

PRAYER AND PRESENCE

THE PURSUIT OF GLORY

GOING DEEPER

DISCUSSION GUIDE

October 29, 2017

Discussion Guide

How Do I 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 STATE THEY HAVE HELD BACK.)

GETTING STARTED:

10 MINUTES

- DO YOU THINK THERE IS A "RIGHT" WAY TO PRAY? COULD YOU ELABORATE?

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, TALK ABOUT THE USE OF SCRIPTED/ROTE PRAYERS, PARTICULARLY IN CONNECTION WITH JESUS' STATEMENT ABOUT "BABBLING" IN MATTHEW 6.7.
- JESUS PROVIDES HIS DISCIPLES WITH A FRAMEWORK TO

HELP THEM LEARN HOW TO PRAY. THIS FRAMEWORK HAS THREE MAJOR MOVEMENTS OR CATEGORIES OF PRAYER: ADORATION(WORSHIP), PETITION(ASKING), AND CONFESSION. ACCORDING TO JESUS, WHAT IS INVOLVED IN EACH OF THESE CATEGORIES OF PRAYER?

- IF PRAYER IS ABOUT MAKING ROOM FOR GOD, THEN HOW MIGHT THIS FRAMEWORK LEAD ONE TO PRAY IN THIS MANNER? COULD YOU EXPLAIN?
- HOW MIGHT THE FRAMEWORK JESUS PROVIDES BE USED TO LEARN HOW TO PRAY?
- WHAT MIGHT IT LOOK LIKE TO PRAY IN THE WAY JESUS OUTLINES? WOULD YOU SAY YOUR PRAYERS ARE IN KEEPING WITH YOUR DESCRIPTION? COULD YOU ELABORATE?
- CONSIDER TAKING TIME TO PRAY, AS A GROUP, FOLLOWING JESUS' FRAMEWORK. YOU MIGHT BEGIN BY SPEAKING JESUS' PRAYER AND THEN MOVING TO EXPAND UPON THE THREE MOVEMENTS IN PERSONAL AND CORPORATE WAYS.

CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

SCRIPTED/ROTE PRAYER

ONE QUESTION WHICH OFTEN COMES UP WITH RESPECT TO PRAYER IS WHETHER IT IS APPROPRIATE TO PRAY WRITTEN PRAYERS, PARTICULARLY THOSE WHICH HAVE BEEN WRITTEN HUNDREDS OF YEARS BEFORE AND PRAYED BY MANY OTHERS THROUGHOUT THE CENTURIES. THIS QUESTION IS MOST OFTEN RAISED BY THOSE WHO FIND THEMSELVES IN THE FREE CHURCH TRADITION, THOSE CHURCHES WHICH RESIST STANDARDIZED LITURGIES IN FAVOR OF ENTHUSIASTIC OR EXTEMPORANEOUS WORSHIP AND PRAYERS.

IN ANSWERING THIS QUESTION, ONE MUST FIRST REALIZE THAT THE USE OF SCRIPTED (OR ROTE) PRAYERS, PARTICULARLY THOSE PRESCRIBED FOR LITURGICAL (WORSHIP) PURPOSES WAS NOT A QUESTION UNTIL THE REFORMATION, AND THE QUESTION WAS RAISED ONLY WITHIN THE ANABAPTIST TRADITION WHICH REJECTED WHOLESALY THE WORSHIP PRACTICES OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH. THE CHURCH HAS A LONG-STANDING TRADITION OF USING WRITTEN PRAYERS IN WORSHIP AND HAS LOOKED FAVORABLY UPON THE REPEATED USE OF THESE PRAYERS. THE REASONING BEHIND THIS VIEW IS TWO-FOLD. FIRST, THE USE OF THESE PRAYERS TEACHES PEOPLE TO PRAY. MANY OF THESE PRAYERS WERE DEVELOPED IN PRE-LITERATE TIMES, BEFORE PEOPLE COULD READ OR HAD ACCESS TO SCRIPTURE. THE REPEATED USE OF THESE PRAYERS PROVIDED AN ENVIRONMENT WHERE PEOPLE COULD LEARN HOW TO APPROACH GOD, CONFESS SIN, ASK FOR PROTECTION, AND THE LIKE. SECOND, THESE PRAYERS WERE USED TO TEACH ORTHODOX DOCTRINE. WORSHIP INVOLVES THE REHEARSAL OF GOD'S STORY, AND MANY OF THE CHURCH'S MOST ANCIENT PRAYERS DO INDEED DO JUST THIS. FURTHER, THESE PRAYERS ARE CONSTRUCTED POETICALLY WHICH AIDS IN THEIR MEMORIZATION THEREBY AIDING IN THE HANDING OFF OF GOOD DOCTRINE. MANY CHURCHES WHICH MAINTAIN LITURGICAL FORMS OF WORSHIP CONTINUE TO USE THESE PRAYERS FOR THESE SAME REASONS AND WITH GOOD EFFECT.

SOME WITHIN THE FREE CHURCH TRADITION HAVE ARGUED THAT THE USE OF SCRIPTED PRAYERS IS CONTRARY TO THE TEACHING OF JESUS, SPECIFICALLY HIS TEACHING IN MATTHEW 6.7 WHERE HE FORBIDS PRAYING LIKE PAGANS. THIS ARGUMENT IS BASED ON THE KING JAMES TRANSLATION OF THIS VERSE WHICH RENDERS THE WORD "BABBLING" AS "VAIN REPETITION." THIS IS A POOR TRANSLATION AS THE WORD DOES NOT MEAN SOMEONE IS SAYING THE SAME THING, OVER AND OVER AGAIN, IN THE SENSE OF REPETITION. THEREFORE, THE ARGUMENT, ON LINGUISTIC EVIDENCE ALONE, IS MUTE. FURTHER, ON

HISTORICAL GROUNDS, THE PRACTICE TO WHICH JESUS REFERS IS THE PAGAN PRACTICE OF THAUMATURGY (MAGIC) TO CONTROL THE GODS. IT WAS BELIEVED THAT SPECIFIC INCANTATIONS BENT THE GODS TO HUMANITY'S WILL. WHEN ONE USED THESE INCANTATIONS IN THE RIGHT WAY AND WITH THE RIGHT FORCE, INCLUDING REPETITION, THE GOD HAD TO DO AS REQUESTED. THE CHURCH'S USE OF SCRIPTED PRAYERS HAS NOTHING IN COMMON WITH THIS ANCIENT PAGAN PRACTICE AS THESE PRAYERS ARE MORE ABOUT PROVIDING PRACTICAL AND THEOLOGICAL GUIDANCE FOR THE WORSHIPER.

A STRONG ARGUMENT CAN BE MADE THAT SCRIPTED PRAYERS EXIST WITHIN THE FREE CHURCH TRADITION EVEN IF THEY HAVE NOT BEEN WRITTEN DOWN. THIS REALITY CAN BE SEEN IN THE REPEATED USE OF COMMON PHRASES OR EVEN THEMES WITHIN AND ACROSS VARIOUS FREE CHURCH TRADITIONS AND DENOMINATIONS. IN ADDITION, STRONG ARGUMENTS CAN BE MADE FOR THE USE OF SCRIPTED PRAYERS BECAUSE THE EXTEMPORANEOUS AND ENTHUSIASTIC NATURE OF PRAYER WITHIN THE FREE CHURCH TRADITION OFTEN LEADS TO HERETICAL UNDERSTANDINGS OF GOD AND SHALLOW/SHORT-SITED REHEARSALS OF GOD'S STORY IN WORSHIP.

SCRIPTED OR ROTE PRAYERS CAN BE PRAYED WORD FOR WORD, OR THEY CAN PROVIDE A SUPPORTIVE FRAMEWORK FOR EXTEMPORANEOUS PRAYER. BOTH PRACTICES, WHEN USED PROPERLY, CAN GREATLY BENEFIT THE FAITH OF A BELIEVER AS THEY LEARN HOW TO PRAY BY JOINING IN WITH THE PRAYERS OF THE CHURCH WHICH STRETCHES BEHIND AND BEFORE THEM.

The Text

MATTHEW 6.5-13: How Do I Pray?

PRAYER IS PART OF THE LIFE OF FAITH, A PART JESUS HIMSELF ASSUMES. HOWEVER, JESUS DOES NOT ASSUME THAT PEOPLE KNOW HOW TO PRAY IN A PROPER, KINGDOM-ORIENTED, MANNER. THEREFORE, A LARGE PART OF JESUS' TEACHING INVOLVED PRAYER. ONE CONCENTRATED BLOCK OF JESUS' TEACHING ON PRAYER IS FOUND IN HIS SERMON ON THE MOUNT. HERE, WE DISCOVER SOME OF JESUS' CLEAREST TEACHING ON PRAYER.

JESUS BEGINS BY NOTING WHAT PRAYER IS NOT. PRAYER IS NOT A PERFORMATIVE RELIGIOUS ACT, ONE TO BE DONE OUT OF DUTY OR OBLIGATION (A CHARACTERIZATION OF THE JEWISH APPROACH). NEITHER IS PRAYER A MAGICAL OR TRANSACTIONAL MEANS OF OBTAINING WHAT ONE DESIRES FROM GOD (A CHARACTERIZATION OF THE PAGAN APPROACH). RATHER, PRAYER IS A MEANS OF APPROACHING GOD WHO IS ALREADY WELL-FAVORED TOWARD THE WORSHIPER AND DESIROUS OF MEETING HIS NEEDS. ONE NEED NOT PLEASE HIM OR BEG HIM TO PROVIDE. THEREFORE,

PRAYER CAN BECOME SOMETHING ENTIRELY OTHER. PRAYER CAN BECOME A MEANS OF MAKING ROOM FOR GOD IN THEIR LIFE.

JESUS PROVIDES A BROAD FRAMEWORK FOR THIS KIND OF PRAYER. WHILE IT IS NOT WRONG TO PRAY THE EXACT WORDS JESUS PROVIDES, IT IS MORE LIKELY THAT JESUS INTENDS THIS FRAMEWORK TO PROVIDE DIRECTIONAL GUIDANCE FOR TRUE PRAYER. WHEN ONE SURVEYS THIS PRAYER, IT MIGHT BE BROKEN DOWN INTO THREE LARGE PARTS, EACH OF WHICH IS MADE UP OF INDIVIDUAL STATEMENTS AND REQUESTS. THE THREE LARGE PARTS MIGHT BE DEFINED AS FOLLOWS: ADORATION, PETITION, AND CONFESSION. WHILE THESE ARE CERTAINLY NOT THE ONLY KIND OF PRAYERS ONE FINDS IN SCRIPTURE, ONE MIGHT ARGUE THAT IF THESE PRAYERS ARE UNDERSTOOD AS CATEGORIES, THEN ALL KINDS OF PRAYERS MIGHT FIND THEIR WAY UNDER ONE OF THESE HEADINGS.

THE ADORATION (WORSHIP) PORTION OF JESUS' PRAYER IS FOUND IN THE BEGINNING (MATTHEW 6.9-10). JESUS INSTRUCTS HIS DISCIPLES TO APPROACH GOD AS FATHER, MOST LIKELY UNDERSTOOD TO MEAN CREATOR OR SOURCE OF LIFE. THUS, PRAYER BEGINS BY ACKNOWLEDGING ONE'S CONNECTION TO GOD. HE THEN INSTRUCTS HIS DISCIPLES TO ACKNOWLEDGE GOD'S IMMINENCE AND TRANSCENDENCE. GOD IS NEAR (HEAVEN WHICH IS THE AIR ALL AROUND ONE) AND SEPARATE (HOLY OR DISTINCT FROM PEOPLE). HE THEN URGES HIS DISCIPLES TO CALL FOR THE COMING OF GOD'S KINGDOM AND THE DOING OF HIS WILL ON EARTH AS IT IS IN HEAVEN. ON THE SURFACE, PRAYER AS ADORATION (WORSHIP) APPEARS TO BE ABOUT ACKNOWLEDGING GOD AND ASKING FOR GOD'S REIGN TO BECOME REAL. HOWEVER, WHAT JESUS IS ENCOURAGING IS MUCH DEEPER THAN THIS. IN THIS PORTION OF HIS INSTRUCTION, JESUS IS POINTING BACK TO THE JEWISH TRADITION OF WORSHIP PRAYERS WHICH REHEARSED GOD'S STORY (1 CHRONICLES 16.7, 12; PSALM 44; 124). THE PSALMS OFFER A RICH REPERTOIRE OF THIS TYPE OF PRAYER. IN THEM, THE WORSHIPER ACKNOWLEDGES GOD AS THE SOURCE OF LIFE AND REDEMPTION AND THEN REHEARSES GOD'S STORY, EVEN TO THE POINT OF LOOKING TO THE FUTURE WHERE GOD'S STORY IS HEADED WITH GREAT ANTICIPATION AND HOPE. IN THIS SAME VEIN, JESUS ENCOURAGES HIS DISCIPLES TO USE PRAYER TO WORSHIP BY ACKNOWLEDGING GOD AS THEIR SOURCE OF LIFE AND TO REHEARSE HIS STORY. GOD CREATED AND IS IN THE PROCESS OF RECREATING, REAFFIRMING HIS REIGN OVER HIS CREATION. THIS KIND OF WORSHIP GOES BEYOND NOTING GOD'S GOODNESS, GREATNESS, OR HOLINESS. IT AFFIRMS THAT GOD IS THE SOURCE OF LIFE AND RECALLS WHAT GOD HAS DONE AND IS GOING TO DO. WHILE THIS MIGHT NOT FEEL LIKE

PRAYER BUT MORE LIKE PROCLAMATION, IT IS PRAYER BECAUSE OF WHAT IT DOES. IN THE PROCLAMATION OF GOD'S STORY, THE DISCIPLE REMINDS HIMSELF OF THE CONTEXT FOR HIS OWN STORY. HE REAFFIRMS THAT HE IS NOT GOD. THESE ARE IMPORTANT PRAYER MOVEMENTS BECAUSE THEY MOVE THE WORSHIPER FROM A POSITION OF SELF-CENTEREDNESS. HIS STORY IS NOT THE STORY. FURTHER, HE STEPS ASIDE AND ALLOWS GOD TO TAKE HIS RIGHTFUL PLACE AND ROLE. THIS IS THE POINT OF WORSHIP AND PRAYER AS WORSHIP DOES THE SAME.

THE SECOND CATEGORY OF PRAYER IN JESUS' FRAMEWORK IS PETITION. JESUS ENCOURAGES HIS DISCIPLES TO ASK GOD FOR THEIR DAILY NEEDS, GUIDANCE, AND PROTECTION FROM FORCES STRONGER THAN THEMSELVES. ONE MIGHT NOTE THAT THESE ARE ALL "ASKING" IN NATURE, AND THEY MIGHT BE OFFERED FOR OTHERS AND NOT JUST FOR THE ONE PRAYING. WHILE THESE PRAYERS APPEAR TO BE SELF-EXPLANATORY, AND THEY ARE, THE ANSWER OF GOD TO THESE PRAYERS IS IMPORTANT, PARTICULARLY THE NEGATIVE ANSWERS FOR THESE ARE PART OF THE EXPERIENCE OF PRAYER (JAMES 4.2-3). IF JESUS SIMPLY MEANT FOR HIS FOLLOWERS TO ASK OF GOD SO THEY MIGHT RECEIVE ALL FOR WHICH THEY ASKED, THEN A RELATIONSHIP COULD EASILY DEVELOP BETWEEN PEOPLE AND GOD WHERE GOD WAS WANTED FOR HIS STUFF. HOWEVER, PRAYER FOSTERS A PROPER RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD. PETITION PRAYERS DO THIS AS THE PETITIONER EXPERIENCES GOD'S ANSWERS. POSITIVE ANSWERS REAFFIRM GOD'S GOODNESS AND HIS ROLE AS RIGHTFUL PROVIDER IN LIFE. HOWEVER, NEGATIVE ANSWERS REMIND THE BELIEVER THAT GOD DOES NOT EXIST TO SATISFY THE WHIMS OF THE BELIEVER, AND THEY HELP TO ALIGN THE DESIRES AND REQUESTS OF THE BELIEVER WITH GOD'S HEART AND DESIRES. BOTH MOVEMENTS BRING AN AWARENESS TO THE BELIEVER THAT HE IS NOT THE CENTER OF THE UNIVERSE NOR SHOULD HE ATTEMPT TO BE.

THE FINAL TYPE OF PRAYER IN JESUS' FRAMEWORK IS CONFESSION. CONFESSION INVOLVES THE ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF WRONGDOING. IN THIS CASE, THE WRONGDOING ACKNOWLEDGED IS FOUND IN THE LIFE OF THE BELIEVER AND IN THE WORLD AROUND HIM. THIS CONFESSION IS COUPLED WITH THE REQUEST FOR FORGIVENESS WHICH INVOLVES NOT ONLY THE PASSING OVER OF WRONGDOING BUT THE PASSING OVER IN ORDER TO ACHIEVE RESTORATION. THUS, JESUS ENCOURAGES HIS DISCIPLES TO ACKNOWLEDGE THEY HAVE LIVED CONTRARY TO GOD'S DESIRES, AND IN SO DOING, ACKNOWLEDGE THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD AND THE NEED FOR HIS RESTORATION. HOWEVER, JESUS TIES THIS MOVEMENT TO THE SAME MOVEMENT IN THE LIFE OF THE BELIEVER AS HE ENGAGES THE WORLD. IN THIS, THE DISCIPLE ALIGNS HIMSELF WITH GOD'S STORY—THE LOOP WITH WORSHIP IS CLOSED—BY BECOMING

AN ACTIVE PARTICIPANT IN WHAT GOD IS DOING IN THE WORLD. THIS KIND OF PRAYER PLACES GOD IN THE ROLE OF SOVEREIGN IN THE BELIEVER'S PERSON AND WITH HIS PURPOSE.

REAL LIFE WITH BLAKE:

PRAYER IS IMPORTANT. THAT MUCH IS CLEAR. WHAT IS NOT ALWAYS CLEAR IS HOW TO GO ABOUT PRAYING, THE RIGHT WAY. WHEN PEOPLE WANTED TO TEACH ME ABOUT PRAYER, THEY HAVE ALMOST ALWAYS POINTED ME TO THE PRAYER JESUS TAUGHT HIS DISCIPLES. WHAT BETTER PLACE TO POINT THAN WHERE JESUS SAID, "PRAY LIKE THIS." HOWEVER, PRAYING LIKE JESUS TAUGHT, AT LEAST THE WAY I UNDERSTOOD JESUS TO TEACH, NEVER FELT RIGHT. I WAS SUPPOSED TO ADORE GOD. HONESTLY, 5 MINUTES OF "YOU ARE WONDERFUL, AND MIGHTY, AND AMAZING, AND AWESOME" GETS MORE THAN TIRESOME. I WAS SUPPOSED TO ASK FOR WHAT I NEEDED, BUT WHEN I DID, SOMETIMES I DIDN'T GET WHAT THE THINGS FOR WHICH I ASKED GOD. I WAS SUPPOSED TO CONFESS ALL I HAD DONE WRONG, BUT DOING SO JUST LEFT ME FEELING BEAT UP AND FULL OF SHAME. JESUS' WAY OF PRAYING FELT . . . SHALL I SAY, LESS THAN SPECTACULAR. BUT WHAT IF JESUS DIDN'T TEACH US TO PRAY LIKE I THOUGHT HE DID?

I AM NOT SAYING JESUS DIDN'T UTTER WHAT WE REFER TO AS THE LORD'S PRAYER. I AM SAYING WE MAY HAVE MISUNDERSTOOD HIM WHEN HE SAID IT. WHAT IF JESUS UNDERSTOOD WORSHIP TO BE MORE THAN TELLING GOD HOW GREAT HE WAS? WHAT IF ASKING INVOLVED MORE THAN GETTING? WHAT IF CONFESSING WASN'T SUPPOSED TO LEAVE YOU BEAT UP? WHAT IF THERE WAS A POINT TO ALL OF THIS WE (I) HAD MISSED? I HAVE BEEN PONDERING THIS, PARTICULARLY IN LIGHT OF VIEWING PRAYER AS SOMETHING WHICH MOVES ME FROM A SELF-CENTERED LIFE TO A GOD-CENTERED LIFE. IN THIS LIGHT, JESUS' PRAYER TAKES ON AN ENTIRELY DIFFERENT FLAVOR, ONE THAT FITS WITHIN THE LARGER STORY OF GOD. ADORING PRAYER BECOMES ABOUT REMINDING MYSELF THAT I AM NOT GOD. PETITION IS NOW ABOUT ALIGNING ME WITH GOD'S HEART. CONFESSION IS INTENDED TO MAKE ME PART OF GOD'S PURPOSES AND WORK IN THE WORLD. SEEING PRAYER IN THIS WAY OPENS NEW WAYS TO PRAY, BUT CAN I PRAY THIS WAY? CAN I LEARN TO PRAY THIS WAY? PERHAPS I CAN, IF I AM WILLING TO LEARN.

REAL LIFE WITH YOU:

PRAYER IS IMPORTANT, BUT THAT DOESN'T MEAN WE FIND IT EASY. MOST OF US WRESTLE WITH HOW TO PRAY. WE SHOULDN'T LET THAT WORRY US. EVEN JESUS' DISCIPLES STRUGGLED TO KNOW HOW TO PRAY (LUKE 11.1). LEARNING HOW TO PRAY SEEMS TO BE A NORMAL PART OF THE FAITH JOURNEY, AND GOD GRACIOUSLY HELPS US ON THIS PATH. JESUS HAS PROVIDED A FRAMEWORK FOR PRAYER WHICH HE INTENDS US TO USE IN ORDER TO LEARN HOW TO PRAY. IT IS A FRAMEWORK WHICH GIVES US STRUCTURE AND CONTENT FOR OUR PRAYER. IN THIS PRAYER, WE LEARN THAT AT THE HIGHEST LEVEL, A LIFE OF PRAYER INVOLVES PRAYERS OF WORSHIP, PETITION, AND CONFESSION. HOWEVER, THE PURPOSE OF EACH IS TO MOVE MORE AND MORE OF GOD INTO THE CENTER OF OUR BEING, AND MORE OF OUR LIVES INTO THE CENTER OF GOD'S PURPOSES FOR AND WORK WITHIN CREATION. IN OTHER WORDS, PRAYER ACCOMPLISHES GREAT THINGS, IN THE ONE PRAYING! THIS WEEK, I ENCOURAGE YOU TO USE JESUS' FRAMEWORK AS A TOOL IN YOUR OWN PRAYER LIFE. YOU CAN BEGIN BY PRAYING THIS PRAYER DIRECTLY, BUT I ENCOURAGE YOU TO ALSO "RIFF" ON THIS PRAYER. USE ITS FRAMEWORK AND CONTENT TO GUIDE PRAYERS WHICH ARE GERMANE TO YOUR LIFE AND SITUATION. THIS IS NOT ABOUT SEEING HOW LONG YOU CAN PRAY BUT HOW WELL YOU CAN LEARN HOW TO PRAY. DO NOT FEEL YOU NEED TO IMPRESS GOD. DO NOT FEAR FAILURE. WE LEARN TO PRAY BY PRAYING.



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