

When You Pray

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Preacher: Phil Stogner

[0 : 00] Because I was reminded as we sang verse 4 of that psalm of a young man in my congregation in Charleston, South Carolina.

In fact, he was on staff, he was a worship leader for us, that he took every word that we would sing literally. And so he would exaggerate that as we would sing.

And so it could be quite a challenge because he played many, many instruments. But even as he was leading, when he came to verse 4 of that psalm where it says, I will raise my hands in prayer to you, he would play with his guitar, he would stop, and he would raise his hands for that, and then he would go back.

So I was also looking for a photo. I had my smartphone ready. I was ready for a photo op to send to Colin. If you took that literally and raised your hands at that point.

I wanted to tell Colin what had become of his congregation in his absence. Let's have some fun tonight. If I feel like I'm preaching to a critical audience or someone that is, their arms are folded and they say, I just dare you to teach me something about prayer, then that's going to be tough for me.

[1 : 18] But if I can sense, if I can sense an eagerness, maybe even an expectation to learn something fresh, maybe old but fresh or new, then that's encouraging to me.

Let me begin with a question. Who taught you how to pray? Who is teaching you how to pray? I learned how to pray through stick figures. You've never heard of her, but her name is Annie Vallotton.

And in the 60s, Annie Vallotton was the artist and the illustrator for the good news for modern man. And I have not shared, I haven't had the opportunity to share my longer testimony, but I was directed from a barracks that I was in, from a bunk mate or cell mate, to begin reading the scriptures if I wanted to learn more about Jesus.

[2 : 41] And the Bible that they had issued to us was the good news for modern man. It is reportedly the best-selling version in the 60s. Now this is hippie years, the 60s and 70s in America.

And so it was the best-selling version of the Bible as the American Bible Society published it in the tens and hundreds of thousands and millions.

And they just gave these Bibles away everywhere. And the beauty for me is that throughout this New Testament, there are stick figures.

And I can show you a few of the stick figures that I came to in Matthew 6. Annie Vallotton was from Switzerland.

And she was an artist. And she loved to inspire people that would see her art to translate it and to interpret it.

[3 : 43] She was visiting, her grandfather was a Lutheran pastor. And with her grandfather, she was visiting in America when, in rather odd circumstances, which is code for the sovereign design of God, his matchmaking powers, she was introduced to someone who was on the board of the American Bible Society.

And they wanted to print a readable Bible, particularly for this new generation. This new generation that were far from God.

And learning about her art, that she had been using her art in church for, similar to our children's talk and Sunday school, for years.

In learning about her art, he asked if she would be commissioned to illustrate with stick art the New Testament, the Gospels particularly.

That was what I had in my hands. I had a good news for modern men. I began reading the table of contents. I'd never read a Bible before. I didn't know how you read a Bible. And so I began reading the table of contents.

[4 : 58] First chapter in the New Testament is Matthew. And by the time I got to Matthew 6. Now the Sermon on the Mount starts in Matthew 5. By the time I got to Matthew 6, already there had begun a stirring in me, an attraction, not a natural attraction, but a longing after more of this man, Jesus Christ.

I knew I was not in a right relationship with God. But having not grown up in the church, I didn't know what you did next. Well, you pray. You bend the knee or the knees of your heart to God, and you cry out to Him for His forgiveness.

And by His grace, through the repentance of my sins, surrendering to Him, I was saved.

But what prompted me was the stick figure. The stick figure of Annie Volatin showed me how to pray.

Now, tonight, in the time that remains, I'm not going to be prayer is a huge subject.

[6 : 20] It is said to be the greatest thing that a Christian will ever do. But it's also the hardest. It has challenges.

Do you know that one of the places that you'll be the most tempted is when you bend the knee in prayer? Again, not even necessarily a posture of bending the knee, but when we bend or bow, when we sit, even when we stand to pray, the tempter will enter in.

Why? Because He wants to challenge the believer, the son, the daughter. He wants to separate us or distract us to meet from our Father.

And then when these distractions come, or when we have these feelings, even of temptation, as we're supposed to be praying, and I'm just not very spiritual, we encounter an obstacle that may very well prompt us to break off prayer at the moment, if not stop praying personal prayer altogether.

So, if I could produce a stick man to communicate one truth that I would leave you with tonight, that we're going to expand, is this.

[7 : 43] Real prayer, real prayer, is a real child speaking to a real father in heaven.

It's taking the position, prayer is taking the position of a child. It's being real, who we really, really are.

C.S. Lewis says, that when you pray, the first order of business is to pray and to come as you are and to not appear as you ought to be.

So, real prayer is positioning ourselves in reality as we really are as a child with our messes and our immaturities, but then also positioning ourselves to speak, to speak and to talk and to commune from our heart to a real father.

not a father of our own design. A God that is only holy and the judge of the world or a God that is a, R.C. Sproul would call, a cosmic bellhop who comes to answer our very specific laundry list of things and do our bidding.

[9 : 16] But we pray to a real father. An outline of where we're going tonight would look like this. Jesus, I want you to observe Jesus assuming that his disciples, his students, his followers, all of them, then and now, that assumes that his disciples pray.

Secondly, that he encourages his disciples to pray. and then thirdly, he enables his disciples to pray. Now, look at Jesus Christ here as the teacher of prayer.

And he will teach us because Jesus is alive. And his spirit presence is with us tonight. and he longs, he longs for us to connect as real children with his real father and ours tonight.

So I wish that you could dismiss me and assume the posture of a disciple tonight. And just as I was instructed many, many years ago how to first pray that you would invite Jesus tonight to be your instructor.

And how does he instruct? Well, the first thing that he does is he assumes that his disciples are praying. Let's look at the scripture. Look at verse 1 of chapter 6.

[10 : 57] This was not read. This is a little bit earlier in the Sermon on the Mount where Jesus says in Matthew 6 verse 1, be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them.

So he's on the subject of practicing righteousness. Now that sounds like odd language to us. I don't think that I've asked Colin or Alan recently, so brother how have you been practicing righteousness?

What's your practice of righteousness looks like? But what he's talking about here is assuming that there are habits, there are spiritual disciplines or there's a system in play by which they pray, they

give to the poor, they remember the poor, and that on occasion they fast, that they have a system. So he's saying in your system when you exercise this habit or this discipline of prayer, so already he's assuming that they have a habit of prayer.

Verse 5, verse 5 he says when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites. Now he will use this again and again, you'll see it in just about every verse.

[12:24] Verse 5, when you pray, verse 6, but when you pray, verse 7, and when you pray, and then in verse 9, how you should pray. So when he says when, he's assuming that there is a then.

So he says, when you pray, and I'm sure that Peter's thinking there, well, you know, my prayer life is a bit of a mess, but my teacher, my rabbi, he's saying, Peter, when you pray, well, I'm glad that he doesn't know what my prayer, he knows, he knows.

He knows that our prayer life may not look quite like others. It may be more like Anne Lamott in her book, *Traveling Mercies*, says that her prayer life was reduced to saying, help me, help me, help me, and thank you, thank you, thank you.

Jesus steps into that with his assumption and he says, so I know you pray, but maybe we could, I could offer some further encouragement to you in your prayers.

And so Jesus comes to them with this assumption that they're praying and then he's going to offer them great encouragement. Jesus encourages his disciples to pray.

[13:51] Now, I want to leave you, as we leave this point in the outline, I want to leave you thinking about when do you pray.

You pray, but have you identified it as prayer? Or do you have a comparison chart to say, I don't pray every day of the week like I do on Wednesday prayer meeting.

So the rest of the time is not prayer. When do you pray? What does it look like? Is there a desire that when you pray that you would pray better?

Is there a desire that you would pray more regularly? I don't believe that Jesus, by assuming that they pray and communicating when you pray and when you practice righteousness, is trying to begin with guilt.

but he's trying to say, now that you are my disciples, I know that you're grappling with how to pray. And so then he sets up because now they're like, yes, yes, teach us.

[15:08] He begins to encourage them. And I love this about Jesus, that he offers them encouragement to pray. You should see on the screen now some of the excuses or some of the reasons, some of the obstacles that I hear when I inquire about someone's prayer life.

When I ask someone, when you pray, or when I start that, what is it like, then I normally hear one of these obstacles to prayer.

I feel like I do not pray very good, I'm not good at it. And I could probably complete that because we don't tend to do, we don't tend to do habitually, we don't tend to practice it, we don't tend to continue what we're not good at.

So many people, they feel like I'm just not good at it. It's so awkward. I mean, even assuming the posture to pray, pray, it just, and then talking, and I, I mean, I'll be honest with you, my first prayer in my barracks, I got down on my knees because that was the posture that Annie Velotin had drawn out in her stick figure, but I prayed and I was like, is there anybody in this room?

Is there anybody that hears me? And it's very awkward. And so people tend to drop off what they don't feel that they're good at. My elders prayers are beautiful and long.

[16:49] Now what we're talking about tonight are personal prayers. Our personal prayer as a son or a daughter of the living God.

A personal prayer. This is not public prayer. John Owen does a wonderful job in talking about prayer about saying that all of us, every one of us is called and invited in to master personal prayer. But only a few are called to lead others by their position in prayer. So I could say that we're all called to pray for ourselves, to pray for all of life that touches us, and to pray for others.

But then there are those, particularly elders, shepherds of the flock, and other spiritual leaders among us that are called to pray for and to lead in prayer for others.

I'm not talking about that. But one of the challenges is many times we'll hear beautiful, theologically precise, long prayers, and we'll be discouraged.

[18:06] What we're doing is we're assuming, we're thinking, I'm not spiritual like that. I'm messed up. I'm a mess. They are a church father or mother, and I'd love to aspire to that, but I am a baby mess.

My prayers, if you heard my prayers, they are disjunct, and they're incoherent, and sometimes they're just words, not even complete sentences. Those of you who have tasted brokenness through trial know sometimes you pray without words.

A third one. I start, but then I get distracted and my thoughts wander. You know, you might be praying like a child.

child. This happens a lot. It happens a lot with children. Many times children can't stay on the subject in a conversation.

I want to tell you that there may, and I can't expand on all of these, and so I'm going to have to hasten on, but I want to encourage you that when your thoughts wander, don't discount that.

[19 : 27] Why don't you include that in your prayer, wherever your thoughts wander. Maybe they wander to something that it's like, oh, I've got to hasten on, I can't spend the five minutes that's my practice, that's my habit to pray today because I'm anxious about fill in the blank.

Well, when your mind begins to wonder or be distracted, what if you follow that thread or include it in your prayer? prayer. A good example of this is there are a number of people that they wake up at night because of their fears and their anxieties.

I call it the witching hour because it's a great time for, I believe, Satan and evil forces to attack us because we can't do anything about it.

And there we are, we're lying in our bed at night, but we just sang a few, a psalm a few minutes ago and it said, as I lie awake in my bed, what do I do?

I pray. So there you are, you've got these distracting thoughts, these anxious thoughts, these fearful thoughts. That's great. That's, those are great ingredients.

[20 : 41] That's your prayer list. Pray about that. I'm sinning because lust or anger overwhelms me. Again, there are folks that take this, and I believe that this is, this is Satan at work.

If you, this is Satan coming to that son or daughter that is meeting with the father and he cannot take our relationship away, but he can try, he can try to interfere and separate us from that relationship.

And when these temptations come, you can confess them and keep moving. But by all means, don't believe the lie that I must be, look how unspiritual I am.

Here I am, I'm meeting with others to pray, or I'm privately praying, and I'm beginning to have these angry thoughts that I harbor. Again, it's not because you're unspiritual.

These can be the very ingredients for things to pray about. Lastly, I stopped asking God for stuff because he didn't answer.

[21 : 49] This is a biggie. I can, I read today an article that said that Ted Turner, Ted Turner, fabulously wealthy, at one time owner of the Atlanta Braves.

Ted Turner, he grew up in a Christian home, but when his sister, when it was discovered that she had cancer and would very likely die, and then she did die, he prayed for her and he asked God to heal his sister, and when God did not, then he said, I'll never pray again because God did not answer my prayer.

Well, what if prayer is something different? What if prayer is not, what if prayer is not simply asking God for stuff? And that's where Jesus comes to us as his disciples, as his students, and he says, don't take as your instructors the Pharisees and the hypocrites, don't take as your instruction the pagans who have many, many words.

He said, when you pray, pray our Father, our Father in heaven. Prayer is bringing the real you, the real child, speaking in a relationship with a real Father.

If I can have the grid on the screen. If I could add another line to this, I would. I was working on this this week to try to help me.

[23 : 31] This is my attempt at artwork. So, the Pharisee, he has both a quantity of prayer. Martin Lloyd Jones says about this text that the reason that the Pharisee is drawing attention to himself on the street corner is that the time has come.

He's to be, he's headed into the temple where the Pharisees were known to both study the scriptures, expound the scriptures, but also pray.

And they made a great show of it. But these men, these Pharisees, want to show that even on their way to the temple, they're men of prayer. It's as if they just can't wait to get to church to pray.

They just pray all the time in all the places, even public places. The pagan also has a quantity of prayer. A pagan is someone by definition, it could be, he could be, Jesus could be thinking about

the Gentiles, but he could be thinking about many, many others.

Who have a form of religion, but they do not have a relationship with God, the Father. Quality on the bottom is our quality of prayer, meaning our, the theological depth, the biblical correctness of it, the intimacy with the Father.

[25 : 00] If I could add another column going up on the immature and the mature Christian side, it would be relationship with God, the Father.

An immature Christian, meaning a young Christian, a new believer, has a growing quality of prayer and a growing quantity of prayer.

The mature believer has a growing quality of prayer and quantity of prayer. And all of it comes, their prayer is fueled, is fueled by their relationship with God, the Father.

Again, where are we? Where are we on this? And I want to be very, very careful here that I'm still getting to know you and it's such a delight personally, so you know I'm not calling anybody out with this.

But I fear sometimes we're taking our cues as to how to pray with people that can be very hypocritical.

[26 : 12] A hypocrite was an actor and they didn't wear makeup so they would have a mask. And that mask, wearing that mask, would hide their true face.

A hypocrite actor would get his reward in prayer by the applause of the audience. The Pharisee, this scripture says, when he prays these long, elaborate, beautiful, public prayers, he's getting his reward.

He's getting the reward of the attention, the respect, the applause of men.

And Jesus says, he's received what he sought in prayer. He's receiving his reward. But note, Jesus says, when you pray, go into a secret place where none can see you.

And even there in that secret place, that prayer closet, or that place that no one else is seeing you, close the door. It's almost to make double sure that no one is there.

[27 : 36] But know that you're not alone. your father's eyes are upon you and you will be rewarded. And what is the reward?

Wait for it. The reward is the father. The reward is the father. and the pagan can pray for many, many, many, many words, seeking to have this experience in prayer, this spiritual experience, but no relation to the father.

The Pharisee can pray elaborate, huge, long prayers, public prayers. But again, the goal is the applause or the respect of others.

It's not to come away with a deeper, more intimate relationship with the father. The young Christian, the immature Christian, begins with this relationship with the father, but they grow to be more and more prayerful and less prayerless is that relationship with the father deepens as they, each time they pray, they have the reward.

They have, they have that relationship with the father and it's deepening each time they pray. Have you experienced that? Have you experienced that reward?

[29 : 09] A couple of tests because I will tell you, I'm, frankly at times, I'm, I'm nervous about praying. I love to pray.

I love to pray. But again, sometimes my public prayers can come out a little, they're not, they're not as beautiful as many prayers as I have heard in my life as a, as a minister.

But I would tell you, I constantly look at prayer and ask myself the question, Phil, when you pray, even publicly, whose eyes are the most important to you.

Let's call it the reward test. When you pray, do you want to experience the eyes of the father in pleasure upon you as his child?

Or do you want to raise your head and experience the eyes of others on you lost in wonder and praise that you prayed so eloquently? It's challenging.

[30 : 13] It's challenging. I have to search my own heart. But in that, finally, Jesus offers us, Jesus is not a scold, he offers us encouragement, and he also enables us to pray.

And the way that Jesus enables us to pray is through the gospel. Galatians 4, verses 4 through 7 says it this way, When the set time had fully come, God sent his son born of a woman born under the law to redeem those under the law that we might receive adoption to sonship.

This is called, right now, this is what we call the theology of adoption. If we were to use our stick figures, if we were to pull in Annie Velotin, then she would draw perhaps an orphanage and she

would show a robed Jesus arriving in time, in a set time, to lead boys and girls from the orphanage into his household as sons and daughters.

Because you are sons, and many Bibles will have a footnote to say daughters too, okay?

God sent the spirit of his son into our hearts, the spirit who calls out Abba, Father. So what's one of the first things?

[31 : 53] In fact, I'm not going to say one of the first things. What is the first thing that happens upon our realization, our crossing from the orphanage into his household?

Coming from being someone that did not want a relationship with God the Father through Christ to now being in relationship with God the Father through Christ. He gives us a heart to talk to him.

We're in relationship and we want a relationship where we can learn more about him and he is taking us just as we are. God sent the spirit of his son into our hearts, the spirit who calls out Abba, Father, so you are no longer a slave but God's child and since you are his child God has made you also an heir.

Jesus Christ when he says pray like this he has assumed that his disciples want to pray.

In fact in Luke's gospel of this same account Luke has one of the disciples representing them all coming to Jesus and saying Lord teach us to pray like John the Baptist taught his disciples how to practice their faith.

[33 : 22] How to have the discipline or the habit of prayer. Teach us and I believe that they had observed Jesus they had heard him and they observed his practice of prayer and they're saying that's different than the Pharisees that's different than the pagans yours is real and you talk to him as a child talks to the father that's what we want and Jesus says that's why I've come that's gospel that's why I've come to give that to you so when you pray don't simply say oh God but pray our father not simply my father but our father do you remember Mary Magdalene in the garden she's there three days after that bloody scandalous death of

Christ as a criminal innocent but dying in our place and here he is he's dead and she's there looking for the body to anoint the body to revere him and see that it's properly taken care of and there is the resurrected Jesus and she rushes to him and she embraces him and that embrace it lingers for a moment and then Jesus says I've got to let you go you go tell my disciples that I'm coming to see them very very soon that I'm back I've conquered death but Mary I've got another errand I've got to ascend to my father and your father this is what

Jesus is saying here this is what fuels this is what enables our prayer that we are meeting with the living God we are meeting with God Jesus is father and now he's mine and he's ours there's a Trinitarian work that's going on here and I can't take any more time but I want to reference this book how the gospel brings us all the way home by Derek Thomas it's in the reference library I really want to encourage you I'll make this the book of the month club these are resources that are available to you in the small hall there are a number of copies they're going like hot cakes because they're absolutely free read it return it so that the rest of the people that are waiting in line to get this book can read it so get your copy tonight but I'm going to hang on to mine because I'm still reading through it

Derek Thomas says that we must never underestimate or dismiss the spirit at work in our prayers because it's the spirit that comes to us and encourages us to pray and there are instances where the spirit completely carries the weight of prayer and prays for us we don't know how to pray Derek Thomas uses the example of a mother who sits beside a child's bed too weak to cry for her sick offspring a spouse whose dreams are broken with an unhappy marriage because it's being destroyed by adultery or lies how do they pray a breadwinner who's been laid off can see no way of providing for the family the ministry that the spirit performs is that he helps us when we are in need of prayer the spirit helps the spirit prays with us the spirit prays for us and his holy spirit intercession is like the intercession of

Jesus it is always heard it was it is always answered God could never turn down a request from the spirit never so how do we pray my first time that I prayed I can't remember what I said it was pretty short but it was real because Jesus had taught me through his word even using stick figures how to pray and he has taught us tonight again how to pray how do we pray we pray like children this is personal prayer private prayer starting tomorrow carve out time just start with five minutes that's a good way to get a habit started just five minutes a day start with five minutes find a place a quiet place reserve that time without interruption what do

[39 : 12] I say maybe you don't say anything maybe you just say father I've come now as your child and I want to meet with you as my father just start