

Prayer

Lesson # 24 of 27

Scripture/Memory Verse

“Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful. And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains. Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should.” Colossians 4:2-4

Lesson Goal & Objectives:

Goal

- This lesson aims to help students develop an understanding of different types of prayer, and also some understanding of how to make use of these different kinds of prayer in their own lives.

Objective

- The students will either 1) write a collect from the BCP in their own words
- *or* 2) write and share a prayer of their own, including any 3 of the 5 forms of prayer: adoration, contrition, thanksgiving, petition & intercession.

Introduction & Teacher Background:

We commonly use a handy memory trick to teach the major purposes of prayer: ACTS. A – adoration; C – confession/contrition; T – thanksgiving; S – supplication. However, we should try to look at prayer in a slightly more developed way. What do these four terms actually mean?

A) Adoration In our culture we tend not to think very much about adoring God; we have largely lost a sense of what this really means to us. Some people (even in the Church) seem to think that adoration is a kind of flattery of an egotistical god, or that adoring Someone diminishes our sense of ourselves. At the same time, we unconsciously give real adoration to all sorts of things from cars to rock stars. **Adoration is the recognition of the wonder of God’s greatness, and our total dependence on Him.** When we encounter anything of breath-taking beauty, we stop and say something like, “Wow!” The kids have restored a very useful word to the English language: “Awesome!” When we begin to focus on Who God really is, we cannot help but be struck with awe and wonder. He is the Creator of all that is – from atoms to galaxies – and we ourselves would not exist without Him. As His creatures we owe God our recognition of His unlimited awesomeness.

C) Confession/Contrition/Conversion Everyone makes mistakes; we all sin sometimes. Often we try to push our errors into unconsciousness or to find reasons to explain away our feelings of guilt. These strategies are never really successful, and we end up feeling worse in the long run. Psalm 32, verse 3 tells us that “while we keep silent (about our guilt)” we may feel like our “bones are withering away.” However, we experience great relief and even joy when we acknowledge our sin to God (verse 5). God does not want to make us grovel, He wants to set us free from the burdens which we carry because of our sins. Contrition is not merely feeling sorry

or guilty, it is rather a decision to acknowledge our guilt, to release it to God and to commit ourselves to allowing God's grace to change us. Confession of our guilt to God puts our contrition into effective action. This process of acknowledgement, release and acceptance of forgiveness, healing and Grace can be summarized as another "C" – conversion.

T) Thanksgiving In the story of the 10 lepers, Jesus heals all ten, but only one comes back to Him to thank Him. Although we often ask God for all sorts of things, we do not often remember to thank Him for answering our prayers. Beyond answering our specific prayers, God also provides all our daily needs – even the next breath we take. We owe our very existence to God, yet we do not stop to be grateful for all His gifts. Many saints have written that cultivating a sense of thankfulness is a sure way to grow in our relationship with God. If we take just a moment to look around and think about all God's good gifts, we will inevitably be inspired to thank Him for them.

S) Supplication This has become a rather old-fashioned, even obsolete word in today's common language usage. It simply means: "**to ask for.**" We do "supplication" any time we ask for anything from anyone. Prayer of supplication can actually be divided into two kinds: 1) properly speaking, when we ask God for something for ourselves, this is called, **petition**; 2) when we pray for something on behalf of someone else, or ask God to do something for another person, this is called, **intercession**. Although the word itself may not be heard too often in modern English, supplication is probably the most common kind of prayer. We spend more time asking God to do things for us and to give us things than we do in adoration, contrition or thanksgiving. When we receive an answer to our prayers, we respond with joy, but then we often run off to enjoy what we have received without remembering to give God thanks or to adore Him for His goodness to us. Supplication and thanksgiving should go hand-in-hand. However, bringing our petitions and intercessions to God is a way to acknowledge His love and power, and they remind us how much we need God. We should all be encouraged to bring our needs to God with trust that He always hears us.

In addition to the usual 4 items indicated by "A.C.T.S.", there is also another very important form of prayer – **meditation**. Because of the current influence of Eastern and New Age religions, we may find that the word "meditation" causes us some concern or even fear. It shouldn't do this at all since meditation is an essentially and profoundly Christian form of prayer. To "meditate" merely means **to think**. It is very simple. One way to look at prayer is to call it, "a conversation with God." A conversation must be a two way street. We talk to God, but we also need to listen to Him. This listening to God is not complicated or scary. We listen to God primarily by reading Holy Scripture. After we read, however, we should take a few minutes to think about what we have read. When we ponder the reading of Holy Scripture, we are meditating. We can also quietly ponder the events of our day, the beauty of the world around us or the many ways in which we experience God's love in our lives. Quiet pondering – giving attention to the God Who loves and cares for us is the prayer of meditation. If we think about it, we are already meditating whenever we simply think about God or ponder the readings of Holy Scripture. Rather than making meditation into some kind of problem, we should cultivate these simple times of quiet thinking.

We can therefore summarize 6 kinds of prayer:

1) Adoring God; 2) Thanking Him; 3) Asking for forgiveness, and accepting God's grace to let it change us; 4) asking for what we need; 5) interceding for the needs of others; 6) thinking about

God to come to understand Him better, especially by thoughtful reading of the Holy Scriptures.

Materials Needed for Lesson

- Book of Common Prayer
- table with special cloth, candle(s), cross and/or icon, (optional) flowers *or*
- use of the church, or a “chapel” space.

Opening Prayer and Introductory Activity (10 – 15 minutes)

In this lesson, our opening prayer *is* our introductory activity. Prepare your study space ahead of time. Put some kind of nice cloth on the table, with a large candle, a standing cross if you have one, or even an icon if one is available, and if possible a few small flowers. Alternatively: If possible, hold this class in your church itself.

Explain to the students that today we need to be able to spend some time being quiet while we pray and think together. If need be, give them a little time at the beginning to get over any giggling problems. Look at the Our Father in each of its separate phrases, and give one phrase to each student until all the phrases are taken (if the class is small, give the students’ more than one phrase). Light your candle, or if possible if you are in church, light the candles on the altar.

Begin by quieting everyone down gently and then invite the students to spend a little quiet time praying and pondering this prayer. Have each student read his or her clause, and then wait silently to give each person in the group time to think about what that phrase means – and what it means to each one personally – before going on to read the next phrase.

Or you may want to use the newer version:

Our Father, Who are in heaven
hallowed by The Name
Thy Kingdom come
Thy Will be done
on earth *as* it is in heaven
Give us this day our daily bread
Forgive us our trespasses (or sins)
As we forgive those who trespass against us
lead us not into temptation
But deliver us from evil
For Thine is the Kingdom, and the power
and the glory for ever and ever.
All together: Amen

Our Father in heaven
Holy be Your Name
Your Kingdom come
Your Will be done
On earth *as* in heaven
Give us today our daily bread
Forgive us our sins
As we forgive those who sin against us
Save us from the time of trial
and deliver us from evil
For the Kingdom, the power and the glory
are Yours, now and forever.
All together: Amen.

Lesson (20 – 25 min.)

Discuss this prayer experience with the students:

We use this prayer every Sunday and even every time we pray. We are so used to it that we

might not realize what kinds of things we are actually saying. Let's think about the Our Father together. Jesus, Himself, gave us this prayer, so it has always been considered the most special prayer we can pray. In this prayer we express to God all of the different kinds of things we need to say to God. We also spent a little time in between each phrase of this prayer thinking quietly about what we were saying. So now, let's take another look at this prayer.

When we say, "Our Father Who art in heaven", (or Our Father in heaven) what does this tell us about our relationship with God? (Try to let the *students tell you* that we understand God to be a loving father to us even though He is also greater than our physical world – **in each of these parts of the prayer, only tell them what it means if none of them are able to express it to the class.**)

What does it mean for us to tell God that His Name is "Holy" or "hallowed" (Here, we are adoring God – acknowledging the uniqueness and greatness of Who He is. We are praising His Name).

What do we mean when we say, "Your Kingdom come and Your will be done?" (Here we are using "petition," but we are also putting ourselves under the authority of God. A "kingdom" is a place where a king's sovereign authority is the highest power. When we ask for God's will to be done, we are trusting Him to do what is truly best for us all)

Think about the real meaning of "on earth as in heaven." What is God's Kingdom like in heaven? How is His Will done in heaven (Answer: Perfectly! Wonderfully! Beautifully! With all Goodness and Love! Wow! For us to ask God to have His Kingdom and Will on earth become the same as it is in heaven is amazing)

When we ask God for "our daily bread" are we only asking for bread? What other needs do we have that could be included in "bread". This phrase is called "petition" because we are asking God to give us what we need. (Notice – what we *need* not merely what we *want*)

The next thing we ask for is forgiveness of our sins. This is called "contrition" What does contrition mean? (The students will probably focus on sorrow for doing wrong. Try to help them understand that it more importantly means being willing to let God heal us from our guilt and also to give us healing grace, and to accept us back into a relationship with Him) Notice that when we ask to be forgiven, we also need to be willing to forgive others who have hurt us too. When we are forgiven, we understand how much we all need forgiveness. As we are forgiven, we also need to let go of resentment and grudges over the way others may have treated us.

The next phrase is a little tricky. It is very important to help the students understand that God *never* tries to tempt us or to trip us up the way that the enemy may try to do. This phrase actually means that we are asking God for guidance, help and strength not to be tripped up by the difficulties that normal life always seems to provide. The word in the actual original Greek does not refer so much to be "tempted" as to being put under pressure or stress. We might be able to translate this accurately as: "Keep me from being stressed-out" or "release me from all the pressures of life." This is also a prayer of petition since we are asking God for help.

The next phrase is also a petition for help: "save us out of evil situations" or "don't let us be overcome by evil." We are asking for His strength to get us out of trouble.

We end the prayer with another expression of Adoration and praise. We acknowledge God's greatness and awesomeness: Kingdom (sovereign power), all authority and all glory belong to God.

"Amen" means that we all agree that, "Yes! This is true."

Reflection (10 – 15 min.)

What we have seen in going through the Our Father is that there are different kinds of prayers. We began by giving God our praise and worship: this is called, "Adoration." We also asked God to give us what we need and to help us through stress and trouble. This kind of prayer is called, "petition." When we petition God on behalf of someone else, we call that, "intercession." A word that means both "petition" and "intercession" is "supplication." Supplication may seem like an odd word, but it simply means: "to ask for something."

We should also always remember to thank God for hearing our prayers and answering us in so many ways. God is also the Creator of all, so everything good comes from Him. Thanksgiving is another very important kind of prayer. In the middle of the Our Father we ask for forgiveness of our sins. Admitting that we need forgiveness and asking for it is called, "contrition." Having contrition is not just being sorry but also making a decision to allow God to heal our guilt and make us into new people by His Grace.

We can put these four kinds of prayer into an "anagram" where the first letter of each word spells another word: ACTS Adoration, Contrition, Thanksgiving and Supplication. Actually, we have learned about 5 kinds of prayer: 1) Praising and adoring God; 2) Acknowledging our need for Forgiveness, and receiving God's forgiving grace; 3) giving Thanks to God for all His gifts – those He is always giving us, and those we specifically ask for; 4) petition, in which we ask God to give us what we need; 5) Intercession in which we ask God to give other people what they need also. There is also a sixth kind of prayer: 6) Meditation. Meditation is nothing weird or difficult. It simply means to think about something – whenever you just sit quietly and think about something, you are "meditating." It is always best to meditate on what we read in Holy Scripture. When we sat quietly and thought about each phrase of the Our Father, we were meditating together. So: 1) ADORATION 2) CONTRITION 3) THANKSGIVING 4) PETITION 5) INTERCESSION 6) MEDITATION are the 6 kinds of Prayer. We should try to use all 6 kinds, not just one or two as often as we can.

Take-home Activity (5 min.)

Between pages 211 and 261 in the Book of Common Prayer, there are prayers called, "Collects" (Pronounced, COLL-ect). These prayers "collect up" several of the 6 kinds of prayer into one. We have at least one Collect at every church service, and usually more than one. Collects always start by acknowledging of God's greatness (adoration or praise) and then bringing to God a specific petition. They may also include a phrase of thanksgiving. Each collect (almost) always ends by offering the prayer to the Father, through Jesus our Lord in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Before our next class, take a look at some of the collects in the Prayer Book. Do *one or the other* of the following assignments:

- 1) Choose one Collect that you particularly like, and re-write it in your own words **OR**
- 2) Write a prayer that includes at least 3 of the 6 kinds of prayer we have learned about (Do not try to include “meditation” since meditation does not actually require words – it is about listening, not saying something)

Closing Prayer (5 min.)

Use Collect # 23 *For Education* at the top of page 261 in the Book of Common Prayer. Invite the students to add their own prayers of praise, thanksgiving, petition and intercession.

Scripture References

- Psalm 32 and 51 (contrition)
- Psalm 148 & 149 (praise & adoration)
- Psalm 25, 42 & 43 (petition, intercession)
- Psalm 136 (thanksgiving)
- Gospel of Matthew, chapter 6, verses 9 through 13.

Resources