

February 3 8:45 [This is part 1 of 2 sermons.]

The following paragraph crossed my desk this week as I was beginning to prepare this message so I thought I would share it with you:

"If there were ever a person you would have thought did not need to pray it would probably be Jesus. Yet Jesus was, by all means, a man of prayer. In fact, prayer was a constant theme throughout the ministry of Jesus. Jesus regularly withdrew for prayer. He taught His disciples to pray. He declared the temple as a house of prayer and He began and ended His ministry with prayer. Jesus was a man of prayer....."

Now if Jesus was a man of prayer, then as his disciples you and I should desire to be like Jesus. As a matter of fact, Jesus disciples only ever asked Jesus to teach them one thing- to pray. So how do we learn to pray like Jesus?

First, let me dispel a thought that may hold you back from learning how to pray like Jesus. Jesus doesn't want you to pray like him; Jesus wants you to pray like you! You don't have to say a prayer like Jesus, you just need to make the commitment to pray with the same passion Jesus displayed.

I remember growing up as a kid and listening to the pastor pray at church. I thought that if I was to pray then I needed to sound like the pastor. The problem was that I didn't know all the big words the pastor used.

Some of you may especially be afraid to pray out loud because you think you need to sound like the pastor! But you don't need to sound like the pastor or know some secret formula about how to pray.

Your prayer is nothing more than *your* words that express your heart's desire as a result of your relationship with God. That's really all prayer is; it's talking with a friend- a friend who loves you, knows you and wants to communicate with you more than you can imagine.

Each prayer you pray is unique to you; it doesn't have to follow any pattern, it doesn't have to contain certain words, prayer is just conversation with God. And just like a teenage boy talking to a girl he likes; what comes out of your mouth may sound a little odd at first but given time it becomes natural and enjoyable!

But the single most important word I want you to hear today about prayer is this: Start!

So what are some ways that you can start to converse with God and what are some things that you can do to improve your time with God in prayer.

Here are a couple of basics that will help you get started or take your prayers to the next level.

1. Be Consistent. Make your time and place of prayer something that can be done regularly. Maybe you have a favorite chair, or a place where you can be alone. The more consistent we become the easier it will be to keep going; and the more you will want to find this time alone with God.

Depending on what your lifestyle is like; remember that the key is finding the rhythm that fits your lifestyle. Many people like to start the day in pray; but some people find that the evening works best. The time and place may change from time to time in your life, but you can still develop consistency in prayer.

2. Get a notebook. There are several things that the notebook can do to help you grow in your prayer life. In no particular order here are some things that notebook can help you with:

a. Make a prayer list. I know that when I go to the store if I don't have a list I am going to forget something. Making a prayer list will help you keep track of what you want to pray about. It also becomes a place where you can reflect on the answers to your prayers.

b. Write out your prayer. I did this several years ago. In my notebook I wrote out in longhand my prayer. It helped me to focus, to slow down, and it made me focus on what I was saying and what I was hearing from God.

c. Paste a written prayer on the inside of the notebook. Many great people of prayer have had their prayers written down and preserved for us. Those written prayers can help us get started with our time of prayer. These prayers can 'prime the pump' to get us started in the right direction.

If you are like me, at times your mind is running faster than you can think with all the things you need to accomplish. Having a written prayer you can use to slow down and focus may be something you want to start.

I know some people don't like written prayers, but there is nothing wrong with using a prayer that someone else wrote. As a matter of fact, the Lord's Prayer fits that category!

Now let me give you several suggestions about ways to pray.

One great way to learn to pray or to improve your prayer life is to turn to the Bible's prayer book. Any idea where you can find this prayer book? That's correct; they are in the book of Psalms.

Many of the Psalms are prayers that were set to music. They express the heartfelt words of people like David and Moses. At times these prayers can become a good place to turn when you are looking for words to express what is happening in your heart and what you want to say to God.

ANXIOUS/AFRAID

- Psalm 70

GRATEFUL

- Psalm 9

CONTENTED

- Psalm 23

Another great way to develop your prayer life is to pray scripture. We are blessed to have the promises of God recorded for us in the Old and New Testaments.

As a matter of fact when Jesus was being tempted in the desert, do you remember how Jesus responded to the Tempter? Jesus said, "It is written..."

- Isaiah 43:1-3 -- Do Not Fear
- Jeremiah 18:1-6 -- The Potter and the Clay

- Joshua 1: 9 -- Be strong and courageous!
- 1 Corinthians 10: 13 -- Endurance in Temptation
- James 1: 2-4 -- Testing Leads to Maturity

If you have access to a computer may I suggest that you go to www.umc.org/pray and access some of these resources and many others to help you grow in praying like Jesus.