

Monday, July 6, 2020

**Pray in this way**

**- Pastor Hank French**

*He was praying in a certain place, and after he had finished, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray..." (Luke 11:1).*

*Pray then in this way... (Matthew 6:9a).*

Jesus would often go off to some lonely place to pray, sometimes alone and sometimes with his disciples. Clearly Jesus needed times away from the crowds who clamored for his attention—and he thought his disciples needed to get away from it all from time to time as well.

He (and they) needed time when his attention could be completely on God, on his relationship with God, time to speak and time to listen, time to rest in the love of the one who sent him into the world for love of the world. Clearly Jesus needed the encouragement, the strengthening, the empowerment that comes from encounters with God in deep, intentional times of prayer. If he needed to pray, how much more do we?

But, we not only need to pray—many if not most of us *want* to pray. If we stop for a moment, step aside from the many distractions of our lives, and look deep within, we find a longing to connect with God. We yearn for intimacy with the divine, the Holy, the one whom Jesus called "Father." And so, we too ask: "Lord, teach us to pray...."

And the request is answered. Jesus responds, "Pray then in this way;" then he teaches what we call The Lord's Prayer—words repeated so often for so long that they may have lost their edge for us. Many of us have become numb to their meaning, insensitive to the radical nature of this ancient and yet modern prayer. For the next several devotions we will think together about the radical nature of the Lord's prayer and what it means for us today.<sup>i</sup>

"Pray then in this way...." These are not words of friendly advice from a gentle wisdom figure encouraging us to develop our own personal piety. Rather they are words of *command* spoken to people who have been *chosen* to follow Jesus in God's mission, and who have freely accepted that remarkable calling. We lose the full force and effect of this prayer if we do not hear the words "Pray then in this way" as marching orders for people *chosen* for the mission of God—the mission of bringing justice and love, forgiveness and redemption into the world's sin and suffering and death.

Prayer: Jesus, teach me to pray; and grant me the faith and courage not only to pray but to follow you in the way of God. Amen.

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<sup>i</sup> The devotions for the next several days are adapted from my book, "Book of Faith Lenten Journey: 40 Days with the Lord's Prayer" (Augsburg Fortress Publishers, 2009).