

Deny Yourself.

A six-week guided practice in laying down our lives and taking up our Christ

Lesson 4: Prayer.

Introduction...

Last week we focused on listening to God. This week, we focus on what to say, and even how to say it, to God. The importance of listening first, then speaking, should not be forgotten. We take our lesson on prayer straight from Jesus' words to those gathered around him as he delivered what is colloquially known as the Sermon on the Mount.

Scripture Focus...

From Matthew's Gospel, Chapter 6, verses 5-14. Jesus says,

'And whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, so that they may be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. But whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

'When you are praying, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do; for they think that they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

'Pray then in this way:

Our Father in heaven,

hallowed be your name.

Your kingdom come.

Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread.

And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.

And do not bring us to the time of trial, but rescue us from the evil one.

For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you; but if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.'

Meditation...

Our meditation this week is simply to pray. However, we'll look at Jesus' teaching on prayer and try to follow His example, fitting our lives into His teaching.

1. Pray in secret! Your conversation, petition, pleas to God are for you and God - take them to a private location, and give them to God alone.
2. Don't pray empty phrases. Instead, make a list ahead of time of what you'll actually offer to God in prayer:
 1. Praise - such as 'hallowed be your name.' Start with letting God know that you know your place in this relationship - Put God first, and praise His holy name!
 2. God's will comes first. Don't ask for things that may put others beneath you. If you are up for a promotion at your job, don't pray the other person being considered is rejected; rather, pray that in this and all things God's will is done. You don't know God's will... so a good starting point is to admit that, then ask God to simply be present with you through the changes.
 3. Ask for what you need. 'Give us this day our daily bread,' is not a list of frivolous wants or first-world problems we hope God will solve for us. It's a simple list of needs. Help with a heartache. Food for your table. Healing for sickness. You get the idea.
 4. First, forgive. We've been through this already during our Lenten study - but being able to forgive others gets you in a better position to ask for God's forgiveness. The truth is that we've all sinned and fallen short of the Glory of God. We all need God's forgiveness. But how better to get forgiveness than to learn how to give it?
 5. Safety from trials and temptations. God alone is powerful enough to withstand this world full of trouble and temptation. We are not so powerful. We ask God to give us just enough of His goodness to overcome those things which rise against us daily.
3. Believe it. You have offered to God what you really need God to know matters to you. Believe He has heard you. Believe He has a plan for you. Live like you know you've been heard. Sometimes we don't get immediate answers, but just knowing our concerns have been heard helps us refocus and begin to move into God's plan.

Prayer:

Holy God, let me be filled with the power of your presence, upheld by your strength, and set free from my own anxieties and worries. Let me be emptied of all that would stand in Your holy way. **Amen.**