

## In the Habit of Praying

1 Timothy 2:1-3

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There's something that we all know about habits. The more we practice something, the more it becomes a habit. And so today we're going to look at the habit of Prayer... about practicing different ways of praying, how can we pray, how do we pray, who do we pray for. These are great things to take a look at.

But before we do that I want to take a look at an image of God, because for some people the image of God in their prayer life is about God living in some far off galaxy, distant from us, maybe looking at our prayer requests, deciding whether or not that God would grant them or maybe that God wouldn't grant them. But Jesus gives us a completely different image of God, especially when we pray. When Jesus would pray to God, Jesus always prayed to a tender, loving parent, because Jesus gave us that picture that God is with us. And Jesus even said, that not only is God with us but God literally lives within us.

When we pray to God, we don't have to worry about God being in some distant far off place or a God that doesn't really know us or doesn't want to give us this love. We have a God who loves us totally and completely and lives inside of us and wants us desperately to be in that relationship. We get a lot of great ideas about prayer from 1 Timothy 2:1-3. I'll read from the Message translation.

*The first thing I want you to do is pray. Pray every way you know how, for everyone you know. Pray especially for rulers and their governments to rule well so we can be quietly about our business of living simply, in humble contemplation. This is the way our Savior God wants us to live.*

So, Jesus wants us to live in prayer. That prayer isn't just something we do once in a while, but that prayer is literally how we live our lives.

Well you know, when I was growing up, here's what I thought prayer was. I prayed before meals (most of the time), and I'd try to remember to pray before I went to bed (quite often it was "Now I lay me down

to sleep..."), and then I would pray if I was in a panic (throw up those quick prayers).

And to be honest with you, I still pray at those times. I still pray before most of my meals, and I still pray before I go to bed, most of the time, and I still do those quick prayers of "My gosh, God, you've got to help me." But Timothy is talking about more of living into a relationship with God and our prayer life becomes part of who we are. There are so many other ways to look at how we're going to pray...and how we can expand our relationship with God through prayer.

So, I'm going to take the word PRAY, and we're going to talk about four different ways of how we can pray. First one – Pray Simply.

### **Pray Simply**

When I went to seminary, I remember sitting in this group of people, and these prayers that people were praying were so elaborate and so beautiful and so eloquent, and I thought, "Wait, I hope they don't come to me, because I don't pray with these great words and great phrases. I just pray like I'm talking to a friend." And I was really concerned that my prayers weren't going to be as good as somebody else's. But what I've learned from reading scripture, and from listening to Jesus, and from being with others, is that praying simply really works, simple words, just like you would be having a conversation with one of your best friends. And when we pray like that, like we're talking to one of our best friends, we speak to someone that we trust, to someone that will bring us comfort, to someone that will bring us hope. And that someone is God. So the first thing we want to remember about prayer is to Pray Simply.

### **Read Scripture**

The more we know the story about God, the more we learn about God and God's love for us, the more our expansive love of God and others will grow. You know how it is when you get to know somebody, quite often the more you get to know them, the more you get to know their story, the closer you become, and the more you love them. I have two son-in-laws and I love them both dearly. But when I first met them, it was like, Oh yeah hi, they were nice, I liked them, but the more I got to know them, the more I got to know their story, the more my love grew for both of these great young men who are married to my daughters.

Well, that's what happens when we read scripture. God has this amazing love story to tell. And when we

read our Scriptures, we pray just using those words in Scripture, we pray learning the story of God's love.

And one of the best things I've learned through reading Scripture and prayer, is that the people in our Scriptures, well they are not perfect. That works for me, because I'm not. So when I read these stories about some of the things people have gone through, I can use their words when I'm going through something similar. And when I'm struggling, when I'm not sure what to do, I can remember what Paul says in the book of Mark, he says, "Lord, I believe, but help my unbelief." Those words are crystal clear to me. Those words help in those times when I'm really struggling. I love when Paul says in Romans, "Nothing in all creation can separate us from the love of God." Wow. There are so many rich things to pray about in Scripture. And the more we get into Scripture, the more we learn God's story, the greater our prayer life becomes a part of our everyday life.

So that's R; so P is Pray Simply, R is Read Scripture, A is Active Prayer.

### **Active Prayer**

I am an active person. I have a hard time just sitting quite often. When I understand that prayer can be active, I think, Oh I love this. It means that God uses what I have been given – my gifts, my talents – and God uses your gifts and your talents to pray. I can explain it better as you listen to my two friends, Robin and Erik as they talk about how they use their God-given gifts of art and music in the form of prayer.

(Video of Robin Kutz and Erik Olson)

Isn't that great? That God would be able to create each of us with our own unique gifts and talents and that we can use them to pray and to praise God.

One of the things I love to do with my prayer life is to pray when I'm walking. And quite often I'm not saying a word. Quite often I'm just walking in nature and things will come to me that I believe are from God. I really believe that as I'm walking and I'm quiet, that God has an opportunity to be active in my life, that I let myself be open so that God can be active with me. So being active in prayer is a really great opportunity to incorporate prayer into the things that you love most. Active. Here's our next one...Y. I just love this one. Y means Yep, those people.

### **Yep, those people**

In this reading from Timothy today, it was great, make our lives prayer, go out and pray for everyone and everything. That includes those people we love, those

people we like, people we know, those people we don't know, those people we don't like, and actually politicians, even the ones maybe we didn't vote for. But what happens is, when we pray, we're not praying for everything to go my way, what we're praying for is God's will to be done. And what is that? That there is peace on earth, and everyone in the whole world is treated justly and equally. Because, you know what, we're all children of God. There isn't a person on earth that isn't a child of God. And as children of God, we pray for each other. We pray for peace and hope and mercy and justice and grace and forgiveness.

And I think the other thing that happens when we pray for others doesn't necessarily change them, but that prayer changes us. When we pray for those who are really hard to pray for, the more we can do that, the more God is changing us and transforming us to be more loving, more compassionate. That's why we pray for Yep, those people.

So, let's take a look at this. P...Pray Simply. Just pray what's on your heart, whatever you're thinking, whatever you're feeling, just like you're in a conversation with your best friend. We can have those conversations with God.

R...Read Scripture. Read through those stories and understand that these people in Scripture are not perfect people but they're people like you and me who make mistakes. When they say those words that we can totally relate to and we share that with God. And the more we know that story the more we can see God's love working in our lives.

A...Active Prayer. We can do it by drawing, by writing, by walking, by playing a sport, by playing piano, there are millions of ways that we've been gifted to be active in our prayer life.

And Y...Yep, those people. Those who we pray for that are some of the hardest ones. God usually and can change us. That is a way to pray.

So, today, since we're in this habit of prayer, some of you pray all the time, but maybe you heard something today and think, Oh, I might want to try a new habit. I'm going to try a new way to pray. So, I encourage you to try one of those P.R.A.Y. ways to pray. And for those of you who are thinking, I need to add a little more to my prayer life, try one of those areas of prayer and watch what happens, how God continues to work in your life as your prayer life becomes even more of a habit.

What form of prayer will you practice this week?