

The Talk. You know the one I'm talking about. That Talk; the one that parents put off for as long as possible to have with their kids, that Talk is probably easier for most people to undertake than asking someone to pray out loud in a group!

Like the Talk, I think we just make prayer harder than it really is.

Like the Talk, we assume that we need to use some vocabulary that we are uncomfortable with using.

Like the Talk, we often abandon our responsibility to others; after all we don't feel we know how to approach the whole topic.

Like the Talk, we figure if we just avoid praying out loud then it will never be an issue that we need to confront.

Well today, we're going to have the Talk, right here, right now. No, not that Talk, we're going to have the talk about prayer. Like that other Talk, some of you are going to squirm in your seats, wish you had stayed at home this morning, or just tune me out. Some of you are thinking I know I need to have that talk- the one about prayer- but you're still so uncomfortable that you just don't know how to begin (actually, that applies to both talks!)

Well here is how we begin; the same way that the first disciples of Jesus began:

Lord, teach us to pray. Luke 11:1

For all of us as disciples who are **centering our lives on loving God and loving others**; learning how to pray is as much a life-long process as is becoming a disciple of Jesus. I know that I've come a long way from '*Now I lay me down to sleep...*' but I also know that I have much more to learn and experience in the school of prayer. So no matter where you are in learning about prayer, I think the things we learn today will help all of us get past the uncomfortableness that is prayer.

One of the people that really taught me about prayer- and the power of prayer- is a very special lady that came into my life when I was 12 years old. That is when Ted and Lou Yohe moved to Lewistown and Ted was

assigned to serve as pastor of Grace UMC. Over the years since that relationship formed, I know that many of the prayers Lou prayed for me and for my family have made a powerful difference. And I can't wait till some day when in heaven I get to see all that her prayers have done. Would you welcome Lou...

Interview with Lou Yohe

1. How has prayer been important in your life?
2. How has your understanding of prayer changed throughout your life?
3. If there is an encouraging word you would share with others about the power and importance of prayer, what would that be?

One thing I am sure that Lou would want all of you to know is the same thing I mentioned last week about reading the Bible; **just start!**

No one expects you to pray for hours on end, no one expects that you'll have all the right words (and by the way, there aren't any!), and no one expects you to pray like anyone else- because prayer is as **unique and individual** as each and every one of us.

So let's begin walking through a few lessons on prayer.

First, there are no magic words, no special positions, and no one-right-way to pray.

Let's look at Matthew 6:5-14.

Prayer is **not an outward show but an inward condition of the heart**. I think one reason that many people find prayer so difficult is that they think they need to say certain things to make prayer work. And one of the reasons that people avoid praying- and praying out loud in particular, is simply the fact that they fear they will not have the right words.

Guys, how many of you were scared-to-death when it came to talking to a girl that you liked? Did you ever call her up on the phone and then when you heard her voice suddenly slam the phone down because you didn't know what to say?

Did you pass notes through friends, asking things like, “Do you like me? Check yes or no?” simply because you were afraid you wouldn’t know what to say?

Guys don’t have the corner on the market when it comes to fear of speaking. And when it comes to prayer; guys certainly don’t have the only trouble when it comes to fearing they may say the wrong thing, so they simply don’t say anything at all.

Second, as we see in these words of Jesus, prayer is not an outward show, but a condition of the heart- a heart that finds itself in **a relationship with a God who is more in love with them than they realize!**

I like this quote I found in an article this week in *Relevant* magazine:

A flourishing prayer life comes not out of dedication to rules and regulations—although structure may help—but from the overflow of a heart totally and fully in love with God.

I think that is one of the things that Jesus tries to communicate in these words from the Sermon on the Mount and in other examples found in the Gospels. Prayer is a relationship. And like all relationships, communication is the key to growing and deepening love between two people. The only difference between our earthly relationships and our relationship with Jesus is that we can see the one and the other we can’t.

Prayer, like any good relationship, takes time to develop. Like any relationship, you learn over time how to relax and say what is on your heart. And, as your relationship grows, so does your vocabulary.

People often ask me, ‘**How do I pray? What do I say?**’ Those are good questions by the way; questions the first disciples asked Jesus.

One answer to that question is found in the Lord’s Prayer. As I said just a moment ago, sometime structure helps your prayer life. And the structure of the Lord’s Prayer gives us some clues about prayer; but before I get into all that a word about the Lord’s Prayer.

An article crossed my desk this week about the Lord's Prayer in today's language. In the article, the author makes the statement that to those who grew up in the church reciting the prayer it can be quite comforting. But the language of the Lord's Prayer can also be obscure and dated and that is not what Jesus intended.

If we step back into the time when Jesus first spoke these words he is surrounded by a throng of farmers and fishermen. Jesus' Sermon on the Mount was full of practical illustrations lifted right out of his listeners' daily lives. Jesus talked about relationship, lust, money, worrying about the future and more.

And here is the point that the writer of the article makes about the Lord's Prayer: Jesus wants his disciples' prayers to come out of their day to day life rather than out of words we use primarily in sacred spaces.

Remember, for Jesus prayer is a conversation. When Jesus stepped aside from his teaching and healing ministry it was to talk with his Father.

I don't know how that conversation works in your house; but if my kids called me, *Father*, it was with a little sarcasm; and they certainly never thought my name was hallowed!

The Lord's Prayer is a great prayer, a powerful prayer; but as the author of the article says, the professional church people got ahold of the prayer and turned it back into often disconnected, ritualistic language Jesus specifically told his listeners to avoid.

I say all that not to discourage anyone from praying the Lord's Prayer, but to challenge you to realize that prayer isn't about formulas and certain words that are only known to church people; prayer should be connected to our everyday life and flow from our lips using everyday words.

So here's a challenge any of you can undertake. How would you rewrite the Lord's Prayer using your own words? On your outline is a suggestion, and it's only a suggestion, because I wonder how many of you actually know what Hallowed means, or what is daily bread? (Remember what I said last week about reading the Bible, we need to understand it in its

cultural context. Daily bread was a concept everyone in the ancient world understood; but how many of you make your own bread each morning or head to the local baker each morning before everyone in your house wakes up?)

As far as structure that can help, many people use the acrostic for ACTS to guide their prayers: Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, Supplication. (I put some notes about those four 'church-y words' on your outline this morning. If you want to know more about that pattern I'll provide you some other notes.)

Let me run through a few quick points before I wrap this up.

1. Recognize from the start that prayer is difficult.

Talking to God should be simple, right? But prayer is hard. Like any relationship there are going to be good days and bad day when it comes to communication. The key is to keep going and push through the tough times.

2. Just do it!

Just talk to God. Anytime, anywhere, prayer works.

“Because prayer is an act of relationship, it should be an open and ongoing dialogue. I Thessalonians 5:17 tells us to “pray continuously.” God may not be physically with us when we pray, but He is present with us, and prayer becomes our connection to Him. Whether we’re crying out in desperation or spontaneously asking for His favor, prayer is how we converse with God. It can be casual conversation or intense, emotion-filled petitioning. It can be done on our knees or in the car, shower, elevator or check-out line.”

3. Try different things.

As we said, prayer doesn't happen the same way, from day to day or from year to year. Sometimes you may pray out loud at other times silently. Sometimes you may write out your prayers, while at other times you may read others' prayers. Sometimes you may pray the scriptures, sometimes you may just take a walk and listen to God speak in the silence.

Remember, prayer isn't a one way street. Sometimes you need to be still and allow God to talk to you.

What I would encourage you to remember above all is that prayer is not a simple five-step solution. For most people prayer will have its highs and lows, one day it will just flow from the heart and on another you will feel as dry as dust blowing across the prairie. But here's the important thing, the struggle is what helps us to grow.

Remember that God wants to have a relationship with you. And like any relationship it grows as you learn to communicate. As you learn that God loves you – by reading the Bible and experiencing God's grace- you will want nothing more than to open your heart to God and bring all your joys, pains, etc.

As we close this morning I want to get the attention of parents and grandparents. The greatest gift of faith that you can ever give to your child or grandchild is to demonstrate for them how vital prayer is to your life, how easy it can be and how you can make it more than just a shared prayer at meals and at bed time.

I'm glad we had this talk this morning. I hope first that it inspires you to start praying. Likewise, I hope that it demonstrates that prayer is not some unconquerable hill that we know we should climb but never take the first step to see if we actually can climb to the top.

<http://www.relevantmagazine.com/god/practical-faith/why-prayer-so-hard>

<http://www.ministrymatters.com/all/blog/entry/4641/what-would-the-lords-prayer-sound-like-today>