

Why Pray?

TEACHER TO TEACHER

We know from our study of *The Prayer God Always Answers*, that no believer can become a spiritual mother or father without a vibrant prayer life. Yet some believers find the spiritual practice or discipline of prayer intimidating. Such seem to be plagued by numerous questions: What is prayer? Why do I need to pray? How should I pray? When do I pray? Isn't prayer just for super spiritual people? etc. Others seem to find excuses for avoiding regular prayer: I don't have time, I don't know how to pray, or it doesn't seem to do any good. Truth time—most of us have asked similar questions or made the same excuses, haven't we?

This lesson is based in part upon two of Roger's past sermons. One was titled "Why Bother to Pray?" The second was called "Prayer—Where the Action Is." To answer the question "Why pray?" we rely upon the Gospel writers and what they tell us of Christ's personal prayer habits and His instructions to His followers, as well as patterns found in His prayers.

You will also find that the lessons are well grounded in two of the three streams of biblical theology that have shaped Casas as a unique Body of Christ: our theology of spiritual transformation and our theology of Great Commandment relationship.

AS YOU PREPARE

First, reflect upon your own prayer life in the light of the Scripture passages interpreted in the lesson. Look for new ideas or attitudes that can find application in your private conversations with God. Be ready to share your discoveries and struggles with your class. This will allow you to teach authentically in your "voice," rather than speaking from another's perspective.

Next, consider the needs of those who make up your Bible Fellowship. There is something in this lesson for spiritual children, for spiritual young men and women, and for spiritual mothers and fathers. Adjust your material presentation to meet the needs of the majority of your department members.

Pay particular attention to the **APPLICATION IDEAS** section in **STUDYING THE WORD TOGETHER**. Here you will find suggestions of how to make the Bible lesson relevant both to you and to your fellow prayer pilgrims.

Finally, remember, you are a child of the King, a son or daughter of God, and a "joint heir with Christ." Bathe your preparation in prayer to your Abba, Father. Spend time meditating on the Scripture passages, dialoguing with God. Listen to the Holy Spirit—the Teacher of Truth—as He speaks to you. Yield to His leadership as you prepare and submit to His anointing as you teach.

STUDYING THE WORD TOGETHER

My next door neighbor came over a few months ago to help me with one of my “honey-do” projects. While we were working together he said, “Jerry, I want to ask you a theological question.”

My ears perked up. He had my attention. And I was a little anxious. I often become a bit uneasy when people want to ask me “theological” questions. I enjoy “talking theology” but I am not a theologian.

My neighbor asked, “If God is omniscient, why do we need to pray? I mean, if He already knows our needs and loves us, why do we have to ask Him for anything? Why do we need to pray?” he asked.

My neighbor’s basic question is one that spiritual children (and some spiritual young adults) have asked throughout church history. And this is the question with which we will wrestle in this lesson. However, before we attempt to answer the “Why pray?” question, let’s deal with one that is much more basic: “What is prayer?”

WHAT IS PRAYER?

On one hand, prayer is very simple to define. On the other, it requires a very complex definition.

▶ *A Simple Definition*

Holding to the less complicated view, the popular Nelson’s Illustrated Bible Dictionary¹ says that prayer is “communication with God.” Prayer simply is a personal conversation with God.

Now the word *conversation* is very important. Don’t miss it. God speaks to us and we listen. We speak to God and He listens. Remember, one way communication is a monologue. A conversation—a dialogue—involves mutual speaking and listening. Of course, I assume that we all have been through circumstances when it seemed that God was silent. But if we patiently waited, we “heard” Him speak: sometimes through circumstances, sometimes through Scripture, sometimes through others, and sometimes He spoke to our inner man—Holy Spirit to human spirit. Our side of this ongoing dialogue

between God and ourselves is called prayer.

▶ *A More Complex Perspective*

A more complex perspective points out that prayer may be oral or mental, occasional or constant, spontaneously informal, or formal and liturgical. Prayer is a “beseeching the Lord” (Ex 32:11); “pouring out the soul before the Lord” (1 Sam 1:15); “praying and crying to heaven” (2 Chron 32:20); “seeking unto God and making supplication” (Job 8:5); “drawing near to God” (Ps 73:28); “bowing the knees” (Eph 3:14). Our prayers, or our conversations with God, may take many different forms: faith, confession, worship, praise, adoration, thanksgiving, intercession, supplication, and dedicated action.

▶ *Basic Assumptions*

Regardless of form, behind every prayer are a few basic suppositions.

1. Believers pray from a biblical worldview anchored in belief in the One True God who is personal, living, and hears our prayers (1 John 5:14-15).

¹ Nelson’s Illustrated Bible Dictionary, copyright © 1986 by Thomas Nelson Publishers.



2. Believers know that God is caringly involved in their lives (Matt. 6:25-34, 1 Peter 5:7).
3. Believers know that God purposes to experience the same intimacy with us that He has with the Son (John 17:26).²

It is upon these points that we form our initial answer to the “Why pray?” question.

WHY PRAY?

The “Why pray?” question is easily answered when we understand that God purposes to mold us into the Image of Christ and to experience an intimate relationship with us. Such a relationship is possible only when it is characterized by mutually self-disclosing conversation. So, we pray in order to further a deeper relationship with God.

▶ *God Is a Personal, Relational Being*

This is one of the basic tenets of the Christian faith: God is a relational being who desires to be known and can be known. Scripture records God’s progressive revelation of Himself to His people. He revealed Himself to Israel through the disclosure of His Names and through His caring involvement in the nation’s history.

For example, Yahweh (or Jehovah) is a very significant name for God in the Old Testament. Yahweh, from the verb “to be,” means simply, but profoundly, “I AM WHO I AM” and “I WILL BE WHAT I WILL BE.” This is the name by which God revealed Himself to Moses in the burning bush (Ex 3:14).

Other names include Jehovah-jireh—translated as “The-LORD-Will-Provide.” This is the Name of God revealed to Abraham as he prepared to sacrifice Isaac (Gen 22:14). Jehovah-nissi means “The-

LORD-Is-My-Banner,” in honor of God’s going before the Israelites in the defeat of the Amalekites (Ex 17:15). Jehovah-tsebaoth—“The-LORD-of-Hosts”—is the name revealed in the days of David and the prophets, witnessing to God the Savior who is surrounded by His hosts of heavenly power (1 Sam 1:3).

God is revealed as Shepherd in Psalm 23 and Isaiah 40:11. Jesus applied this name to Himself in Luke 15:4-7 and John 10:11-16. The name of Servant also prophetically describes the Messiah and His saving ministry on behalf of His people. God’s Servant is described in terms that apply to Jesus.

We could go on, but the point is this: God, who wants to be personally known by His people, reveals Himself in Scripture as a knowable being through names that describe His caring involvement in the lives of His people. It is through God’s initiative of self-revelation that our intimate relationship with Him begins. You will recall from our study of *The Prayer God Always Answers*,² that developing intimacy with God takes time and involves a process.

▶ *The Intimacy Process*

In *The Pursuit of Intimacy*,³ the Fergusons and Thurmans describe four necessary ingredients for intimacy: caring involvement, vulnerable communication, interdependence, and mutual giving and receiving. The diagram on the following page illustrates the interrelatedness of the four ingredients.

Caring involvement and vulnerable conversation seem good starting points in a process of building intimate relationships. As trust builds, movement toward interdependence takes place. Healthy interdependence leads to love (agapé) which is defined as mutual giving and receiving to meet needs.

² Barrier and Wilkinson, *The Prayer God Always Answers: Lord Make me a Spiritual Parent at Any Cost*, Copyright © 2005 by Casas Adobes Baptist Church, Tucson, AZ, p. 4-2.

³ Dr. David and Teresa Ferguson and Dr. Chris and Holly Thurman, *The Pursuit of Intimacy: What Being in Love Was Meant to Be*, Thomas Nelson Publishers, Nashville, TN, 1993 pp. 74-85.

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Any healthy intimate relationship—whether between God and a believer or between two individuals—is marked by a mutually-held trust that is routinely nurtured through caring involvement and self-disclosing communication (e.g., by God’s caring involvement in the lives of His people and by the disclosure of His Names).

When caringly involved in one another’s lives, we reciprocally give and receive care. When vulnerably disclosing

ourselves to one another, a mutual trust is formed. As trust builds we can risk interdependence, saying to one another, “I need you—and it is OK for you to need me.” Such interdependence leads to love (agapé)—mutual giving and receiving. Relationships progressively become more intimate as the cyclical process of mutual caring, trust-building self-disclosure, interdependence, and mutual giving and receiving is repeated.

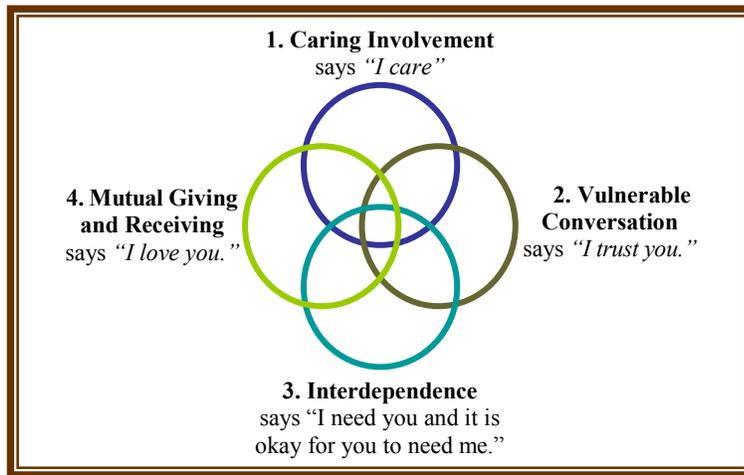


Fig. 1: Four Necessary Ingredients for Intimacy

► *Prayer Is Essential to Our Intimate Relationship with God*

We don’t stretch the point when we say that a similar process makes it possible for us to move into ever-deepening intimacy with God. Because

prayer is our side of personal conversations with God, it is essential to developing intimacy with Him.

Does the diagram below look familiar? You may remember a similar one from *The Prayer God Always Answers*.⁴ God reveals Himself to us throughout the Bible and through Jesus as we see Him in the Gospels. We experience Him in others. As

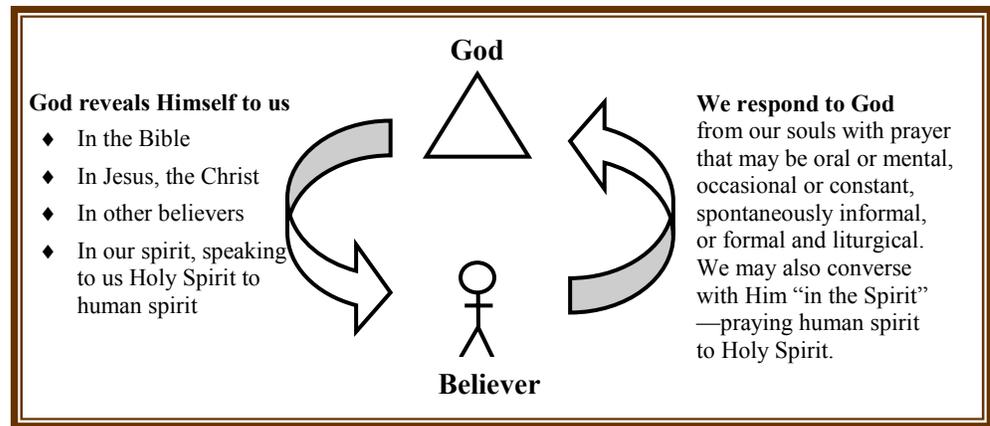


Fig. 2: God Reveals Himself to the Believer

⁴ Barrier and Wilkinson, p. 5-7.



we mature He reveals Himself to us as He speaks to us in our inner being—Holy Spirit to human spirit. Just as the experience of His care elicits from us gratitude and thanksgiving, His trust-building revelation produces a natural response in us. We want to disclose our heart to Him and we do that through prayer—whether oral or mental, occasional or constant, spontaneously informal, or formal and liturgical.

Of course, before we utter a prayer He already knows our needs and the secrets of our hearts, doesn't He? But I believe that His commitment to listen to our prayer is reflective of His desire for intimacy with us. Our prayers reflect our faith in Him and our dependence upon Him. Such tender and vulnerable self-disclosure is precious to Him. Look at the passage below:

He came and took the scroll from the right hand of him who sat on the throne. And when he had taken it, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb.

Each one had a harp and they were holding golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. And they sang a new song: "You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth." (Revelation 5:7-10)

First, I want you to notice verse 8: *...the twenty-four elders...were holding golden bowls full of...the prayers of the saints.* I think the imagery used here in God's revelation to John for the Church is breathtaking. Think of it. Not one believer's prayer has been lost—not one conversation forgotten. Each one is valued and held at the altar in the golden bowl of God's eternal memory.

Over the years my wife Lana and I have

shared many self-revealing conversations: confessions of how we have wronged or hurt the other, words of forgiveness and reconciliation, joy and celebration, painfully deep grief, dreams and hopes for the future. I treasure our conversations. I treasure the opportunity to safely disclose myself to her. I treasure each revelation she has made to me. They are deeply embedded in my memory and form the fabric of the story of our lives together.

I believe God treasures and holds onto our prayers in a similar manner. Our prayers to Him and His trust-building revelations to us nurture the narrative of our lives with Him.

Now I want to tickle your thinking a bit more.

The intimate conversations between Lana and me have served to build a great trust between us. That trust prompts us to say to one another, "I need you and it's okay for you to need me." Could it be that the faith engendered by your prayers might lead you to say to God, "I need you and it's okay for You to count on me to serve You"? You see, submitting to a powerful God who is a stranger is very threatening. But submitting to and committing to serve a caring and self-revealing God that I know intimately seems very natural—even exciting.

Once Lana and I arrived at the juncture of interdependence, mutually declaring, "I need you and it is okay for you to need me," we found that loving one another took on a deeper meaning. We began to see it as mutual giving and receiving—giving to meet the other's need and gratefully receiving the other's gift for the satisfaction of our need.

I believe that we experience something similar as we declare to the Christ whom we trust, "I am dependent upon you and You may count on me to serve You." As I arrive at this juncture with Jesus, I find myself comfortably receiving from Him and more easily giving myself to His service. The mutual giving and receiving between Jesus and me is called "love."



So we can say that the answer to the “Why pray?” question is this: God desires an intimate relationship with us just as He has with His Son, and such intimacy can’t be developed without mutual trust-building self-revelation. Prayer, regardless of its form, is our side of that ongoing conversation.

Christian prayer is regular, ongoing, vulnerable, self-revealing conversation between the believer and God. Remember, in the early stages of spiritual development God primarily speaks or reveals Himself to the believer through the Scripture, and believers speak to Him through self-revealing prayer. In the later stages of spiritual growth, believers experience His revelation Holy Spirit to human spirit and may respond to Him human spirit to Holy Spirit.

The response to the “Why pray?” question is simple:

1. We pray vulnerably, revealing our reverent, loving heart for God.
2. We pray confessing our sins and asking His forgiveness.
3. We pray asking Him to meet our physical, relational, and spiritual needs.
4. We pray expressing gratitude for His blessings.

Now for confirmation, let’s examine the gospel records for clues concerning Christ’s personal prayer life, His expectations for His disciples, and important instructions on prayer.

PRAYING AS SONS AND DAUGHTERS

There are several ways to look at the record of Jesus’ prayer life preserved for us in the Gospels. For example, we could discuss the facts of the record: how He prayed, what He prayed, when He prayed, why He prayed, where He prayed, with whom He prayed. However, in this lesson I want to look at the relational context of Jesus’ prayer life—His

personal, intimate conversations with His Father.

► The Father-Son Relationship

To establish the relational context of Jesus’ prayers, one only has to look at the way He addressed God as He began praying:

At that time Jesus said, “I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth... Yes, Father, for this was your good pleasure.” (Matthew 11:25-26)

Then Jesus looked up and said, “Father, I thank you that you have heard me.” (John 11:41)

“Now my heart is troubled, and what shall I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour’? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. Father, glorify your name!” (John 12:27-28)

After Jesus said this, he looked toward heaven and prayed: “Father, the time has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you.” (John 17:1)

“Righteous Father, though the world does not know you, I know you, and they know that you have sent me.” (John 17:25)

Perhaps the clearest example of the intimate Father-Son relationship from which Jesus prayed is that of Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane. Look at the way Mark records this prayer:

“Abba, Father,” he said, “everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will.” (Mark 14:36)

Here Jesus invokes or calls out to God saying, “Abba, Father.” This is the only place in the Gospels that we find this phrase. Abba is most likely a word used as an endearing term for father in the mixed Aramaic language of early Palestine. The closest that we can come in English is



“Daddy” or “Papa.” While Daddy and Papa probably connote a similar measure of endearment, they most likely fail to communicate the same level of respect that “Abba” carried in the Middle Eastern culture of Jesus’ time.⁵ Mark clarifies the meaning of Abba by connecting it to Pateér, the more respectful Greek word for Father.

It is at this most tender moment in the Garden that Jesus reveals the true poignancy of the relational context of the Father-Son relationship in which His prayers are offered—the context in which His conversations with His Father are held. He prays as a Son who is relationally intimate with His Father: the Beloved calling out to the Beloved.

▶ *Jesus Encouraged His Followers to Pray as Sons and Daughters of God*

Matthew and Mark both contain passages regarding Jesus’ explicit expectation that His followers would pray and that they would pray from the same Abba-Child relationship that He enjoyed with His Father.

But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and *pray to your Father* who is unseen. Then *your Father*, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. (Matthew 6:6, my underline and italics)

This, then, is how you should pray: “*Our Father* in heaven, hallowed be your name....” (Matthew 6:9, my underline and italics)

And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him, so that *your Father* in heaven may forgive you your sins.” (Mark 11:25, my underline and italics)

Look at the phrases that I have underlined: when you pray, this...is how you should pray, and when you stand praying. Notice

the assumptive quality of these phrases. Jesus assumed His disciples prayed. He expected them to pray.

Now look at the italicized phrases: *pray to your Father*, *your Father*, *our Father*, and *your Father in heaven*. Each indicates that Christ’s followers were to address their prayers to God, the Father, talking with Him from the context of an intimate Abba-Child relationship.

▶ *We, Too, Pray from the Abba-Child Relationship*

There are strong indications that the early church acutely understood the deep significance of the intimate Father-Son or Abba-Child context for prayer and that they made it the context from which they prayed. For example, Paul uses *Abba* twice in his writing and tells us that we also have a Father-Child relationship with God.

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.” The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children. 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. (Romans 8:15-17)

Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, “Abba, Father.” So you are no longer a slave, but a son; and since you are a son, God has made you also an heir. (Galatians 4:6-7)

The logical conclusion is that as sons and daughters of Abba, Father and joint heirs with Christ, we can pray from the same tender, poignant, relational context from which Jesus prayed. The Abba-Child relationship can be illustrated by the diagram on the following page:

⁵ Kenneth E. Bailey, *Poet & Peasant and Through Peasant Eyes: A Literary-Cultural Approach to the Parables in Luke*, Combined Edition, copyright © 1983 by Wm. B. Erdmans Publishing Company.

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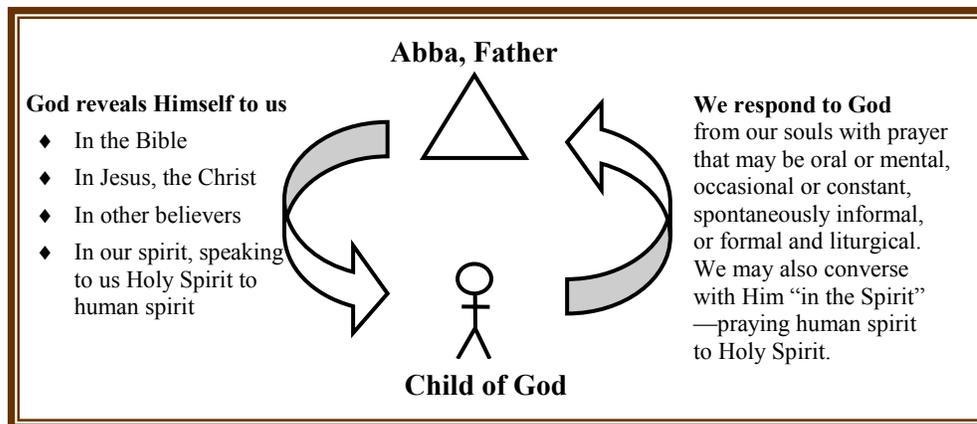


Fig. 3: Abba, Father Reveals Himself to the Child of God

Of course, it is important to acknowledge that some have a hard time intimately relating to God as Abba, Father. Perhaps this is true because their human father was anything but close and caring. Perhaps your father was distant, critical, disappointed in you, or abusive. If this is true for you, it is important that you begin to see the Real God as He is depicted in Scripture and in the life of Jesus rather than attributing to Him the nature and character of a very imperfect human father.

► *Through the Eyes of a Son*

While visiting Mom and Dad a few years ago, I awoke at 4:00 a.m. and as the popular Christmas tale says, “Not a creature was stirring”—or so I thought. As I stepped through the door of the bedroom, I noticed light coming from the den. I headed down the hall and stepped around the corner to find Dad in his bathrobe and slippers stretched out in his favorite recliner.

I poured a cup of coffee, said good morning, and sat on the couch. It was quiet. It was just Dad and me—together. Neither of us said anything for a while. Soon Dad began to tell me about a dream he had had earlier in the morning. It seems that God—through a dream—brought to Dad’s mind numerous people who at various times had become caringly involved in his life. As Dad remembered each, he found himself thanking God for

that person. This was a special time for me. I had not often had such tender insights into my dad’s heart. There was nothing grand about anything he said. He was simply his most vulnerable, authentic self. I had a wonderful time celebrating Dad and celebrating with him those men and women who helped him become more of who God had desired for him to be.

I think of that morning often. It is one of my most precious memories. I am convinced that God arranged for Dad and me to be together while everyone else slept. Our time was a private one. Knowing my dad, I know the conversation would not have occurred except in the secrecy and privacy of the early morning hour when it was just the two of us together.

When I read Matthew 6:6, I can’t help but interpret it through the lens of that early morning in Dad’s den. Look at what it says:

But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. (Matthew 6:6)

I believe that Jesus is telling us something about praying from the intimate Abba-Child relationship. Do you see it? “When you pray, go into your room and close the door....” Can you imagine that Jesus might give this counsel because He has personally prayed this way Himself?

He has been alone with His Abba in the privacy of a secluded grove on the side of

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a mountain early in the morning. What has Jesus heard from His Abba? Could it be that He got to hear His Abba speak tender things—Father to Son? Could it be that He got to hear His Abba speak wisdom—Father to Son? I believe that in the privacy of secluded places, Jesus heard secrets from His Abba’s heart. Don’t you? I also believe that is why Jesus taught His followers to seek opportunities for intimate encounters with their Abba, Father in the same way—privately, in secret.

APPLICATION IDEAS AND QUESTIONS

Jesus regularly spent time in private, secretly conversing with His Abba, Father. The Father revealed Himself to

Jesus. Jesus responded with prayer. Jesus expected His followers to pray from the same Abba-Child relationship that He enjoyed with His Father. As a believer, do you regularly set aside private time to listen to God and respond to Him in prayer from the perspective of a beloved child talking with his/her Abba, Father? What steps can you take to develop a more intimate, Abba-Child relationship with God? If you do not regularly set aside time for intimate conversations with God, what action can you take to develop such a habit? How do you think the intimacy of your relationship with God might change, if you more regularly took time to privately listen to Him and vulnerably disclose yourself to Him?

COMMENTARY

JEWISH PRAYER AT THE
TIME OF JESUS¹

Historically and at the time of Christ, the Jews were a praying people. Their sacred writings contain references to many prayers which surely were used regularly. The Dead Sea Scrolls (Qumran Scrolls), as well as Jewish apocrypha and pseudepigrapha give witness to the Jews' continuing creativity on the formulation and practice of prayer. The Temple was called "a house of prayer" (Isa 56:7), and the sacrifices were accompanied by prayers (Luke 10:19), so that the hour of sacrifice (morning and evening) could simply be called the "hour of prayer" (Acts 3:1).

The prayer of prayers for the Jew subsequent to and at the time of Jesus was the *Shemoneh Esreh*, the Eighteen Benedictions. Although it probably was given this form between A.D. 70-100, several of the many benedictions certainly would have been known to and used by Jesus. Characteristic of each of the Eighteen Benedictions is the final response (subsequently the title): "Blessed are you Lord..."—"shield of Abraham," "who makes the dead alive," "who delights in repentance," "rich in forgiveness," "who humbles the insolent," and "who hears prayer."

The tradition of every Jew praying privately twice a day (at sunrise and at sunset) and corporately at the third and ninth hours (the hours of sacrifice) is very old (Ezra 9:5; Dan 9:21); it is attributed to Moses by Josephus (Ant. 4.212). This

practice was regularized in the Mishnah as an accompaniment to the saying of the *Shema*. There is also the old tradition of praying at midday (the 6th hour), giving three times of public prayer per day.

We probably are safe in assuming that Jesus was brought up to say the *Shema* and the Eighteen Benedictions (in some form) twice a day (cf. Mark 12:29). It seemed to be His regular practice to attend the synagogue on the Sabbath (Luke 4:16) when He would join with the rest in the public prayers. Jesus' practice of private prayer and His instructions to His followers on prayer are well documented in each of the Gospels.

ABBA²

Joachim Jeremias, writing in 1967 in the *Prayers of Jesus*, made the case for Jesus regularly having addressed God by the Aramaic word "abb" or "abba" and he noted that "abbs" was a child's word. This too quickly led many to the conclusion that "Abbs" meant "Daddy." To draw this conclusion is, almost unconsciously, to indigenize the cultural elements of the word. In this case, the exegete assumes that the first century Jew thought much like himself. What does it mean for Jesus to call His Heavenly Father "Abba"? The answer argues that it is only reasonable to assume that Jesus would address His Father by the same familiar title we would use today—"Daddy" or "Papa."

Kenneth E. Bailey, expert in Middle Eastern culture and chair of Biblical Department at Near Eastern School of

¹ Adapted from an article by J.D.G. Dunn, writing in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, © 1992 by InterVarsity Christian Fellowship/USA.

² Adapted from J.D.G. Dunn, writing in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, © 1992, InterVarsity Christian Fellowship/USA and Kenneth E. Bailey, *Poet and Peasant and Through Peasant Eyes: A Literary-Cultural Approach to the Parables in Luke (Combined Edition)*, © 1983 by William E. Erdmans Publishing Company.



Theology (Beirut), asserts that the “Abba,” while a familiar term, would not be used only by children within the family circle. It also might be used by an adult speaking to his father or by disciples speaking to a beloved and revered teacher. It certainly implies a deep level of affection and relational intimacy, but “Abba” also connotes a deep level of respect or reverence. This may be the reason that the Greek translation pairs *Abba* and *Pater* (Father—the more respectful Greek manner of address) in Mark 14:36.

Jeremias further asserts that while the term “Abba” occurs no place else in the Gospel records, that Jesus nonetheless prayed from an intimate Father-Child perspective, because He experienced His relationship with God through prayer as such a relation of intimacy and reverence. This is evidenced by the frequent occasions in which His manner of addressing God is “Pater” or Father (Mark 14:36; Matt 11:25-26 par. Luke 10:21; 23:34, 46; Matt 26:42; John 11:41; 12:27-28; 17:1, 5, 11, 21, 24-25). In light of Romans 8:15-17 and Galatians 4:6-7, Jeremias’ conclusion must be judged fair: that the Greek “Pater” and the Aramaic “Abba” or equivalents.

Like Jesus, the earliest disciples retained the usage of Abba, Father because they,

too, experienced prayer prompted by the Spirit as a relationship of sonship—but not a sonship independent of Jesus. Rather, their relationship was dependent upon His Abba sonship and one in which they shared by virtue of being joint heirs with Him.

Finally, there are two significant points that must be made regarding Paul’s teaching of sonship or adoption in the Romans 8 and Galatians 4 passages mentioned above:

1. This must mean that “Abba” as a particular manner of addressing God in prayer had become so well established among the earliest believers and was so precious to them that it was carried over into the worship of the Greek-speaking churches. Its continuing value lay not in its meaningfulness to Greek speakers but in the meaningfulness of the living tradition of prayer it expressed.
2. “Abba” was a word particularly and peculiarly associated with Jesus’ own sonship to God, and therefore, of particular importance to believers by virtue of their shared inheritance with Christ.

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RESOURCES NEEDED:

- ◆ 2-sided copies of Lesson Notes / Take-Home pages
- ◆ Pencils or pens for each person
- ◆ Dry erase markers and marker board or felt tip markers and a flip chart
- ◆ **Optional:** Slips of paper with each of the following Scripture references for Step Four:
Matt. 11:25-26
John 11:41
John 12:27-28
John 17:1
John 17:25
Mark 14:36

TIME FRAME:

- ◆ 45 minutes

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SUGGESTED LESSON PLAN

NOTE TO TEACHER: This *suggested* lesson plan contains many elements that, if employed, will help maximize learning for life-change in your Bible Fellowship. If you are an experienced teacher, you have freedom to create your own plan based upon the “Studying the Word Together” section. If you are less experienced, we suggest that you “stick to the plan.” However, even less-experienced teachers should feel free to modify the plan based upon the needs of your Bible Fellowship. This plan is designed to be presented in 45 minutes. It is important, therefore, that you carefully plan your presentation so that you communicate the main points with brevity and clarity.

Focal Scriptures:

- ◆ Romans 8:15-17
- ◆ Matthew 6:6

Teaching Goals:

- ◆ **LEARN:** Lead members of your Bible Fellowship to understand that believers pray from the Abba-Child relationship in order to deepen our intimate relationship with God through Christ
- ◆ **EXPERIENCE:** Bible Fellowship members reflect upon the significance of praying from the Abba-Child relationship and hear a prayer of thanksgiving for this blessing

Before Class Begins:

- ◆ Distribute handouts for each class member on chairs or on tables.
- ◆ If you chose to use slips of paper with scripture references for Step Four, give those to people who you know enjoy reading aloud.
- ◆ To save teaching time, consider sketching on the marker board the graphics and “*says I care, says I trust you,*” etc. portion of the text for the Intimacy Process diagram (p. 1-4), so that you may quickly write in the blanks for Lesson Notes.

STEP ONE: GETTING READY TO LEARN (5 MINUTES)

- ◆ Ask each member to write a personal definition of prayer in the space provided on their handout. Give them 1½ minutes to do this. Then, invite everyone to share their definitions with someone sitting close to them.

STEP TWO: WHAT IS PRAYER? (5 MINUTES) (See “What Is Prayer,” p. 1-2)

- ◆ Explain to your department that prayer can be defined simply or in a more complex manner and write this simple definition of prayer on your marker board: *Prayer is a personal conversation with God.* Refer members to the handout so they can fill in blanks.
- ◆ Explain the difference between a monologue and a dialogue. Tell your group that in a conversation with God, He speaks and we listen. And we speak (pray) and He listens.
- ◆ Review the basic suppositions behind every Christian prayer. Refer group to handout for fill-in-the-blanks interactive.

Notes 

STEP THREE: WHY PRAY?

(15 MINUTES) (See p. 1-3)

- ◆ Tell your Bible Fellowship that God is a personal, relational being who desires to be known and can be known. (Lead them to fill in the blanks on their handout.) Explain that historically God has taken initiative to reveal who He is by calling Himself by different names. Ask your class to mention aloud differing names of God that they might know and tell what that name communicates about His nature, character, and personality. If necessary to make the point, you can illustrate with Yahweh, Jehovah-Jireh, Jehovah-Nissi and Jehovah-Tsebaoth (see p. 1-3).
- ◆ Transition by saying that in the Old Testament, God's caring involvement in Israel's national life and the disclosure of His nature and character through the disclosure of His many names, demonstrated His desire to be known and experienced in an intimate way. Then, using the "Four Necessary Ingredients" diagram (p. 1-4), briefly—and in your own words—present the intimacy process to your BF members.
- ◆ Describe why prayer is essential to the development of our intimate relationship with God. Draw a quick sketch of the diagram at the bottom of page 1-4, filling in the words "God" at the top and "Believer" at the bottom as you explain how God reveals Himself and how we respond.
- ◆ Close this step by listing the four "Why pray?" statements (p. 1-6) on your marker board.

STEP FOUR: PRAYING AS SONS AND DAUGHTERS

(15 MINUTES) (See p. 1-6)

- ◆ Invite some BF members to each

read one of the following passages: Matthew 11:25-26, John 11:41, John 12:27-28, John 17:1, John 17:25. Conclude from these readings, that Jesus prayed to God from the context of a Father-Son relationship. Have another person read Mark 14:36. Define the term "Abba" as a respectful yet intimate name for Father. Explain that Jesus always prayed from the intimacy of His Abba-Child relationship with God.

- ◆ From Matthew 6:6, 6:9, and Mark 11:25, demonstrate that Jesus expected or assumed his followers to pray. Then point out that He wanted them to pray from the same Father-Son/Daughter or Abba-Child context from which He prayed.
- ◆ Explain that the early church understood the significance of the Abba-Child context for prayer and made it part of their teaching. Illustrate this with Romans 8:15-17 and Galatians 4:6-7.
- ◆ Acknowledge the difficulty some may have relating to God as Abba, Father. Encourage them to envision God as a perfect, all-powerful, loving Father rather than as an imperfect or flawed earthly parent. Use Jerry's story or one of your own to illustrate the sweetness of private moments with a loved one; then use Matthew 6:6 to connect that thought to the idea of praying from an Abba-Child relationship. Add the words "Abba, Father" and "Child of God" to the "God reveals Himself / We respond to God" diagram.

STEP FIVE: CLOSING

(5 MINUTES)

- ◆ Close your lesson by inviting some to share their thoughts about the significance of praying as a well-loved child talking with his/her respected and beloved Father. Close with a prayer

Lesson 1

Why Pray?

Notes 

Growing Wise

based upon Romans 8:15-17, thanking God for making us His beloved children and heirs with Christ. Thank Him for the “Spirit of Adoption” that allows us to cry “Abba, Father.”

◆ As you dismiss, point out “Daily Reflections” on their handouts. Also, encourage them to be here next week for “Lord, Teach Us to Pray—Part One.”

LESSON NOTES BLANKS:

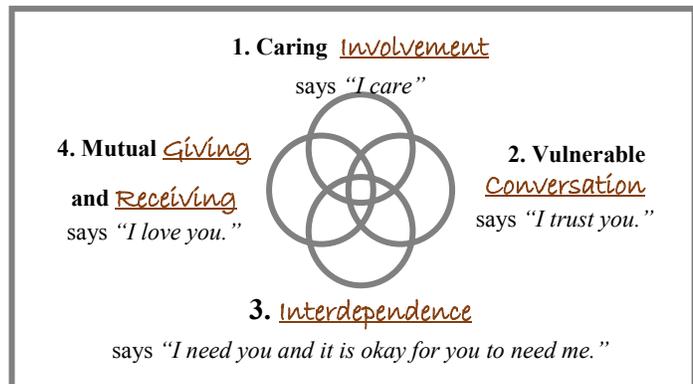
What is prayer?

- ◆ Prayer is a personal conversation with God.
- ◆ Basic assumptions:
 1. Believers pray from a biblical worldview anchored in belief in the One True God who is personal, living, and hears our prayers. (1 John 5:14-15)
 2. Believers know that God is caringly involved in their lives. (Matt. 6:25-34, 1 Peter 5:7)
 3. Believers know that God purposes to experience the same intimacy with us that He has with the Son. (John 17:26)

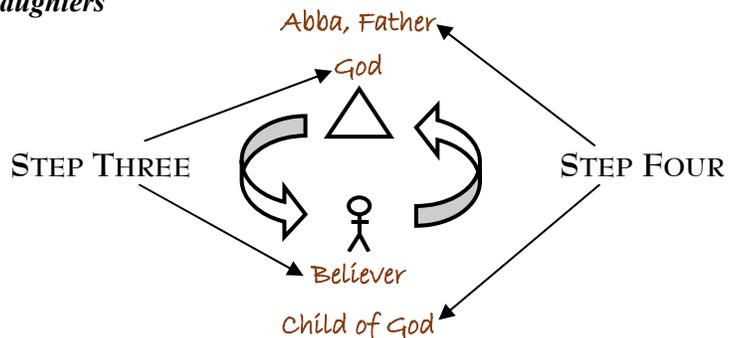
Why Pray?

- ◆ God is a personal, relational being who desires to be known and can be known.

The Intimacy Process



Praying as Sons and Daughters



Today in My Department

How would you define prayer? Take a moment to write your definition in the space below.

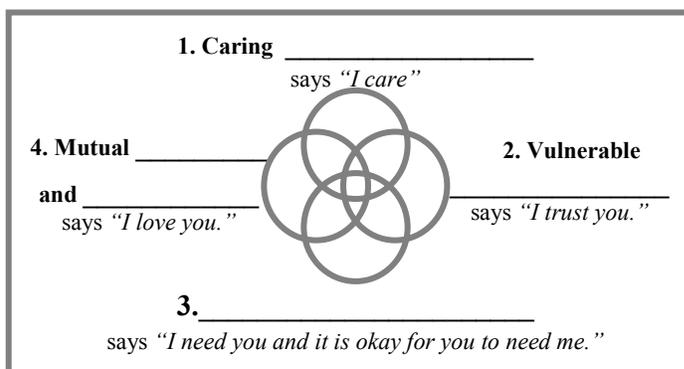
What is prayer?

- ◆ Prayer is a _____ with God.
- ◆ Basic assumptions:
 1. Believers pray from a biblical _____ anchored in belief in the One True God who is _____, living, and _____ our prayers. (1 John 5:14-15)
 2. Believers know that God is _____ in their lives. (Matt. 6:25-34, 1 Peter 5:7)
 3. Believers know that God purposes to _____ the same _____ with us that He has with the Son. (John 17:26)

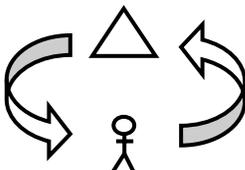
Why Pray?

- ◆ God is a _____ being who desires to be _____ and can be _____.

The Intimacy Process[†]



Praying as Sons and Daughters



Today's Scriptures

Romans 8:15-17: 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." The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. 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.

Matthew 6:6: But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

Next Week's Lesson:
"Lord, Teach Us to Pray—Part One"

[†] Dr. David and Teresa Ferguson and Dr. Chris and Holly Thurman, *The Pursuit of Intimacy: What Being in Love Was Meant to Be*, Thomas Nelson Publishers, Nashville, TN, 1993, pp. 74-85.

Daily Reflections

Begin each daily reflection by meditating a few minutes on the suggested Scripture passage. Seek to listen to the Holy Spirit as He speaks to you. Then consider the comments and questions about the passage. Be aware of your thoughts and feelings. Respond to God through both.

Monday: *“Abba, Father,” he said, “everything is possible for you....” (Mark 14:36)*

As you reflected on the verse, did you see the childlike declaration of faith with which Jesus began His Garden of Gethsemane prayer? Notice that His “everything-is-possible” belief flows from the intimate Abba-Son relationship that Jesus enjoys with His Father. Celebrate with Christ His intimate relationship with His Abba.

Tuesday: *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.” The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. (Romans 8:15-16)*

Think about it! Instead of being a slave to fear, we— just like Christ—have the Spirit of Sonship in us that leads us to proclaim, “Abba, Father” as we begin to pray. Just as God was Jesus’ Abba, Father, He is our “Abba, Father.” With gratitude and thanksgiving, celebrate your Abba-Son or Abba-Daughter relationship with God through Christ.

Wednesday: *Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed. (Mark 1:35)*

Are you curious about what prompted Jesus to get out of bed and go to a private place to pray: duty, discipline, need for direction? Or perhaps He simply was drawn to spend time with His Abba, Father because of the sweetness of their relationship. What motivates you to have intimate, private conversations with God?

Thursday: *But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. (Matthew 6:6)*

Imagine Jesus saying directly to you, “When you pray, _____(your name)_____, seclude yourself so that we can speak privately.” How would you respond? Do you have a private place where you can secretly talk with God and hear Him speak to you through the Scripture, or speak you Holy Spirit to human spirit?

Friday: *He [Jesus] came and took the scroll from the right hand of him [God] who sat on the throne. And when he had taken it, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb. Each one had a harp and they were holding golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. And they sang a new song.... (Revelation 5:7-9)*

The Patriarchs and the Apostles are bowing down before Christ. They have in their hands golden bowls of incense representing every prayer of every believer offered throughout the ages. Your prayers are in those golden bowls. Note that none of your conversations with God, Christ, or the Holy Spirit has been forgotten. Each has been remembered and treasured. Respond to God from your heart as you consider this amazing truth.

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