

# Prayer

## *“With Jesus in the School of Prayer”*

Mark 1:35-39 & acts 2:42-43

June 6, 2010  
The Reverend Fitz Neal

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### **A Summer of Prayer**

This morning we begin a summer of prayer as a church. In the Mission Study that was done a few years ago, it was clear that Columbia is a praying church. So for the next 12 weeks, we’re going to drill down deep into prayer – what it is, why we do it, how to do it, when and where.

Along the way, we’ll let the major passages on prayer be our guide.

### **Jesus Prayed**

We start with this one: *“Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, and departed to a place in the outdoors and there he prayed.”*

Whatever else we might believe about prayer, or whatever questions or frustrations – or joys and blessings we experience with prayer – we begin here – Jesus prayed. Because God in the flesh prayed, we pray, too. Here are a few things we learn from Jesus right away about prayer...

- **Make prayer your *Top Priority*.** It was a top priority for Jesus – he made it the very first thing he did in the day. Apparently, this early morning prayer was a habit he practiced often, not just in this one instance.
- **Give prayer a *Set-aside Time*.** Jesus gave over a particular set-aside time for the activity of prayer. We know he also prayed many times in short bursts throughout the day – we all do that. But Jesus was unique in setting aside a special time for prayer.
  - It’s good to pray throughout the day – but it’s also important to build in a regular, specific habit of prayer at a regular time of day – where

you can get off with just you and God and your heart and thoughts and bring it! Bring yourself into God's presence with focus.

- **Give prayer at your *Favorite Place*** – clearly, Jesus loved creation and being in it in the early morning as the sun cast it's light upon the dawning world. He prayed as he walked, probably had a favorite place to sit and get centered, and prayed there.

These three: priority, time, and place for prayer place us in a relationship where Jesus becomes our master teacher and learn from him in the school of prayer. This is where we're going this summer: with Christ in the school of prayer.

### **My First Prayer Meeting**

How many thoughts and questions, answers and frustrations we all have about prayer! On the one hand, we know it's important. Everybody says so! But prayer can also be perplexing – it can even give a lot of people a sense of failure – they feel they don't pray enough, or use the right words, or don't have enough faith... so prayer, as important as it is, can be kind of hard.

I grew up in a home and a tradition where almost every prayer was formal – out of a book. The prayers were beautiful, and now I appreciate them, but they also seemed canned – impersonal. Then, one night when I was a sophomore, I was invited to a prayer meeting at a friend's youth group. I'd never even heard of prayer meeting. "what do you do?" I asked. "We share requests and then pray for them." He answered. We got together in a living room, there were about 15 kids there. Prayer requests were shared and the a youth sponsor said – let's pray. Everybody bowed their heads. I didn't know what was going on. And then somebody started praying – out loud! Without it being a formal prayer! I couldn't believe it! They were talking to God directly and voicing the prayer requests that had been mentioned before.

Apparently, they expected God to hear them, and answer! Then I started to sweat – literally sweat. They were praying around the circle! I WAS GOING TO HAVE TO PRAY! I didn't know what to say! I couldn't remember the requests. I got so scared I was afraid I was going to throw up! Right there at prayer meeting! It got closer and closer. I had no idea how to pray – especially out loud.

But I also loved hearing this kind of prayer – it wasn't formal. It was from the heart – it wasn't fancy. It was genuine concern, being lifted up to a God they seemed to know well and trusted.

It was finally my turn... I stammered something out, very briefly and was so relieved!

Prayer can be like that for a lot of people – we like it, but we don't know how – what do we say? Where and when do we do it? What about the tough issues in life? What about prayers that seem to go nowhere? We'll explore all of this throughout the summer. Let's let Christ teach us to pray.

### **Prayer Is...**

And here are a few matters to ponder about prayer as we get started. Here are a few statements on what prayer is...

- **Prayer is A Conversation** – Prayer at its most basic is a conversation with God. In a conversation you listen, and then speak to someone who listens, who then responds – and it goes back and forth. That's what prayer is. How do we begin that conversation? By making the Bible our first step in praying. Read something in your Bible to start your prayer-time. That gives God a chance to begin the conversation. Then respond according to what you hear.
  - Let's use this morning's passage as an example. You read, "Jesus got up while it was still dark and went off to an outdoors place to pray." The conversation could go like this, "Lord, when would you like me to set aside time to pray? Where would you like me to meet with you?" Then listen for an answer.
- **A Relationship** – conversation is what leads to relationships. It's when you visit regularly with someone that a relationship develops. A relationship comes through trust. The only way trust can grow is to rely on the giving and receiving of answers to the conversation. When we pray and spend time with God, we build up a way of knowing what God thinks and we start to pray differently... And a lot of prayer is just enjoying being with God.
- **A Partnership** – Prayer is also a partnership with God. God invites us into his work in the world through prayer. He didn't have to do it this way. God

can do anything. But God, for reasons known only to Him, has said, “I’m at work to redeem a lost world and YOU’RE part of my plan. I won’t do it without YOU. And the main way you say yes to this is to pray.

- **When you and I pray**, we release God’s grace into life – ours or somebody else’s. Doesn’t that just amaze you? That God would invite us to work with Him on this?
- **Work** – Prayer is thus a form of the most important work we ever do. This is why I say learn to pray for and about everything. Everything – your marriage, your work, the neighbors, your kids, the grandkids, the world, leaders, the economy, the Oil spill, the weather, the person on the road next to you on the highway, your schedule, your future, your past, your dreams, your fears – just bring it.
- **Delight** – Prayer is also a delight – a place of being with God as we bring it, that leads – over time – to delight. What I mean by this is the delight of knowing, when we pray the way Jesus prayed – with it as our top priority, with a set-aside time, and a favorite place – it becomes the refuge of life that brings peace, delight, wonder, and the knowledge that we have not allowed ourselves the luxury of believing that prayer is an add-on or an option for the truly spiritual – but that WE are self-sufficient. No – we have gone to God first, and then await his directions.

### **Details**

So come ready to learn this summer. Come ready for a weekly prayer assignment. Come ready to learn with Christ in his school of prayer.

I took this passage literally one summer. My prayer life was disorganized and dry. It had turned kind of rote and flippant. I was tossing off prayers in the midst of busyness with scarcely a thought – I would pray very generally, “Lord, help that situation,” or, “bless the world, God.”

So I decided to try doing what Jesus did here just to see what would happen. I’m early riser by nature, so I started getting up, took my Bible, and went for a walk in the green space across from my parent’s house. I love nature. I would praise God as I walked to a favorite place along a creek. There I would sit and read a little of the Gospel of Luke. I would reflect on it. Then be quiet for a few

minutes. I'd lay my sins at Jesus' feet, just to get clear with him, then I'd pray. As I prayed, I found myself noticing the world around me – the smells of the trees and the sound of the water – birds awaking the day.

I got centered – a little more each day. Then I'd pray on the way back to the house, where I had a good breakfast. It awakened my whole life.

Just a regular time, and favorite place and God.

So I have a prayer assignment for you this week:

- **Make prayer your top priority.** Take your calendar and schedule in at least 10-15 minutes of prayer in to your daily schedule before you schedule in anything else.
- **Pick the time when you are most available to God without interruptions** – and that's different for everybody – though I don't recommend when you crawl into bed at night
  - **Or too early if you're not a morning person...**
- **Pick a favorite place**
- **Share this with those who need to know** – so they can support you in a life of prayer

**Furthermore – this summer on Wednesdays, I'm calling for a weekly day of fasting and prayer.**

- **Kids shouldn't**
- **Skip a meal and pray instead of eating** – especially when you get hungry
- **The church will be set aside as a sanctuary for prayer all day, but especially from 5- 9 in the evening. We'll have to close the doors then, but if you want to come here please do so.**
  - **It WON'T be organized. No one will lead a prayer time. I may not even be there or Bruce. It's just prayer.**

**Oh. By the way. The Father will be here. And wherever you are Jesus will be present – and wherever you are the Spirit will be here, and with you wherever you are...**