monologue. In this passage, we see the grace of God in operation, entering fully into human conversation, and enriching human experience with divine wisdom.

Read the introduction which precedes Abraham’s prayer –Genesis 18:16-21

What does this tell us about how God sees us?

Now read Genesis 18:22-33.

What do vv22-23 tell us about Abraham’s posture when he prays to God?

What posture do we prefer or use and why? How is posture symbolic of how we stand before God?

What is the purpose of Abraham’s question in vv 23-25?

What is the effect of the Lord’s response in v26?

Why does Abraham continue to converse in this way in vv27-32?

If this is “bargaining with God” then when might this be admissible for us when we pray?

Why does Abraham stop at “10”?

What does Abraham learn about God from this encounter?

How can Abraham’s encounter help us in our praying?

It’s not wrong to talk things through with God; he welcomes it

Session 3: What's Going On? Psalm 13 (05 August 2007)

Read the Psalm.

(v1) In what circumstances do might we feel that God has forgotten us?

What is going on when we feel like this?

What does it mean, "hide your face from me"?

Look at what people in the OT believed would happen when God hid his face from the living-see Ps. 27:9; 102:2; 104:29

And at what they believed when God turned his face towards them –see Numbers 6:24-27

("Face" is used to mean the presence of God)

(v2) What might have been the cause of the suffering recorded here?

What is going on when we "wrestle with thoughts"? What is the answer to the sorrow thus caused? Who can help? How?

(v3) How serious is the situation described here?

(v4) Who – or what are our "enemies"?

(vv 5-6) What has happened to the mind and spirit of the believer here during the process of this prayer?

In other words, what change has taken place from v1 to v6?

How did this change happen? What is going on?

Prayer in acute distress focuses the mind on God

Session 4: Heartfelt Prayer 1 Samuel 1:1-28 (12 August 2007)

Read the background to Hannah's situation vv 1-8.

What was going on in her mind all the time?

Why is having a child so important?

Read vv 9-20

When do people "just go into a church" nowadays?

If they are troubled, what are they hoping to find?

In what sense in Hannah praying with all of her being (soul)? v 10

How do we pray "with the heart"? v13

What prompts people to make a vow to God when they ask him for some favour?

What happens if a vow is not kept? –See Ecclesiastes 5:1-6

Why did Eli mistake Hannah's posture and the manner of praying? vv 12-16

When is silent prayer useful and necessary?

It appears that Hannah had not eaten food for some time –the prayer was more important – and then after a definite sign (v17) she felt she could take food. What spiritual discipline was she practising? How can her devotional skill help us?

What does the child's name tell us about Hannah's love of God? v20

Read the conclusion vv 21-28

What can we learn from the way Hannah kept her vow?

And from her worship –this is expressed in chapter 2 and has parallels in Luke 1:46 and 1:67 (Mary and Elizabeth)

Heartfelt prayer goes to the heart of God

Session 5: Who Do You Think You Are? Luke 18:9-14 (19 August 2007)

Look at the first verse –v9.

Why did Jesus want to address his remarks to “those who were confident of their own righteousness”?

What does it mean to “look down on everybody else”?

So –before the parable it spoken –what do you think Jesus is going to say that our attitude should be like?

Read vv 10-13.

Why does Jesus choose a Pharisee and a tax collector? How does this make the story more interesting to his hearers from the outset?

What was the content of the Pharisee’s prayer? Who was he really talking to? How was God being used in this so-called prayer?

What do you note about where the tax collector placed himself? What does this say about how he approached God?

What does his posture and action convey about his character and attitude?

His prayer was brief. Why would God be inclined to listen to him and respond to his need?

Read Jesus’ comment in v14. What is his main teaching point?

Approach God in humility and He will lift you up

Session 6: Pray Away John 17 (26 August 2007)

This is often called the great High-Priestly Prayer. In it, Jesus prays first for himself, then for those nearest to him and finally, for everyone else.

What is so practical about this way of praying?

How can it help us?

Read vv 1-5

Jesus speaks of HIS work for the Father. What is the work that we are given to do by God?

How do we pray to God daily so that we are constantly aware of God’s work for us?

Read vv 6-19

How did Jesus care for those whom the Father entrusted to him (the disciples)?

How can we best care for those who are nearest to us in our faith?

How do we pray for those who are our fellow Christians in our own church?

What do we pray for?

Look back to the prayer that Jesus taught – Luke 11 or Matthew 6.

Read vv 20-26

How do we pray for all Christians?

Is there any method that could be helpful?

What do we learn about Jesus from the way he prayed for us all that time ago?

How does this encourage us?

Pray for yourself, those nearest to you and for everyone else

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