

Discipleship 101: Prayer

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- [0 : 0 0] Welcome here for this Sunday, March 20th. Well, we recognized last week that it was daylight savings change. And I don't know if you got the memo, but apparently they've now shortened the seasonal cycle to two seasons.
- So spring we had this week and now we're back in winter. So Connor laughed this morning at breakfast and said to me, I said, what's the matter? And he said, it's the first day of spring.
- And I said, no, it's not. And he said, yes, it is. But look outside. God has no sense of humor, right? So who's tired this morning?
- I was saying to the ladies over here, I have a sleep disorder. So I take medication for it. And I've had it all my adult life.
- So I went to bed last night and I said to Michelle, did I take my medication? And she said, I don't remember. And so I thought, hmm. So either I take it again, realizing, not realizing that I already have, or I don't take it.
- [1 : 0 6] And I'll wake up around two or three with my body going, hey, we're done for the night. And B is what happened. So I woke up at two o'clock and thought to myself, do I take it now, knowing that I need to be up, awake, and moving and thinking clearly at 730?
- Or do I just get up and read a book? So I just decided, well, I'll roll the dice. So I'm a little foggy this morning because I decided to take it. But Sue said to me, maybe we need some sort of signal so they can come over and bail me out, Sue and Audrey.
- But I think I'll be okay. So just a heads up. But it was tired this morning, right? We just did that daylight savings change. And so I'm glad that we're having coffee again after the service because that will help us.
- So we can commiserate a bit together over that this morning. And that daylight savings change seems to throw us for a bit of a loop, doesn't it? It messes with our circadian rhythm, our sleep cycle.
- And so I read recently that in some ways you may not recover. Sometimes it takes people weeks or months to recover to get their feet back under them.
- [2 : 2 3] And for other people, they don't actually recover at all. So you spend this time in a constant fog. And so I know for me, last Sunday night, I crashed pretty hard.
- And I was quite happy to get a decent rest. So I hope you've had a good rest this week as well and been able to catch up a bit. So this morning, we're continuing in our sermon series called Discipleship 101.
- Through this series, we're continuing to look at the importance of discipleship, both in our individual lives and in our life as a church. And discipleship is a journey of growth and learning for us as individuals.
- But it's also a journey that we take together as we're disciplined by others. And as we continue in this series, I'll continue to refer to some things from a discipleship resource called Master Life.

And I talked about that a bit last week. So last week, I introduced us to something called the Disciples Cross. And I think we can put it up. That's all right.

[3 : 28] So it's, there it is. Oh, and there's all sorts of other video things too. Anyway, so the, just focus on the center. So the center is the Disciples Cross. And it's a teaching tool that was created by a man named Avery Willis.

And we're going to continue looking at that together over the next few weeks. This will be fun for people who are watching a live stream, seeing multiple images. Nobody panic.

So the Disciples Cross, that center image, is a visual representation of the life of a disciple. And that's what we'll, we've been considering together through this sermon series so far.

The process of becoming a disciple. And as we've recognized in the past, a discipleship is a follower of Jesus Christ, right?

And that's the ultimate goal for each of us, to become fully devoted followers of Jesus Christ. And the number one priority for a disciple of Jesus is to make him, as you see in the center there, make him the center.

[4 : 35] He is the vine and we are the branches. He is the main focus of our lives. He must be the number one priority. And we won't be true disciples of Jesus until we make him that.

We make him the central focus. We need to anchor our lives in him. Center our lives around him. He has to become the most important person in our lives.

And if we're going to be followers, disciples, as Jesus intended, he needs to be the priority in our lives. And so just how important should Jesus be in our lives?

I don't know if the slide will come up, but if it doesn't, that's okay. Let's hear Jesus' own perspective on this in Matthew 12, verses 46 to 50. Where we read, Pointing to his disciples, he said, Here are my mother and my brothers.

For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother. Have you ever struggled with that passage?

[6 : 10] I have to confess that I have. So Jesus wasn't suggesting here that we ignore our earthly responsibilities or relationships.

He wasn't suggesting that at all. He was paving a way for us to change our perspective. He was preparing his disciples to recognize the importance of their spiritual family.

With Jesus himself as the number one priority. So returning to the disciples' cross, which we never left, we have recognized that the vertical axis of that cross represents our relationship with the Lord.

That's our up and down relationship, right? And I talked about that a bit last week. The mission statement of our church, I remember a pastor at a church I attended, he would periodically test the congregation to see if they know it.

But I'm not going to do that. So the mission statement of our church is reaching up to God, reaching out to people. And that's what we're talking about here.

[7 : 18] We're talking about reaching up to God. So last week we talked about the lower part of the cross there. The fact that we need to ground ourselves in scripture, as it says the word there.

We need to ground ourselves in scripture as the best source of guidance and truth in our lives. And we recognize that it's important to spend time in God's word daily.

And when we do that, there are four things that happen. These are the four things we talked about last week. When we spend time in God's word alone with God, we get to know the Lord and deepen our relationship with him.

Then we receive guidance and direction from the Lord. We create time and space to bring our needs and desires to him. We become better able to see God at work in our lives and to recognize opportunities where he has used us in the past.

And where he can use us in our current circumstances. And so as we've been looking at more practical things we can do as a disciple of Jesus, we've recognized that we need to make him the center of our lives, as I said, and we need to spend time with him daily in his word.

[8 : 40] So today we're going to focus on the top section. And you may be able to see it there, perhaps not, but we're going to focus on that top section. And here we find another need to incorporate into our lives, into our lives as disciples.

And our sermon this morning is called Prayer. So maybe you know what it's about. So hopefully we can recognize that prayer is a must for a disciple of Jesus.

Right? Can we recognize that? And we all likely pray in our own way. And I tried to give you some grace and freedom last week when I said, don't worry about the perfect words.

Your words to your God. Do you remember that? Your words to your God. But I believe it's also fair to consider that at times we may have prayer all wrong.

Bear with me. How do you pray? Do your prayers follow a specific formula, a specific script, a specific pattern?

[9 : 54] For example, when we pray at meals, we pray the same prayer. We pray, come Lord Jesus, be our guest. May this food to us be blessed. And maybe you've heard that prayer before.

At times I think, no, we're going to pray a little more detailed prayer than that. But it is a somewhat formulaic prayer that we use at mealtimes, but it anchors us into being grateful for what we're about to eat.

So are your prayers just essentially a list of things that you want or need? Are they generally focused specifically on you?

That may be something familiar as well. Disciples must pray. We absolutely must. But we're going to invest a little bit of time this morning in developing a better understanding of prayer.

But let's begin by recognizing that there are literally thousands of books written about prayer, thousands of authors, thousands of over decades and centuries, people have written about prayer.

[11 : 09] And there are some people throughout history who you would say, certainly without question, one of the most prayerful people I can think of. And yet, if you dig deeply enough, even those folks struggled with prayer.

Struggled with how to do it, how to understand it, how to frame it, how to approach it, how to take it seriously, how to take it not so seriously. All of those perspectives.

So Jesus gives us a glimpse into real prayer in John 15, in John 15, verse 7. And we've heard this in our series before. If you remain in me, and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given to you.

That sounds pretty good, doesn't it? Jesus says to ask for what we want, and he will give it to us. But, we can probably all recognize at times that that hasn't happened for us, right?

God has not answered a prayer in the way we expected, or hoped, or deeply desired. So, did Jesus forget what he said there? Well, I think, friends, it's actually we who have forgotten.

[12 : 30] There are qualifiers to answered prayer. And that's one of the things I want to look at for a second. We must abide in Jesus.

We must let his words abide in us. Are we doing that as true disciples? Are you doing that? Remember last week's message.

We considered that Jesus needs to be, and it's going to sound like I'm harping on this, but I am. Jesus needs to be the center of our lives, and we need to be in his word daily.

Then, we'll have answered prayer. But why is that? Well, when we're in God's word daily, we have a better idea of what we need to pray about.

We have a better idea of what our priorities in prayer should be. And then we'll begin to pray the things that God wants.

[13 : 35] Not from a me-first kind of a perspective. Avery Willis says, prayer is intended, this is such a great quote, prayer is intended to involve me in God's purpose rather than involving him in my plans.

Isn't that great? Prayer is intended to involve me in God's purpose rather than involving him in my plans.

It's an important perspective there. The purpose of prayer is not for God to make everything you want to happen. His intention is for you to come to know what he wants you to do, and then pray that you will be able to do it.

Is that a new perspective for you on prayer? It's a big paradigm shift to me for maybe how we've understood prayer in the past. So let's talk about how we can pray this way.

We need to begin by understanding what we're doing when we pray. So that probably makes you snicker a little bit. Maybe you're thinking, duh, Pastor Kent, hello.

[14 : 54] Praying is talking to God. So you're right. You're absolutely right, but it's also quite a bit more significant than that. When we pray, we are actually coming into God's presence.

Can you see that? If you think back to the Old Testament, it was a very select group of people who could be in God's presence. Usually priests, prophets, people like that.

The tabernacle, and later the temple in Jerusalem, had a place in both of them called the Holy of Holies. And that was a place where God made himself known.

God manifest himself in a very real way. And only the high priest could go into that room once a year. And the high priest would enter that room to then act as an intermediary between God and his people.

But Jesus changed all that as we read in Hebrews 4 verses 14 to 16. Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess.

[16 : 26] For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way just as we are, yet was without sin.

let us approach the throne of grace with confidence so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

Can you recognize that, that we don't need an intermediary anymore? prayer anymore? Why did that hit me so strongly?

Good question. We don't need someone to go to God for us anymore. Because of Jesus and of what he has done, we, friends, have direct access to God.

God. And so that's what prayer is. It is coming into God's presence. And it may help you to picture that.

[17 : 33] Hopefully it doesn't intimidate you, but it may help you to picture that happening. Picture God there with you when you pray because he is.

Picture yourself coming into his presence because you are. prayer isn't casual or trivial. It shouldn't simply be a habit.

It should be something that is awe inspiring and serious. But we're also welcomed to approach God. We are invited to him.

We're his children and it's our place to be there. It's our place where we can go to him and deepen our relationship with them. So the most important thing to remember is that when you pray, you are truly in the presence of God.

And so recognizing that that is where we begin in prayer, in the presence of God, let's look at four things to help us remember about two, four things for us to remember about prayer.

[18 : 46] First, this is a prayer formula. If you like a how-to on prayer, we need to begin our prayers with thanksgiving.

Psalms 100 verse 4 tells us, enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise. Give thanks to him and praise his name.

Do you begin your prayers by recognizing and thanking God for who he is and what he has done? Do you begin in gratitude to God?

Friends, declare that in your prayers and start from that point. Do you struggle to know what to thank God for?

And that's not a joke, I'm serious. Some people struggle knowing where to begin. And here are some suggestions. Thank him for saving you.

[19 : 48] He knew where you were, he knew what you were before you turned to him. He knows you in your ugliest, most sinful moments, and he loves you anyway.

Amen to that, maybe? He wants to rescue you. He has saved you from your sin, and he wants you to be a catalyst to change the lives of other people.

And he has a place for you in his kingdom. All pretty thanks-inducing, I would think. I don't know about you, but I'm deeply grateful for those things.

Deeply grateful. Who else is always there for you? Who else is truly trustworthy and dependable to the extent that God is?

No one, even your best, closest friend, still doesn't compare. Even the people who love us the most deeply may lose focus at times, but God never forgets about us.

[21 : 04] He never loses interest in us. We're never out of his sight, and we can never escape him. Here's a question to consider, and maybe you've heard a version of this before.

I have, and I didn't know who the quote was from, so I had to dig. A man named T.W. Hunt once said, what if tomorrow I had only the things for which I thanked God today?

You ever thought about that before? What if tomorrow your lack of gratitude for things today resulted in a different set of circumstances?

That's such a powerful reminder to me of the importance of thanksgiving when we pray. Second, as you continue to pray, move from thanksgiving to praise.

Praise is best described as declaring someone or some things value or worth. So to praise God then means to declare his value or worth to you personally.

[22 : 19] A few years ago we explored God, it's funny to say, a few years ago but here we are, we explored God's character, we explored his nature in a sermon series together and we, so think about God's qualities and his character and praise him for those things.

That he is most high, the strongest of the strong and the most powerful. That he is almighty, he is sufficient in all things and all circumstances.

That he is the Lord, the one who is always present. That he is God, the creator and sustainer of all things.

praise. So this may be a change of focus for you but praise God in your prayers. First for who he is, not simply for what he does.

Praise is about affirming God for who he is and declaring your love for him. Third, as you continue to move in your prayers, move from praise to confession.

[23 : 38] This is where the focus turns from God to us. Not in a selfish or self-interested way, but in recognizing our personal responsibility.

Confession is the time to focus on your state of heart and to let God examine it. It's about intentionally becoming vulnerable before God.

Ask him to show you the things in your heart, your attitude, your priorities that do not demonstrate how we put others or God first.

Does that make sense? Let God expose to you what separates you from him and then confess that to him. It's vulnerable, it's convicting, it's embarrassing, but it's important.

And guess what? He already knows. It's about personal responsibility. Agree with God that you have sinned.

[24 : 52] That's an important piece. It's not just important to say, okay, I guess this was sinful. It's about recognizing that a choice you have made, a choice you have not made, goes against God's desire for you.

Recognizing and agreeing with God that you've sinned. And then repent. Right? It's one thing to apologize, to take responsibility, but repent.

Turn away from it. Ask for God's power to help you in that. God is less likely to hear. And it's not that you've got.

It's not that you've heard of it. It's not that you've cherished sin in my heart. The Lord would not have listened. Do you see that?

The important part, the important perspective there? If we continue to hold on to sin and continue to live in a sinful way, God is less likely to hear.

[25 : 56] He will still hear. He will still act. But it's about a healthy, open relationship. And so our confession of sin must be sincere.

And it must continue. It must be ongoing. Because, friends, we continue to do wrong. I recognize that about myself. We can't get any further in our prayers until we agree with God that we have sinned, that we have sinned against Him, and that we repent of those sins.

As long as we hold on to anything, and this is what Psalm 66, 18 is getting at, as long as we hold on to anything and resist confessing it, we'll be hindering our relationship with God.

We simply must be confessing disciples. Fourth, we move from confessing. This is the part that we, I think we tend to begin with and stick with the whole time we pray.

We move from confessing to asking. And once we reach this point, we recognize that we can then, with these other things behind us, pray with full confidence.

[27 : 18] Hebrews 4, verse 16 tells us, let us approach the throne of grace with confidence so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

We approach with confidence having praised God, having declared His value to us, having confessed our sin.

All the baggage then of our sin is gone. We can approach with confidence. Some Christians pray timidly.

I confess I have done that at times. We can be afraid to be bold in asking God to meet our needs, right? And I think it's fair to be timid when we're starting with asking, right?

We're starting with, Lord, I need, here's my list, and I need all of these things. Amen. Right? And it's not wrong to ask, but it needs to be done in the right perspective, in the right context, in the right way, the right timing of our prayer.

[28 : 31] So others pray flippantly, I think, with little thought about its significance or its meaning or its power. God will literally move heaven and earth in response to our prayers when they're done the right way, when they're done with his will first.

One commentary I read put it really well, come with reverence because he is your king, but also come with bold assurance because he's your friend and your counselor.

Do you see that balance? The fear of the Lord, as scripture tells us, is the beginning of wisdom. Come with reverence, but come with confidence and comfort.

comfort. So as we've explored this morning, when we pray correctly, not with perfect words, as I said, your words to your God, but with the correct perspective, with the correct approach, we can pray with confidence.

So the Bible describes two ways of asking. We're in the asking part. Two ways of asking God in prayer. first, there's petition. First John 5, verses 14 and 15, encourages us when it says, this is the confidence we have in approaching God, that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us.

[30 : 15] And if we know that he hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have what we asked of him. So the emphasis here in petition is on God's will, not our will, right?

We don't demand what we want, but we talk to God about what he wants for us. Do you see the difference there? We don't demand what we want from God, we talk to him about what he wants for us.

It's spending time with God in his word that will help us pray according to his will. will. When you understand God's perspective, you'll be better equipped to pray according to his will.

And we come to know his will by spending time in his word, right? God doesn't answer prayers that are asked for the wrong reasons.

I think that's important to recognize. Or prayers that go against his word or go against his character. And that's what praying according to God's will means.

[31 : 24] As we come to understand God's will, we will pray within his will, according to his will, and those are the prayers that God answers. So the second kind of asking in prayer we find in the Bible, and we do this a lot, and this is important, is intercession.

So intercession is praying for praying about interceding with God on behalf of other people. That's what intercession is.

So you would pray for others for the same things that you would likely pray for for yourself. Health and provision, and God's guidance, and God's wisdom. And it's important that we pray for other believers, that God would move them into the disciples, that he would have them become.

And it's important for us to pray for others as well who don't know Christ, that they would come to know him, come to give their lives to him. That's also intercession, an important part of it.

We pray for others, as I said, for provision, for healing and strength, as we've probably done this morning, as we do when we see our newsletter prayer list. We pray for strength and endurance in difficult times.

[32 : 50] We pray for the Holy Spirit's power to be at work in their lives. Those are all great ways to pray for other people. My friends, lift others up in prayer before God, in all situations.

Honestly, I don't know about you, but I can never be prayed for enough. right prayer. Praying correctly, as we've kind of talked about this morning, it's not always easy.

We tend to default to the come Lord Jesus, be our guest prayers because they're comfortable, because they are formulaic. But right prayer is about praying for God to have his way in your life.

not for God to let you have your own way. See the difference there? Praying for God to have his way in your life, not to let you have your own way.

So we're going to pray the Lord's prayer together as we close our time this morning. And I want you to listen for the elements of prayer that we've explored together this morning because Jesus got it.

[34 : 11] Thanksgiving, praise, confession, and asking. Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.

Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, power, and the glory, forever and ever.

Amen.