

Week 1: What is Prayer?

Opening Prayer:

Almighty God, to you all hearts are open, all desires known, and from you no secrets are hidden. Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love you, and worthily magnify your holy name, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

A Couple of Stories

Mark 1:35 "In the morning, while it was still very dark, [Jesus] got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed."

An Invitation into Deeper Waters, Luke 5:1-11

What is prayer?

"For me, prayer is an aspiration of the heart, it is a simple glance directed to heaven, it is a cry of gratitude and love in the midst of trial as well as joy; finally it is something great, supernatural, which expands my soul and unites me to Jesus."--St. Therese of Lisieux

"Prayer is, at root, simply paying attention to God."-- Dr. Ralph Martin

"You have made us for yourself, Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you."--St. Augustine

“Prayer is the only entryway into genuine self-knowledge. It is also the main way we experience deep change--the reordering of our loves. Prayer is how God gives us so many of the unimaginable things he has for us. Indeed, prayer makes it safe for God to give us many of the things we most desire. It is the way we know God, the way we finally treat God as God. Prayer is simply the key to everything we need to do and be in life. We must learn to pray. We have to.”--Timothy Keller, *Prayer: Experiencing Awe and Intimacy with God*

“There is no bad way to pray and there is no one starting point for prayer. All the great spiritual masters offer only one non-negotiable rule: You have to show up for prayer and you have to show up regularly.”--Ronald Rolheiser, *Prayer: Our Deepest Longing*

Some Etymology

Latin--prex, precarius

Hebrew--palal, לָלַץ

Tefillah: a labor of awakening the hidden love within the heart until a state of intimate union with the divine is achieved.

Greek--proseuche, προσευχή

A Few More Thoughts on Prayer from Spiritual Giants

“Come to me,” Jesus says, “all you who are weary and find life burdensome, and I will refresh you. Take my yoke upon your shoulders and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble of heart. Your soul will find rest, for my yoke is easy, and my burden is light” (Matt. 11:28-30).

Here the deeper meaning of prayer becomes manifest. To pray is to unite ourselves with Jesus and lift up the whole world through him to God in a cry for forgiveness, reconciliation, healing, and mercy. To pray, therefore, is to connect whatever human struggle or pain we encounter---whether starvation, torture, displacement of peoples, or any form of physical and mental anguish---with the gentle and humble heart of Jesus. . . .

Prayer is leading every sorrow to the source of all healing; it is letting the warmth of Jesus’ love melt the cold anger of resentment; it is opening a space where joy replaces sadness, mercy supplants bitterness, love displaces fear, gentleness and care overcome hatred and indifference. But most of all, prayer is the way to become and remain part of Jesus’ mission to draw all people to the intimacy of God’s love.

--Henri Nouwen, *Prayer Embraces the World*

“If we do not pray, we fail to realize that we are in the presence of God... We have found the right road, and now it behooves us to walk in it. On this path, the gospel and the law, the promise and the commandments of God, are one and the same thing. God opens this road to us; he commands us to pray... To be a Christian and to pray are one and the same thing; it is a matter that cannot be left to our caprice. It is a need, a kind of breathing necessary to life.”--Karl Barth, *Prayer*

“There is (of course) much more that could be said about prayer, but, as with worship, the important thing is to get on with it.”--N. T. Wright, *Simply Christian*

Week 1 Prayer Tool: The Wesley Covenant Prayer
-Pray this prayer daily for 7 days.

I AM NO LONGER MY OWN, BUT THINE.
PUT ME TO WHAT THOU WILT, RANK ME WITH WHOM THOU WILT.
PUT ME TO DOING, PUT ME TO SUFFERING.
LET ME BE EMPLOYED FOR THEE OR LAID ASIDE FOR THEE,
EXALTED FOR THEE OR BROUGHT LOW FOR THEE.
LET ME BE FULL, LET ME BE EMPTY.
LET ME HAVE ALL THINGS, LET ME HAVE NOTHING.
I FREELY AND HEARTILY YIELD ALL THINGS
TO THY PLEASURE AND DISPOSAL.
AND NOW, O GLORIOUS AND BLESSED GOD,
FATHER, SON AND HOLY SPIRIT,
THOU ART MINE, AND I AM THINE.
SO BE IT.
AND THE COVENANT WHICH I HAVE MADE ON EARTH,
LET IT BE RATIFIED IN HEAVEN.
AMEN.

A Covenant Prayer
in the Wesleyan Tradition

