

Soul Care | *Spiritual Basics for Hungry People* Week 6 – Conversing With God



"We are unfinished creatures—longing, reaching, stretching towards fulfillment. We express these desires for completion in prayer. Prayers articulate our seeking after the best. Prayers give voice to aspiration towards the highest. Everything that is distinctively human gets formulated in prayers: our pathos, our nobility, our creativity. Also, interestingly, everything that is disreputable in us—lust, avarice, pride, pettiness—disguises itself in prayer in order, if possible, to get us credit instead of shame. But wither way, whether in disguise or reality, prayers show us at our best."

– Eugene Peterson, *Answering God*

Corporate Prayer

A Doxology: *Psalm 8* and quiet meditation

Group Discussion

1. What most often occupies your prayer life, what subject, people, etc?
2. What does your practice of prayer currently look like?
3. What resources have you used in your time of prayer?
4. What are structures that you have learned to guide your prayer time?
5. What do you feel is the greatest hindrance to your prayer life?
6. How does your view of God change the matter, or content of your prayer?

*The Types of Prayer**

1. Supplication – presenting our requests to God; Phil 4:4-7
2. Confession – acknowledging our sin before God, admitting, making know our sin; Ps 51:3-6
 - a. General – my sinful condition, my corruption
 - b. Particular – my actual sins, my guilt
3. Petition – requesting the forgiveness of our sins; Ps 51:7-12
4. Adoration/Worship – giving praise to God for his work, his majesty and beauty; Ps 3
5. Intercession – praying on behalf of someone else, Matt 19:13; Luke 6:28; Eph 6:9
6. Imprecation – prayers of hatred toward the enemies of God, those against the purposes of God; Ps 137
7. Listening – being still, waiting for God, listening for his voice over the din, Ps. 46:10; 1 King 19:9ff

*Richard Foster in his book, *Prayer*, offers more than a dozen types of prayer including meditative, contemplative, healing, radical, covenant prayer, formation prayer, prayer of examen (coming later), prayer of tears, prayer of the heart, prayer of suffering and several more.

The Power of Prayer

1. Prayer is dialog, a conversation...
 - a. Between a child and his/her Father

¹⁴ because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. ¹⁵ For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father."

¹⁶ The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. ¹⁷ Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory. **Rom 8:14-17**

¹¹ "Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? ¹² Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? ¹³ If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!" **Lk 11:11-13**

- b. Between friends

⁷ If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. ⁸ This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples. ¹⁵ I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. ¹⁶ You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit—fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. ¹⁷ This is my command: Love each other. **John 15:7-8, 15-17**

- c. Between a master and his servant

³⁶ At the time of sacrifice, the prophet Elijah stepped forward and prayed: "O LORD, God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, let it be known today that you are God in Israel and that I am your servant and have done all these things at your command. **1 Kings 18:36**

³⁴ I will defend this city and save it, for my sake and for the sake of David my servant." **2 Kings 19:34**

2. Our prayer is supported by the intercession of Jesus:

¹⁴ 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. ¹⁵ 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. ¹⁶ Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need. **Heb 4:14-16**

²¹ and since we have a great priest over the house of God, ²² let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. **Heb 10:21-22**

³⁴ Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. **Rom 8:34**

3. Our prayer is supported by the intercession of the Holy Spirit:

²⁶ In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. ²⁷ And he who searches

our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will. **Rom 8:26-27**

The Nature of Prayer – things we ought to remember about prayer:

1. prayer is *theological* – we need to know about God, we need to understand God to understand the use, benefit, purpose of prayer
2. prayer is *historical* – there is a past: people, places, activities; our prayer is not in isolation from biblical, American, or family history
3. prayer is *learned* – in the same way that we learn language as a child, our prayers grow, early on we may pray in grunts and babbles, but we learn our voice, our vocabulary; God knows what his babies need and as they grow the relationship grows, the conversation grows
4. prayer is *individual* and *communal* – though we might pray in solitude or in quiet, we are not alone in prayer, our voice is not singular, there are many voices, many needs, many children who pray, we pray with others for others
5. prayer is *formative* – prayer is not just asking God for stuff, but listening intently, prayer is being formed by God for his glory and our perfection

The Language of Prayer

We may be duped into thinking that prayer must follow a certain structure or form, it must use certain language (verbs, sentence structure, allusions to biblical ideas or characters, include *thee's* and *thou's*) in order to be heard by God, or to be acceptable to him—that he would hear and respond. Satan would have us believe that our prayers cannot be heard because of our recent sins, or because we do not use the right words or phrases.

[Thanks to Eugene Peterson, *Answering God*, for these helpful distinctions.]

1. The language of personal intimacy:
The language of personal intimacy and relationship is the first language we learn. At first it is not articulate speech. The sounds that pass between parent and infant are incredibly rich in meaning, but less than impressive in content. The coos and cries of the infant do not parse. The nonsense syllables of the answering parent have no dictionary entries. But in the exchange of gurgles and out-of-tune hums, trust develops. Parent whispers transmute infant screams into grunts of hope. The cornerstone words in this language are names, or pet names, mama, papa. For all its limited vocabulary and butchered syntax, it is more than adequate to express complex and profound love, and to develop the basic trust foundational to human existence.
– Eugene Peterson, *Answering God*, p. 41
2. The language of information: Contrast the language of personal intimacy with language that is used to name and understand our world, the language that is used in teaching, explaining, defining the world around us. That language is a cold, detached language; it is not a language of the heart.
3. The language of motivation: Contrast the language of personal intimacy with language that is used to motivate or control the world. This language is used in sales and politics, in relationships to get others to respond, to move at our will or whim. This is a manipulative language that does not cultivate trust or intimacy.

A Season of Prayer

Take time now, in your seat, or move further from those close to you. Spend time with God in conversational prayer (using the first type of language), recalling his desire for you, that he is Father, Friend, and Master. Approach the time knowing that Jesus is interceding for you now and the Holy Spirit is praying with you in your weakness and on your behalf (Rom. 8:26).

Questions for Personal Consideration

1. Off hand, what do you long for in your spiritual life, what change, growth, renewal, hope, etc.?
2. What do you find that you most often pray for? What consumes your prayer? What do you find yourself "reaching for" when you pray?
3. If our heart is revealed in the words of our prayer, what do our words reveal about us? What do they reveal about our view of God?
4. If we centered our prayer on the understanding that God has moved first, and the prayers we speak are a response, an answer to what God has already said in his word, how might our prayer(s) change?
5. **Consider Jesus' prayer: Matthew 26:26-46** What does Jesus' prayer say about himself? about his Father in heaven?

Exercises for Later

1. In your quiet time this week, take 15-20 minutes and write down attributes of God, both this *communicable* (the ones that we share in, like love, relationship, holiness, compassion, faithfulness, authority, etc.), and the *incommunicable* (those attributes that we do not share with God, immutability, perfection, eternity, infinitude, omnipresence, omniscience, etc.). How does an understanding of these attributes affect your prayer?
2. Challenge your prayer pattern by spending your whole time praying in another type of the prayers we discussed (confession, petition, adoration, thanksgiving, intercession, centering).
3. Instead of praying your prayers, take some extra time and write our the prayer(s) that you want to speak to the Father regarding life, your desire for change, for growth, the pain of life now, the enemies that are at your door, the health and medical concerns that are consuming you. Present those to God in writing to be able to look back in several weeks or months to see how God is at work.
4. This week engage in prayer considering one of the images described in the lesson, a conversation between a father and his child, between a master and servant, or a conversation between two friends. How do your requests change? How does your vocabulary change? How does your response to God change?

Resources on Prayer (Keith will present more resources next week)

The Divine Hours, Phyllis Tickle

Valley of Vision, Arthur G. Bennett

Prayer, Richard Foster

Prayer's Apprentice, Timothy K. Jones

Nelson's Personal handbook on Prayer, James C. Wilhoit

Complete Works on Prayer, E.M. Bounds

Psalter Hymnal, CRC Publications, Grand Rapids

Trinity Hymnal, Great Commission Publications

Personal Notes on Prayer

Psalm 8:1-9 (NIV)

For the director of music. According to the gittith. A psalm of David.

¹O Lord, our Lord,

how majestic is your name in all the earth!

You have set your glory

above the heavens.

²From the lips of children and infants

you have ordained praise

because of your enemies,

to silence the foe and the avenger.

³When I consider your heavens,

the work of your fingers,

the moon and the stars,

which you have set in place,

⁴what is man that you are mindful of him,

the son of man that you care for him?

⁵You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings

and crowned him with glory and honor.

⁶You made him ruler over the works of your hands;

you put everything under his feet:

⁷all flocks and herds,

and the beasts of the field,

⁸the birds of the air,

and the fish of the sea,

all that swim the paths of the seas.

⁹O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!