



# Group Life at UBC

## Prayer

### What is Prayer

#### Questions for consideration:

- 1) How would you explain prayer to someone who has never been introduced to Christianity?
- 2) If God is sovereign, why does it matter if I pray? Isn't God just going to do what God is just going to do?
- 3) Some sports team pray before playing a game. If you were asked to pray for your sports team before a game, what are some theological truths that would help guide your prayer?
- 4) In 1 Thessalonians 5:17, the Apostle Paul tells us "pray without ceasing." What does this mean?

#### What is prayer?

The act of pray is the active receiving from God as we listen, and giving ourselves to God as we speak. "Of all the spiritual disciplines prayer is the most central because it ushers us into perpetual communion with the Father. Meditation introduces us to the inner life, fasting is an accompanying means, study transforms our minds, but it is a the Discipline of prayer that brings us into the deepest and highest work of the the human spirit. Real prayer is life creating and life changing" (Celebration of Disciple, p. 33). Richard Fosters focus on real prayer which is important because as Christians, we all pray, but the question we need to be concerned about is if our prayers are both "life creating and life changing."

Life Creating: "You do not have because you do not ask God. When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures" (James 4:2b-3). The central focus of our prayers must be sanctification, to think God's thoughts after Him; to desire the things He desires, to love the things He loves, to will the things He wills. In prayer, we must align our hearts with His. This may not be how we begin, but it should be the result as God draws us closer to Himself.

Life Changing: We also fail to enter into true prayer because we so often doubt that God will intervene in our lives in any sort of real way. And in our habit of prayer, we fall into the trap of thinking, "Do my prayers really make a difference." And yet, we are told throughout the Bible that our prayers do in fact make a difference. In fact, God is so eager to make this point that the Bible uses anthropomorphic language of God changing His mind in response to prayers (Exodus 32:14 & Jonah 3:10). Of course, God is perfect and He never changes his mind but the point being made is an important one, our prayers matter.

Therefore, we must prayer with the perspective given to us by Jesus. As little children coming to our Heavenly Father in dependance, anticipation, boldness, openness, honesty and love. Real prayer is both life creating and life changing. Jim Samra writes, "We act as if God created the universe, handed us the instruction manual, and now doesn't want to be bothered with us again, as if he is some sort of absentee father. We do our thing; he does his. As long as we obey, he's happy. He's even willing to bail us out of a few fixes we might find ourselves in along the way . But the Bible present a far different picture: a warm, loving Father who is intimately interested in all aspects of our lives, actively making himself available to us" (God told me, p.23).

#### Some quotes concerning Studying:

"Prayer is not simply petition, but strenuous petition. It is not just passive surrender but active pleading with God. It involves not only submission to the will of God but seeking to change his will. It consists not merely in reflection on the promises of God but in taking hold of these promises." Donald G. Bloesch

This morning, as I came from the train and prayed for all the people on the street, I felt new energy surge into me. What it does to all of them to receive that instant prayer I may never know. What it does for me is electrical. It drives out fatigue and thrills one with eager power. How curious one's mind feels thus encircling others. Is Jesus like that?" Frank Laubach

"One hot July day, with the sun beating down, and my shirt drenched with perspiration, I stooped over my tiny tomato garden and picked a tomato. Prayer was the last thing on my mind. But as I held it in my hands, I was struck by how beautiful and red it was. Suddenly I was overwhelmed with the simple joy of being alive. I wanted to share the moment with God, to lift the tomato up into His face and laugh with delight at this moment as I was. Together at the centre. For nearly an hour I went right on with my work in the garden...But inside, in a channel just beneath the surface, a stream of communio flowed silently between God and me. I never actually spoke words to God. I was utterly aware of my business in the garden. But I was somehow praying." Sue Monk Kidd.

**Practice:** The best way to practise prayer is to pray. Take some extended time within your group to pray with one another, and encourage everyone to take part. If some people in your Life Group are nervous, emphasis that God doesn't require long elegant speeches (Matthew 6:5-8) but sometimes short and simple prayers are the best. You can also encourage people to simply read scripture as his/her prayer. Repeat this practice each week.



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### Prayer in Practice

#### Questions for consideration:

- 1) When you think about prayer - what is your initial gut reaction? (excited/guilty/bored/fulfilled)
- 2) What are some obstacles that hinder the importance of prayer in your life?
- 3) Have you developed any practices that have helped you to emphasize prayer in your life?
- 4) Read Matthew 6:5-8. How does Jesus' teaching speak into practical advice to our prayers.
- 5) Read Mark 11:24 & John 14:12-14. What does it mean to pray with confidence?

It is important to understand that Spiritual disciplines are not separated from one another, but often overlapping. Reading the Bible is a part of prayer as prayer is a part of reading the Bible. And therefore, as we grow in our abilities to mediate/study, we will also grow in our ability to pray. However, we must recognize that there are also differences between reading the Bible and prayer and therefore it is important that we make room to focus specifically on prayer. And when we pray, there are different methods: individual, group and corporate.

**1) Individual prayer:** This is most likely where you want to start as it involves only you and God and there is no pressure to perform. Look at your schedule and plan time when you can constantly find time to pray without feeling rushed, in a place that is free from unhelpful distractions. It is best if this is a place where you can pray out loud without fear of being overheard because spoken words are helpful to keep us focused on God, whereas our thoughts are easily swayed by distractions. And as we begin to pray, it is important to learn from the example of Jesus. "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one" (Matthew 6:9-13.)

As Jesus demonstrates, we are called to approach God in prayer through different avenues. 1) Recognition of who God is, 2) thanksgiving for His faithfulness and many blessings, 3) submitting to and seeking to understand His will, 4) confession of our sin and shortcomings. 5) requests. Of course, there is no formula that defines how we should pray, however the above order has been thought to be a natural flow to help align ourselves with God's heart as we move from declaring to asking.

In prayer, your most helpful ally is the Holy Spirit. The Apostle Paul writes in Romans 8:26, "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 through wordless groans." Therefore, as you pray, continually ask for the Spirit's help and guidance. And as you ask, be sure to pay attention to the Spirit's leading. How do you discern the Spirit's leading? This is no easy question to answer, but it is sufficient to say that if we seek God, God will meet us by His Spirit and as we prioritize setting time aside in prayer, we will grow in our ability to discern the Spirit's leading.

**2) Group Prayer:** This can be more difficult for people because of the added pressure of people listening to what we might define as our senseless rambles. What if we say the wrong thing or something "stupid?" These concerns are valid (not in reality, but in the fact that it is how we feel) which is why Life Groups are so important. Again, the purpose of a Life Group "To create a safe haven through intentional relationships where people are encouraged by one another to grow in Christ and are equipped by the Spirit for the Great Commission as we live life together." Hopefully, people within your Life Group have come to, or at least are continuing to approach a place where they feel safe within the group. A place we can be comfortable in embarrassing ourselves, making mistakes and stumbling over our words. Again, this is why fellowship with a Life Group is so important. Therefore, as you enter into this vulnerable space as a group, reaffirm your commitment to one another as a safe place. As we pray as a group, it's okay to stumble over words, it's okay if our prayers sound simple and plain, it's okay if we say something wrong. We are all learning, and our goal is to create a comfortable space for people to dive deeper into the discipline of prayer together.

And as we pray with one another, it is important to spend some time dedicated to listening to God together. To discern and move with the Spirit's leading together. Again this isn't an easy task, but as a group we can take the pressure off by creating an environment where it is okay to make mistakes. Not that God will make a mistake if He seeks to speak to us, but as people we can easily misalign our steps to the Spirit's leading or misinterpret what we hear. And if we do make a mistake, a correction needs to be made, but we should strive to do so in a way that encourages and honors everyone in the group.

**3) Corporate Prayer:** This avenue is beyond the scope of Life Groups but it is helpful to at least make a comment to what Corporate Prayer involves. Corporate Prayer involves the full participation of a localized body of Christ and most often involves someone who acts as a leader for others to follow. Corporate Prayer is when a church combines many voices into one.