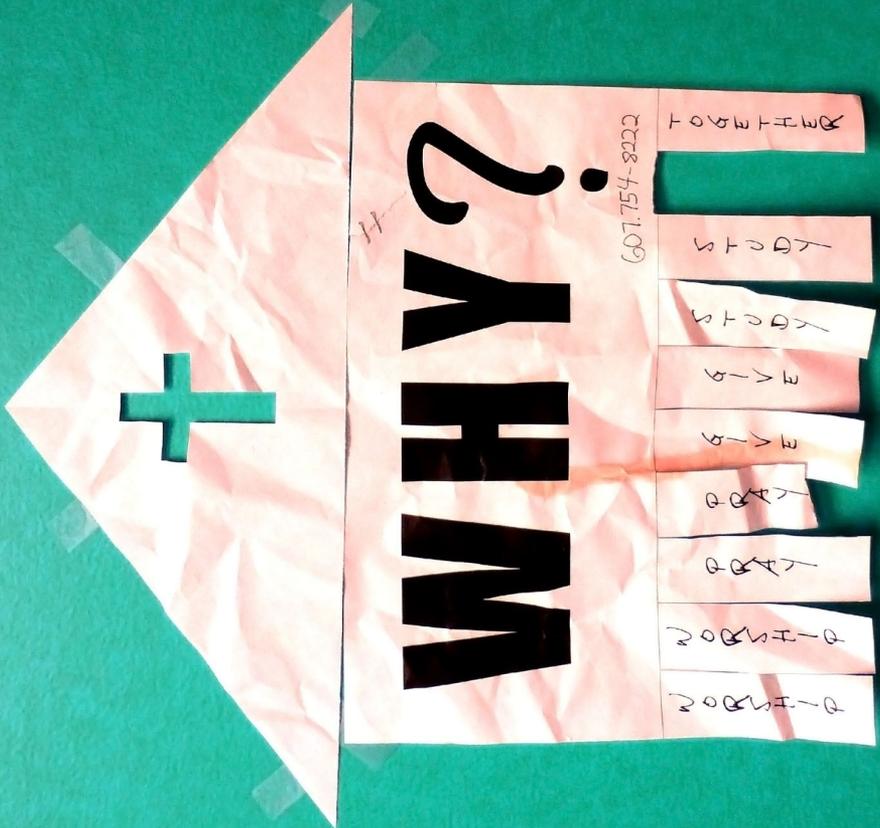


GOING DEEPER

DISCUSSION GUIDE

April 26, 2015



Discussion Guide

Why Pray?

Connecting:

45 minutes

(The following questions are intended to provide your group with a way of connecting with one another so that you might partner in the work God is doing in your lives.)

- In what ways did God move in your life this week? In what ways did you respond to him?
- What was your biggest challenge this week? In what ways, if any, did you invite God into this challenge?
- How honest have you been with us? (Graciously thank group members for their honesty if they answer that they have held back.)

Getting Started:

10 minutes

- When you hear the word “prayer,” what comes to mind? Do you find that it is easy for you to pray? Would you explain?

Diving Into the Text:

60 minutes

(The following questions are intended to provide your group with a simple road map through the text. Feel free to use these questions in ways that best fit your group and the dynamics of your own meeting.)

- Using the notes, explain the context of prayer.
- Read Luke 11.1-13 aloud, slowly. Read the text once more, seeking to imagine Jesus teaching you about prayer as one of his disciples.
- What posture did Jesus encourage his disciples to take in prayer?
- What petitions did Jesus encourage his disciples to make in prayer?
- What posture do people take and what petitions do they typically make in prayer? Are these similar or dissimilar to those Jesus states? Why might this be?
- What assumptions, if any, would a person need in order to pray in the way Jesus describes?
- In what ways, if any, does Jesus address these assumptions?

- Do you find it easy or difficult to pray in the way Jesus describes? Could you elaborate?
- What might make it easier for you to pray in this way?
- Consider closing your time as a group, approaching God as Father, using Jesus’ words as your guide. You might consider reading Jesus’ prayer one phrase at a time and then offering your own prayer in keeping with the principle Jesus provides.

Context and Background

Prayer

Scripture uses the term “prayer” to describe the dialogue people have with God. This dialogue is initiated by God (Ezekiel 2.1-2; Psalm 50.3-4), but people must respond to God’s initiative. This dialogue with God (prayer) may be spontaneous or it might take on a structured form (Nehemiah 2.4; Matthew 6.9-13). Prayer may also be offered individually or corporately (Nehemiah 1.5-11; Psalm 124). This means that there is value in the use of free-form and scripted prayers so long as the one who is praying is seeking to dialogue with God.

The form of prayer which appears most often throughout Scripture is the prayer of intercession, also known as “asking prayer” or “petition.” In intercession, the person of God asks God to provide what she is not capable of providing on her own (John 14.13-14; 1 John 5.14-15). Other forms of prayer appear throughout Scripture—adoration, thanksgiving, lamentation, and confession—but each of these involves petition to some extent (1 Samuel 1.15; Psalm 88.1-2; 130.1-2; 142.1-2; Matthew 7.7-8; Philippians 4.6).

As a practice, prayer is an act of faith. As one prays, he attaches himself to God, acknowledging that he is dependent upon the pleasure, provision, and timing of God (Luke 11.9-13; 1 John 5.14-15). This exercise of faith works to align him with God’s will and serves to further the Kingdom desires of God (James 4.2-3; 5.16)

The Text

Luke 11.1-4: *Teach us to pray*

Prayer was an important part of Jesus' life. Jesus withdrew on a regular basis to pray (Mark 1.35; 6.46; 14.32-40). Noticing that prayer was an important practice for Jesus, his disciples desired Jesus to teach them how to pray. Part of this desire is rooted in the purpose of discipleship. A disciple desires to become like the one she is following. Therefore, the desire for Jesus to teach about prayer is a desire for Jesus to teach his disciples how to pray like he prays. Implicit in the request for Jesus to teach about how to pray may also be a longing for a specific prayer which sets this Jesus group apart from other groups, specifically stated as the group which followed John. It was not uncommon for religious groups to have their own specific scripted prayer which identified them and gave them a measure of cohesion.

Jesus honors the request of his disciples and provides a basic framework for how to pray. The words Jesus provides may be prayed word-for-word, and many to this day pray in this way. However, what is most important for prayer are the principles which undergird the words Jesus teaches. When one considers what lies beneath Jesus' words, the radical nature of Jesus' prayer comes to the surface.

Jesus instructs his disciples to begin their prayer by addressing God as Father. In Jesus' native tongue, this address is not unlike the modern address of "Daddy." Such intimacy is unheard of, even today, in addressing God. However, Jesus encourages prayer to begin assuming intimacy with the one who created the universe, although this intimacy is to be held in tension with the realization of who God is. He is holy, something other. Therefore, God may be approached with intimacy, but Jesus encourages his disciples to ask that God act so that others, including the one praying, might recognize God for who he truly is. Recognizing God for who he is (holy) leads one to submit to his authority, requesting that God's Kingdom would come. On one level, this could be a request that God fix the world, but on the deepest level, this request is that God would exercise his rightful authority in the world, beginning in the life of the one praying. The radical nature of Jesus' prayer to this point is hard to understate.

Jesus would have his disciples to approach the God who made all things with great boldness and then to willingly give him 5proposal, one often forced upon humanity by the hostility of the gods. However, this God is not terrifying, though he is all-powerful, and as such, one may entrust his life to him.

Having acknowledged and then surrendered to this "safe" God, Jesus instructs his disciples to express their basic needs so that the one they call Father might meet them. They may begin with their basic needs such as bread. The prayer of Jesus literally translates "our tomorrow bread," but the idea is plain. The disciple is only asking for bread one day at a time. One can hear an echo of the giving of manna in the wilderness journey. Once again, this is a radical prayer. The request is kept small so that an attitude and posture of dependence is generated. While this God could grant all things, one is to ask for only what they need for that day, thus necessitating a return to engage with this Father on the very next day.

Jesus also encourages his disciples to ask that God forgive them their sins. The idea is that God would cancel the debts they owe to God. Simply put, the petition is for the Father to clear the path for the relationship to be maintained, and this request is coupled with the assertion that the petitioner will act in the same way with others. Once more we can see an attitude of dependence being expressed as well as that of surrender to the ways of the Father.

Finally, Jesus admonishes his disciples to request guidance away from temptation. More than likely, the idea is that apart from God's guidance, the one praying would fall victim to temptation. This is an acknowledgement of one's weakness apart from God, an expression of one's need for God. Throughout this prayer, the constant theme is one of dependence and surrender. The petitioner, if he prays as Jesus instructs, positions himself boldly before God in order to entrust himself to the one he calls Father.

Luke 11.5-13: *Can Father be trusted?*

Jesus' words would strike fear into the hearts of his audience, modern audiences as well! Surrendering to God, entrusting our lives to him, involves a relinquishing of all control. This giving up of control requires an assurance that we can trust the one to whom we are entrusting our lives.

Jesus knows this and addresses the issue with a parable. He asks his audience to imagine they have had a visitor arrive and they are unable to provide for his needs, an expectation in Jesus' day. According to custom, such an instance would require the larger community to pitch in and help. However, because of the late hour, the only means of acquiring this help would be to shame a neighbor into providing the necessary supplies. Jesus then reasons that one can approach God for what they need because he is different. He does not need to be shamed. He freely gives the things for which he is petitioned, to those who entrust themselves to him by seeking after him. Those who seek to entrust themselves to him will find that he, contrary to ancient ideas about the gods who were angry and fickle, will only give them good things. This Father would go so far as giving people his very self in the form of the Holy spirit.

Real life with Blake:

Why do we pray? Prayer has always been hard for me. Part of the problem is that no one really taught me to pray. I grew up hearing people pray the same tired and worn phrases again and again. So, I guess no one ever taught them to pray either. Therefore, I always felt inadequate, like I wasn't really prepared to pray. When I did find the words, prayer seemed somewhat pointless. God already knew what I needed, even before I asked (Matthew 6.8). So, why did I even need to ask? Because I wrestled with feelings of inadequacy and purposelessness, I rarely prayed. I might mumble a few words of thanks here and there, and certainly when I hit rough patches I cried out in pain for God to fix it all. By and large, prayer wasn't a regular part of my life. In recent years, that has changed. Prayer has become an ever-increasing part of my journey of faith because I am coming to realize that I need prayer to grow my faith. I used to think prayer was about getting things. I am coming to understand that prayer is about God getting me. In prayer I ask, I petition, I request. I do all of these things not to get but to make space for God to have me. In asking I acknowledge that I am not God because I cannot provide for myself.

In petitioning I acknowledge that God's way is best, not my own. In requesting, I surrender my own feeble efforts and depend fully upon God. Another way of saying it is that in prayer I surrender and entrust myself to God. Thus, in prayer I am exercising faith, orienting my life around God. I am discovering that prayer is not a duty but a gift to me, God's gift to draw me to himself in faith.

Real life with you:

Why do we pray? Sometimes we pray because we think we have to pray. Sometimes we pray because we are in a mess and we want out. Sometimes we pray because we want things. In the end, prayer isn't about any of these things, not really. Prayer is not really about us getting as much as it is about God getting us. In prayer we enter into a dialogue with the one who made us and admit that he made us. We acknowledge that our lives cannot and do not exist apart from him. As such, we need him and depend upon him. In prayer we entrust our lives to God. We engage in this thing called faith which happens to be the heart of a relationship with the one who made us. This week, we encourage you to take time each day to pray, to exercise your faith. You might pray the words of Jesus in Luke 11.2-4 or you might use these words as a model for approaching the one who made you in an intimate way, expressing your deep need and dependence upon him.

I am coming to realize that I need prayer to grow my faith.



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