

CONNECTING WITH GOD IN A DISTRACTING WORLD

Bauer Evans

October 20, 2012

I. Introduction: A Conversation Between Friends

"Prayer is the conversation of friends. It is not mere convenience for letting God know what we are thinking or what we want. Prayer is that for which we are made. It is at the heart of God's plan of salvation... A Christian is someone who knows God through Jesus Christ, and to know God is to converse with him." - Timothy Chester, The Message of Prayer, pg. 27

"It is not too much to say that God made us to pray, that prayer is (not the easiest, but) the most natural activity in which we ever engage." - J.I. Packer, Praying the Lord's Prayer, pg. 15

Read Matthew 6: 5-14

II. Jesus teaches us two things about how **NOT** to pray in this passage

I have a desire to pray, but sometimes for the wrong reasons

- ◇ to impress others (Matthew 6:5)
- ◇ to impress God - 'heard for their many words' - (Matthew 6:7)

III. Jesus teaches us three things about HOW to pray

- ◇ prayer is a conversation with our Heavenly Father, not a formula
- ◇ when we pray to our heavenly father, we have his full attention
- ◇ the gospel frees us to come to our heavenly father "messy"

IV. Why is this the Hardest Place on Earth to Pray?¹

1. American culture is arguably the hardest place in the world to learn to pray
 - ◇ we are busy: prayer feels restless
 - ◇ we prize work, productivity, accomplishments: prayer seems like wasted time
 - ◇ our culture values intellect, competency, wealth: prayer seems unnecessary
2. I have a tendency to be distracted by many things when I pray
 - ◇ The good things of family, work, friends, recreation
 - ◇ But also the things of this world
3. I feel guilty for not praying
4. We get confused about what makes for "good" prayer
 - ◇ we make it formal and try to be something we aren't
 - ◇ we call it a spiritual discipline rather than a conversation

¹ Miller, Paul, *A Praying Life: Connecting with God in a Distracting World* (NavPress: 2009), pages 15-16

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5. Prayer can be uncomfortable

- ◇ when we are talking to someone on the phone, we can hear a voice and respond
- ◇ when we pray, we are talking with a Spirit (John 4:24) who is unseen, and doesn't speak with an audible voice

6. Prayer sometimes feels frustrating

- ◇ I have a desire to pray because God made us in His image enabling us to enjoy a relationship with Him (Genesis 1:26-27)
- ◇ Our frustration in prayer comes from the fall: evil has marred the image; we want to talk to God but at the same time we don't, we feel like we can't (Romans 7:18-20)

V. Learning to Pray as Jesus Prayed²

1. Jesus life teaches us that prayer is about a relationship

“During the days of Jesus’ life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission.” (Heb 5:7)

2. Jesus pulls away from the noise and from people in order to pray to His father

- ◇ *“Go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father”* (Matthew 6:6)
- ◇ *“You don’t create intimacy, you make room for it ... you need space to be together”³*
- ◇ *“When Jesus prays, he is not performing a duty - he is getting close to his Father”*

3. Why did Jesus need to pray?

- ◇ His identity as God’s son
 - * *“The Son can do nothing of his own accord’ - John 5:19, 30*
 - * *Only a child would say ‘I only will do what I see my Father doing’*
 - * *Because He is childlike, depending on his Father*
- ◇ His One Person Focus (John 5:3,6)
 - * *The way Jesus loves people is identical to the way he prays to his Father*
- ◇ His Humanity
 - * *From all eternity, he has been in relationship with His Father,*
 - * *He wants to concentrate on His Father, so he gets alone to pray*
 - * *Jesus would withdraw to desolate places to pray - Luke 5:16*

² Miller, pg. 43 - 48

³ Miller, pg. 47

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4. Jesus Taught Us the Lord's Prayer to Help Focus Our Conversation with God

Jesus (in the Lord's prayer) is not giving words to be repeated verbatim, but a model to shape all our praying. 'This is how you should pray' is literally, 'Pray in this manner' and implies an example to adapt rather than a mechanical formula. While repeating the words of the Lord's Prayer is not to be discouraged, the more important thing is that Christians pray in this kind of way. Whatever it is for which we pray, we should pray with these priorities. Luther said, 'a Christian has prayed abundantly who has rightly prayed the Lord's Prayer.'" - Timothy Chester, The Message of Prayer, pg. 157

5. Jesus Life Exemplified Prayer as a Conversation with His Heavenly Father

- a) He prayed as a Son (John 5:19-30)
- b) He prayed in the morning (Psalm 5:3, 59:16, 88:13, 143:8)
- c) He prayed at night (John 17, Luke 22:39-46)
- d) He prayed by himself (Luke 6:12-13) and with others (Luke 11:1-4)
- e) He prayed out loud (Hebrews 5:7)
- f) He prayed the promises of Scripture (John 17:1-5)

VI. Learning to Talk With Our Heavenly Father

- ◇ Jesus regularly speaks to his disciples about God as his father, and their father - 'this is insider language, that distinguishes the new people of God Jesus disciples - from all others, especially the scribes and the Pharisees'⁴
- ◇ The opening words of the Lord's Prayer are "our Father" (Matt. 6:9).
 - * Jesus instructs his disciples to know themselves in relationship to their heavenly father (**our identity**)
 - * Jesus reveals that we are at the center of our heavenly father's affection
- ◇ Jesus teaches us to start talking to our father – "to my Father, and your father" (John 20:17) as he put it to Mary from Magdala – your Father who rules the world, and who has freely chosen to take your best interests to heart.

VII. Learning to Come to Our Heavenly Father Like a Little Child⁵

- ◇ On more than one occasion, Jesus tells his disciples to become like little children (Matthew 18:3)
- ◇ Jesus wants us to pray to Our heavenly Father like little children do:
 - ◇ Remember you are in a conversation
 - ◇ Realize if you are a believer, you have his full attention because He loves you
 - ◇ Come to him just as you are – distracted, weary, 'messy'
 - ◇ Pray about what your mind is wandering too - maybe its important

⁴ Pennington, Jonathan, *Heaven and Earth in the Gospel of Matthew* (Baker Academic: 2007), pg. 250

⁵ Miller, pages 40-41

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VIII. The Holy Spirit Helps Us to Pray Like Children

Paul told us that Holy Spirit puts the praying heart of Jesus in you - he is praying in you!

“And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!” - Galatians 4:6

IX. The Gospel helps us to be like children and come to God messy (Matthew 11:28)⁶

- ◇ Jesus didn't call the righteous; He came for sinners
- ◇ Therefore, all of us qualify
- ◇ The very things we try to get rid of before we pray: our weariness, our messy lives, our distractedness: are what can become the 'front door' of prayer
- ◇ That is how the gospel works in prayer: we can come to God as we are

By believing the gospel, we believe God's acceptance of us is because of Jesus.

- ◇ Jesus invites us to come to God overwhelmed with life (Matthew 11:28)
- ◇ The gospel frees us to tell our heavenly Father what is on our hearts (Matthew 6:8, 32)
- ◇ How do we learn to talk with our heavenly father? By asking like a child, like Jesus did. By believing like a child, like Jesus did. And as we get the clutter off of our hearts, minds, we will find it easier to be still in God's presence, and trust him with all of our hearts.

X. How To Pray

1. Begin by remembering the gospel

- ◇ The gospel reminds me I am accepted because of Jesus Christ
- ◇ The gospel frees me to come to my Heavenly Father messy

“In this the love of God was made manifest among us that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins” - 1 John 4:9-10

2. Remember your identity because of Jesus Christ

God said, “I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to me.” 2 Corinthians 6:18

What does my adoption into God's family mean for my praying?

Answer: it means my prayers can be a conversation between my heavenly Father and me who deeply loves me and gives me his full attention

⁶ Miller, pg. 31

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3. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you to pray to our heavenly Father?

“And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba! Father!” - Galatians 4:6

“The fact is, I need God to help me love God” - Francis Chan

4. Does Jesus tell us WHAT we should pray for

a. Pray what your mind is most often distracted about - it is probably important.

b. Pray the priorities you find in the Lord’s Prayer (Matthew 6, Luke 11)

◇ God’s fame (“hallowed by thy name”)

◇ God’s saving reign, our submission to it (“thy kingdom come, will be done”)

◇ Our needs (“daily bread”)

◇ Our forgiveness of sin

◇ Our deliverance (“lead us not into temptation”)

c. Pray for others

◇ Who needs Jesus as their Savior and King?

◇ Who needs his forgiveness, his presence, his power ?

◇ Who needs freedom from overwhelming tests, trials, temptations?

XI. Application Questions⁷

1. What is the heart of prayer?

2. Think about how you pray now. What is frustrating to you about prayer?

3. What is it about American culture that makes it difficult for you to pray?

4. How is prayer like having a conversation with friends?

5. What happens when we make prayer formal? A discipline?

6. Think of a child you know:

◇ What do they ask for? How often?

◇ In what way?

7. In what ways are you similar to and different from that child as you talk to your heavenly Father?

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8. Describe the differences between coming to God messy and coming put together using the chart below.

	Coming Messy	Coming Put Together
<i>What does it look like?</i>	_____	_____
<i>How does God respond?</i>	_____	_____
<i>What's hard about it?</i>	_____	_____

9. How does the gospel help you to pray?
10. Read Mark 2:13-17 - what kind of people did Jesus come for? Why is it so important to come to God just as you are? How does the gospel free us to come to God just as we are? Are you tempted to clean yourself up before you turn to God in prayer?
11. Take time, right now, to come to God messy for just 5 minutes? What was that experience like for you? Jot down a few words that come to mind.