



DAILY PRAYER JOURNAL

————— 2020 —————

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF OCEAN SPRINGS

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Heroes and role models are important. Through whom have you found inspiration? When we see excellence in someone in an arena of life we care about, we draw inspiration. As a young man, I wanted to run track. And I did. I drew my inspiration from Eric Liddell, whom I learned about through the movie *Chariots of Fire*. I discovered that even though my inspiration was Eric Liddell, I wasn't much of a sprinter. Even still, I ran.

I have prayed with some people over the years, and it has seemed that they are drawing from a deeper well of prayer than I am. An early mentor of mine became such because after a time of prayer with him, I was inspired to become a better man of prayer. I asked him to teach me to pray.

Prayer is a vital tool in pushing back against the darkness of the fallen world that surrounds us. We are reminded that the gates of hell will not prevail against the advance of the Church. But the leading weapon in the Church's advance against the kingdom of darkness is the prayer that paves the way. What a thought that God would ordain prayer as a lever that moves his hand! Sisters and brothers, would you join me in pushing the lever of prayer that so moves the Almighty God to advance his kingdom through the Church?

This booklet is a one-week prayer journal. Each day we will look at different prayer patterns and prayers of Jesus. Jesus' model of prayer as recorded in the gospel accounts will give us a chance to be mentored in prayer by the Lord himself. May we learn well from the perfect teacher!

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- DAY 1** **THE TIME AND PLACE OF PRAYER**
Mark 1:35
Luke 6:12
Matthew 6:5-6
- DAY 2** **PRAYERS OF DISCERNMENT**
Mark 1:35-38
Luke 6:12-16
- DAY 3** **PRAYING FOR OUR WANTS BUT SEEKING GOD'S WILL**
Matthew 26:36-46
- DAY 4** **PRAYING FOR OUR NATION**
Luke 19:41-42
Daniel 9:3-5
Nehemiah 1:4-7
- DAY 5** **PRAYING FOR OUR ENEMIES**
Matthew 5:43-45
Luke 23:32-34
- DAY 6** **HOW JESUS PRAYED/PRAYS FOR US**
John 17:20-23
Hebrews 7:25
- DAY 7** **THE MODEL PRAYER**
Matthew 6:9-13

DAY 1: THE TIME AND PLACE OF PRAYER

"And rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark, he departed and went out to a desolate place, and there he prayed." - Mark 1:35

"In these days he went out to the mountain to pray, and all night he continued in prayer to God." – Luke 6:12

"But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret." – Matthew 6:6

Jesus found quiet places of solitude in which to pray. In preaching through Daniel it is clear that he too found quiet solitude as the setting of his prayer life. Jesus commended those listening to his Sermon on the Mount to find a closet and shut the door when they prayed.

One of the great hindrances to prayer is the constant buzz and busyness of the world around us. Jesus' life was a whirr of activity as well. But he needed to pray. So he would get up before the sun and find a quiet spot. When the rest of the world was still up, he would climb a mountain and pray all night.

Jesus' commendation of "closet prayers" is about making time to get away, to seek solitude, and to remove the "noise" of an encroaching world.

Before prayer can be about what we are saying, it must be about the time and place we say it. Do you have a time and place of prayer? When and where is your prayer closet?

In this journaling space provided, take some time to think about creating a rhythm of prayer. I have become enthralled with Daniel's prayer rhythm. He viewed his time liturgically and the rest of his day was shaped around his commitment to be a man of prayer.

Think about the rhythm (or rhythmlessness!) of your day. **When** would be the best time for you to pray while the world is quiet around you?

Think about where you find solace and calm. **Where** would be a quiet place for you to invest in prayer uninterrupted - your prayer "closet", so to speak?

Spend some time asking God to enrich your prayer life with rhythm and solitude. Ask him to lead you to a time and place of prayer.

DAY 2: PRAYERS OF DISCERNMENT

Where would God have you go? What would God have you do? Who does God want to bless you through? Who does God want you to bless?

These are questions of discernment. Oftentimes people pray asking God to bless decisions they have already made rather than asking the Lord to show them the where, or what, or who of God's will.

After Jesus' prayer time in the desolate place, Mark records, *"And he said to them, 'Let us go on to the next towns, that I may preach there also, for that is why I came out.'"*

After Jesus' all-night prayer on the mountain, Luke records, *"And when day came, he called his disciples and chose from them twelve, whom he named apostles."*

After an early morning of prayer, Jesus knew just what to do. After an evening of prayer, Jesus knew just whom to do it with. What might these insights tell us about what Jesus spent these times praying about?

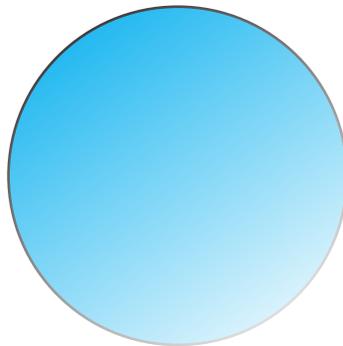
Even though Jesus was fully God, he sought the will of the Father by asking what he was to do, where he was to go, and whom he was to call on. If Jesus needed to pray prayers of discernment, shouldn't we?

So often our prayers can default to a list of our decisions, hopes, and dreams we simply want God to ratify. The difficulty of discerning prayer is that it takes our hand off the wheel of our lives and allows God's to be there instead.

In the space provided, take some time to reflect on your prayer life.

Fill out the pie graph:

What percentage of your prayer time do you spend praying about your will, wants, or desires? What percentage of your prayer time do you spend praying about God's will for you?



What does this graph say about your prayer life?

Spend some time reflecting on and praying God's will to be done in decisions you need to make, people you need to invest in, how you need to spend time, how you spend money, or what calling God has in your life.

DAY 3: PRAYING FOR OUR WANTS BUT SEEKING GOD'S WILL

In Matthew 26:36-46, we read Jesus' prayer in the garden of Gethsemane just before his arrest:

And going a little farther he fell on his face and prayed, saying, "My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will." ... Again, for the second time, he went away and prayed, "My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done." ... he went away and prayed for the third time, saying the same words again.

"Not as I will but as you will" may be some of the most important words we can pray. Here, Jesus is expressing honest grief with what lay before him in Calvary. The shame and pain of the cross Jesus would experience in his flesh were very real concerns for him. However, Jesus, as we see so often, submitted his will to that of God the Father.

Put simply, Jesus was more concerned about honoring the will of God the Father than he was about asking the Father to ease his pain or keep him from suffering. For Jesus, honoring the will of God the Father was his highest desire. This was reflected in how Jesus prayed.

In Gethsemane, Jesus expressed his desire to not suffer if he didn't have to. But he concluded his prayer with ultimate submission to the will of the Father. "Nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will" is a wonderful way to remind us in our praying that God is not a genie who must grant our prayerful wishes, but rather the Sovereign of the universe whose will should be submitted to.

List some areas of concern or desire in your life in which you want a specific outcome.

Pray through that list, expressing your desires to God. But as you finish expressing your desires, conclude each request with Jesus' phrase, "Nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will."

Are there some specific areas where it is harder for you to pray "not as I will, but as you will"? Spend some time asking God to help you trust him in those areas.

DAY 4: PRAYING FOR OUR NATION

This prayer journal was actually inspired by people encouraging me to encourage our church to pray for our country. The need for such intercession is clear. Our nation is divided along political, racial, socioeconomic, and religious fault lines.

However, the United States is not like the biblical Nation of Israel. Passages like Jer. 29:11-14 are often used by evangelical Americans to call the church to pray for our nation.

"Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will hear you. You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you, declares the Lord, and I will restore your fortunes..."

However, to apply this prophesy about biblical Israel to America is biblically unfaithful. God is not speaking a word to 21st century America in that text any more than God is addressing Indonesia in that text.

However, that doesn't mean we shouldn't pray for our nation. We should. More specifically, we should pray for the church in our nation to be who God has called us to be. If we want the principles of God's kingdom to be reflected in our country, then it is the church in America we must pray for.

If America has faltered, then the church in America has faltered. And there are clear biblical examples of how to pray when this happens.

And when Jesus drew near and saw the city, he wept over it, saying, "Would that you, even you, had known on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes." – Luke 19:41-42

Then I turned my face to the Lord God, seeking him by prayer and pleas for mercy with fasting and sackcloth and ashes. I prayed to the Lord my God and made confession, saying, "O Lord, the great and awesome God, who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, we have sinned and done wrong and acted wickedly and rebelled, turning aside from your commandments and rules. – Daniel 9:3-5

As soon as I heard these words I sat down and wept... And I said, "O Lord God of heaven... be attentive and your eyes open, to hear the prayer of your servant that I now pray before you day and night for the people of Israel your servants, confessing the sins of the people of Israel, which we have sinned against you. Even I and my father's house have sinned... - Nehemiah 1:4-6

Prayers for our nation are in order. If we want to address those prayers biblically, I think a few things should take precedence.

- 1. Godly grief** ("weeping") is proper emotion. Anger toward those we think "messed it up" does not lead us to godly prayer. Mourning keeps our prayers humble.
- 2. Our own personal complicity** in the matter - as individuals and as the church. Both Nehemiah and Daniel personally repented over the state of things. One thing we often need to repent of is the idolatry of our own partisanship that is not.
- 3. Those in leadership** at every level whether we agree with their politics or not. *"I urge, then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for all people— for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness." – 1 Timothy 2:1-2*

Spend some time praying through these categories.

DAY 5: PRAYING FOR OUR ENEMIES

Praying for myself is usually not a problem. I know my needs and desires. I care about me and how I'm doing. Praying for people I know and love is usually not a problem either. I generally know what's going on with those I know and love and carrying their concerns to God in prayer is something I am glad to do.

But what about praying for my detractors, rivals, and ideological opposites? What should I pray concerning those who are actively or passively opposed to me? How should I pray for those who have hurt me or done harm to those I love? How about those whose politics or opinions seem dangerous to me?

These are hard questions. Here is an example of what Jesus taught about this:

Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven.
– Matthew 5:44

Here is an example of what Jesus did about this:

And when they came to the place that is called The Skull, there they crucified him, and the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. And Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." And they cast lots to divide his garments. – Luke 23:34

Jesus practiced what he preached. He called his followers to love and pray for their enemies and then he loved and prayed for his enemies. One of the greatest ways to reflect the love of Jesus is to practice obedience to the words of Jesus.

Without qualifications or justifications, list some individuals or kinds of people toward whom you may hold resentment.

Spend some time in prayer for those on your list. As you pray for these "enemies", ask God for empathy and compassion to replace bitterness and disdain.

Commit to praying for these people on a regular basis and take note of how your attitude about them changes.

DAY 6: HOW JESUS PRAYED/PRAYS FOR US

Do you ever consider the implications of Jesus praying for you? What an amazing thought that Jesus, the Son of God, prayed for you and me!

"...I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me..." – John 17:20-23

Jesus, on the night of his betrayal and arrest, prayed for his followers. Not just his apostles, mind you, but "those" who would believe in him through their word. That's us!

So what did Jesus pray for us about? "That they may all be one..." He prayed for the unity of the church.

Why would church unity be on his heart the night before his crucifixion? "That the world might believe... that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me." When the church is in disharmony, we discredit our witness to Jesus and therefore we blind the world from knowing God's love.

The book of Hebrews indicates that Jesus hasn't stopped praying for us either.

"Consequently, [Jesus] is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them." –Hebrews 7:25

As Jesus intercedes for us now, for what do you think he is praying? The church is Christ's body, Christ's witness, and the tangible expression of God's love through Christ to the world! Even now Jesus prays for the unity of the church and has given the Holy Spirit to sanctify his church for our mission.

In your prayer life, how often do you pray for the unity of the church?

The EPC's "Seven Essentials" defines the church this way:

The true Church is composed of all persons who through saving faith in Jesus Christ and the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit are united together in the body of Christ. The Church finds her visible, yet imperfect, expression in local congregations where the Word of God is preached in its purity and the sacraments are administered in their integrity; where scriptural discipline is practiced, and where loving fellowship is maintained. For her perfecting, she awaits the return of her Lord.

The Church is the global community of Christ's followers, as well as the visible "expression" of that in particular congregations.

Take some time to pray for the kind of unity that validates our message and makes Jesus more visible to the hurting world around us. As we do this, let us also repent on behalf of the church for the myriad ways a divided Church has compromised our witness to him.

DAY 7: THE MODEL PRAYER

Now Jesus was praying in a certain place, and when he finished, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples." And he said to them, "When you pray, say..." Luke 11:1-2

The Lord's Prayer is a model prayer for the whole of our prayer life. I am convinced that in the prayer categories commended to us in this prayer there is everything we need in order to have a full life of prayer that will never be exhausted. To pray the Lord's Prayer is to enter with our Lord into prayer. It is to join with him in prayer. It is to be taught by him through praying. It is to join him as beloved children of our Heavenly Father. It is to see clearly, to pray fully, to follow faithfully, and to draw near to the heart of God. Every category of true prayer falls within the framework of the prayer he taught his disciples to pray.

Praying The Lord's Prayer:

Our Father...

Spend time praying, reflecting on and thanking God for your adoption as his son or daughter.

Who art in heaven...

Prayerfully reflect on the sovereignty of God who reigns and rules over all creation.

Hallowed be thy name...

Prayerfully acknowledge God's holiness, his perfection, his majesty, and his glory.

Thy kingdom come...

Pray for God's kingdom to come in its fullness and for the work of Jesus to triumph in the world.

Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven...

Pray for God's will for your life to be accomplished. Pray for insight into what his will is and for courage to walk in it.

Give us this day our daily bread...

Pray for your needs, not your wants. Pray for contentment to replace your appetite for more.

And forgive us our debts/trespases...

Confess your sin to the Lord. Ask him to reveal areas of your life that you have not yielded to him.

As we forgive our debtors/those who have trespassed against us...

Ask God to give you grace that enables you to be set free from resentment and bitterness toward those that have wronged you. Ask Father God to give you forgiveness for them.

And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil...

Ask God to sanctify you and to give you strength to withstand the temptations of Satan, which would lead you away from God. Name specific temptations you feel.

For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.

Acknowledge that you are the Lord's, your family is the Lord's, your time is the Lord's, your resources are the Lord's - always have been, always will be. Amen.