

## Prayer Practices of the Master: 8.12.18

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**Jesus isn't an inaccessible spiritual guru.**

All too often when we look at the life and patterns of Jesus, we can get weighed down and leave feeling like he's just a little too far out of reach. Like, he's an inaccessible spiritual guru. If what the author to the Hebrews tells us is true when they write,

**For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.<sup>1</sup>**

Then all of a sudden, we're confronted with this truth that Jesus isn't a savior that is removed from us, but in fact, one who sympathizes with us. One who can look us in the eye and honestly say, "I understand... I've walked in your shoes." So, when it comes to looking at the prayer life and practices of Jesus, we need to shift our perspective from merely hoping we can come close to the spiritual guru Jesus; and instead, fully embrace the prayer patterns and practices that the Father wants us to catch as he conforms us into the image of Jesus through the working of the Holy Spirit. Not buying it? Let's look at the Paul writes to the Philippians:

**"...though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men."<sup>2</sup>**

Catch it there? Jesus humbled himself to take on the form of man... ie. You and me. Simply, Jesus isn't some inaccessible spiritual guru; he is our savior who didn't consider equality with God a thing to hold onto, instead, he invaded our world, put on our shoes, sympathizes with us, and made a way for us to be reunited with the Father. Oh, and he modeled how we are supposed to live too. Pretty cool, huh? Let's look at his patterns and practices of prayer.

**Jesus established a regular rhythm and environment for prayer. (Luke 5:16)**

They've been walking away from the action for a very long time now. The whole way they are feeling both confused and amazed. "Why are we going this way?" they ask one another. "Did

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<sup>1</sup> *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*. (2016). (Heb 4:15). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

<sup>2</sup> *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*. (2016). (Php 2:6–8). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

you see what happen back there?” another one remarks. Yet, they continue to follow their leader as he presses on, farther and farther away from the crowds, the people, the press. See, not too long ago a man found them. Well, he found, Him. This man had been isolated, exiled, and excluded for as long as he could remember now. If (and that is a very big, IF) a physician stopped by all they would ever say is, “Your condition is too far gone, I’m sorry, there is nothing we can do.” One day, however, he caught wind that there might be someone who could help him. Someone who had the power to cure his condition. Maybe once again he would finally feel something other than loneliness. So, he set out to find him, and he did. But, what do you say, how do you make that request? As he searched in his mind for the right words, “If you want to, you can...” fell from his lips. And in the mere seconds between his request and the response, he thought, “Why did you say it that way, now he never will...” When all of a sudden, he saw a hand reaching out to him, a gentle embrace, and in a dream-like state or a movie scene in slow motion dead and dying skin gave way to new living and healthy skin... and the response “I will be clean.” But now, they are miles from that moment and those crowds. Finally, they stop, and their leader rests. The only word that quietly falls off his lips is, “Father...”

In Luke’s gospel, we are met with this incredible story of Jesus healing a leper who’s condition is so bad that Luke (who is a physician) notes, “he was full of leprosy.” He set out to find Jesus, and Jesus heals him. Then, Jesus gives some instructions to go to the Temple and be declared clean by the priest, but not to tell anyone how he was healed. Somewhere along the way, he spills the beans. Can you blame him? Years of isolation, mental and physical torture, and hopelessness all gone in a touch. The word travels fast, and the crowds press in on Jesus. Almost instinctually, Jesus begins to retreat into the wilderness and pray. It’s a one verse note in Luke, and no one would fault you for reading over it. But, in it, we get a picture of Jesus’ intentionality and rhythm for prayer.

See, Luke in his writing structure using verbs for both (withdraw and pray). This implies a continual doing of these two actions. In other words, Luke is telling us in one short verse that Jesus made a consistent habit of withdrawing into quiet places to pray. And, he does it here in the face of unprecedented success. I mean he just healed a leper in which the doctor who’s writing this account, tells us the leper had one of the worst cases he had ever seen. Honestly, if

I'm Jesus, I set up shop and keep healing. I'm also probably tasking one of my disciples to make sure we record it all for accurate record keeping and a killer infographic at the end of the ministry cycle. But, Jesus has an entirely different rhythm and intentionality for prayer that looks us square in the eyes and says, "Your prayer life could be so much more, and this is how. Regularly be withdrawing and praying, no matter how amazing things are."

Let's do a quick check in with a couple self-assessment questions:

- ◆ Are you intentional about the rhythm and environments for your prayer life?
  - Where do you pray most often? Where should you?
  - When do you pray most often? When should you?

Jesus never tells us that we have to go to some iconic or holy place for God to hear our prayers. Instead, he models a life of being intentional in our rhythms and environments for prayer. Man, that's not a good guru move if he wants to keep us chasing after an unattainable standard.

**Jesus' prayer life is caught, not just taught.** (Luke 11:1-13)

He keeps looking over at him, trying to be respectful, but this question is just burning in him. Every time he thinks his teacher is done and is ready to talk, he begins to ask his question, only to stop before even a whisper comes out realizing he'd just be interrupting. This cycle goes on for a while until finally, the question comes blurting out... "Would you teach us to pray?" With a smile as large as they have seen, their teacher responds to this question, "Of course, I thought you'd never ask." And the lesson began, "When you pray..."

The disciples had plenty of familiarity with prayer in their communities, synagogues, and even as they passed through gentile cities. It seemed as if everyone was praying... but, no one was praying like Jesus. In fact, as they watch and listen to his prayers, they are prompted on more than one occasion to ask for his instruction. Naturally, the disciples didn't learn about prayer exclusively through teaching, but they learned countless lessons by catching it. Remember how in one verse, in one small note, Luke told us that Jesus was intentional about his rhythms and environments for prayer? Who do you think he was taking along with him? The same guys that at this moment are asking for instruction. They had seen the pious and proud religious leaders pretend to pray on street corners. Loud and flamboyant so that everyone around them could

hear and see. They had listened to the Gentiles who thought the more words and the louder you are, the more likely the gods are to hear you. It was babbling and obnoxious. But in Jesus, they saw something different and had to know more.

When Jesus begins teaching them, he tells them to refer to God as, father. In Aramaic, the word is Abba. In Hebrew, it is, Abinu. In English, father sounds a bit formal, stale, and even a little distant. But, that couldn't be farther from what Jesus was teaching his disciples and us about who the Father is. See, Abba is better translated as, daddy or dad. Something intimate and close. He kind of wholehearted trust that a small child has for their dad. This prayer was ground shaking for the disciples. They most likely had a picture of God a little distant, a little removed, at least not someone so close that they could refer to him as, daddy.

It seems to me that this idea was so new to the disciples that Jesus circles back around in verses 11-13 to give a better picture of a loving heavenly Father by asking some ridiculous questions. Think about it, how crazy would your father be if you asked for a fish and he gave you a snake or asked for an egg, and he gave you a scorpion? I imagine the disciples are reacting to those questions as we do. "Duh, no good dad would do that!" And then Jesus is like, yup, neither would your heavenly Father. Not so hard, huh?

What if your heavenly Father who is good, wanted you to catch the prayer practices and patterns of his son so that you could be as close to him as Jesus was on earth? Crazy idea, right? So crazy, that when God inspired the authors of the gospels to write, he had them capture 30 individual events over 45 passages so that you too could catch the prayer patterns and practices of Jesus; not so that you could become some professional pray-er. But, instead, so that you could draw near to the Father just as Jesus did.

If you were to go back and read the gospels looking for Jesus' prayer life, what would you catch? And, if you were intentional about your rhythms and environments for prayer, who would catch a healthy model of prayer from you?

### **Jesus prayed to remain connected to the will and presence of the Father. (Luke 22:39-46)**

The sweat on the back of his neck is increasing, his heart rate is racing, and he can see those around him talking, but their voices sound far and distant. He keeps walking hoping for a familiar place to bring some comfort. As he gets close, the smells of the olive trees, the dew gathering on the ground and leaves, and the sounds of the night confirm he is here. But tonight "here" isn't bringing any comfort. It is his favorite place on the whole earth, but it's like he's never been here before. His companions are only a stone's throw away... 100 or 200 feet at most. They've never seen him like this. They've never heard him pray like this. He falls to his face, humbled, broken, prostrate, and cries out in a loud and desperate voice, "FATHER..."

R.T France notes, "There is no other passage that gives such intimate insight into Jesus' relationship with the Father." Here, Jesus is about to go to the cross and in the face of insurmountable pressure, odds, and stress Jesus gets away to pray. It is here in this moment that the battle for the cross is won. Jesus willingly takes up the cup that he knows is the Father's plan for him so that you and I might have a chance at redemption and a renewed relationship. Jesus' very own posture is a lesson in humility. Luke tells us that he "knelt down," this is so uncommon in Luke's world that he makes a note about it. Jewish men almost never knelt to pray. Instead, they prayed standing and with eyes looking up to heaven. But, here Jesus is in such stress and inner turmoil that the only posture appropriate for the moment is complete humility and kneeling is that posture. The posture of submission and surrender. Jesus is not forced into this position but willingly assumes it. He is in such pain that Luke uses the word agony to describe it. A word that only occurs here in the NT, and then tells us how the blood vessels near his skin popped from stress and blood came out with sweat. A physical response that only happens under extreme stress.

At this moment, Jesus who has modeled that prayer is his lifeline to hearing from the Father and connecting to him in relationship, is comforted by his father. Nothing else can do that, nothing else reduces that stress. And, at this moment we are confronted by our habits of prayer in times of stress, profound and significant pain, and hopelessness. Do we see prayer as a lifeline to draw near to the father, laying ourselves humbly before him? Or, do we see it as a

negotiation session? “If you do this... I’ll do this.” Jesus taught his disciples about a father in heaven who loved them. Here, he modeled what their posture before the father should be and just how good their father is. They watched him sweat, be tormented, and heard him cry out. They watched him submit to the father and take up his cup.

Do we believe that we can have the same prayer life and relational connection with the Father, just as Jesus did on earth through the Spirit? Jesus models a healthy and vibrant prayer life that I can access, and connects me to a loving heavenly Father. And, the Father wants us to catch it. It’s why he recorded it for us.

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