

Sermon on the Mount, Week 3

Small Group Discussion Guide, week of Sept 27th

SEPT 27TH SERMON SUMMARY

Praying from the Heart (Matthew 6:5-15)

We all know that conversation is vital to relationships, and that prayer is our vital link to God. What does it mean to truly pray from the heart?

- 1. Pray genuinely (v.5-6).** Pray for the right reasons, because you want to talk to God. Don't pray because of a concern for what people think or to impress others.
- 2. Pray confidently (v. 7-8).** Come as you are; God hears your prayers and knows your heart. You don't have to pray the same thing or pray long drawn-out prayers in order to be heard.
- 3. Pray honestly (v. 9-13).** Say what you really mean. Jesus teaches what prayer looks like from a heart that wants to honor and glorify Him and to fully depend on Him. Do we pray like this to impress others, to impress God, or because we honestly mean it?

Jesus sets a high standard for His disciples. He doesn't expect us to fix ourselves, but to see our need for Him. The challenge is not about WHAT we need to do, but about WHO we need.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

I. INTRODUCTION: Share briefly something that made you feel blessed this week.

II. THINK AND REFLECT.

Jesus confronted the prayer practices of his day in Matthew 6:5-8 (below).

5 "And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. **6** But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. **7** And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. **8** Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

1. What bugged Jesus about the way people prayed? How were their prayers:
 - a. NOT genuine?
 - b. NOT confident?
 - c. NOT honest?

2. Do you think the prayers of people today would bug Jesus in the same (or other) ways? Explain your answer.

3. In these verses, what do you think Jesus wanted them (and us) to learn about the Father?

4. Discuss the following article excerpt:

If you ever feel guilty about not praying enough, raise your mental hand. If someone at a party were to ask you: "How is your prayer life these days?" (which, by the way, is a great way to kill a conversation at a party), what would you say? Is the state of your prayer life determined by how often you pray? How long you pray? Is it measured by how many people you are praying for, or how much faith you pray with, or how many prayers get answered?

(John Ortberg, "Getting Good At Prayer Isn't the Point", Leadership Journal, Summer 2015)

- a. When you assess your own prayer life, do you think about those kinds of questions? (Be honest!) If you do, how does that make you feel about prayer?

- b. How do those kinds of questions make it hard to pray genuinely, confidently, and/or honestly?

- c. What do you think the point (purpose, reason) of prayer is? How do those kinds of questions miss the point?

- d. What are some better, more grace-filled, ways we could assess our prayer life?

5. Discuss this excerpt from later in the same article:

Many years ago I read words that helped me to understand Jesus and ministry and prayer in a new way: "To believe is to begin to pray" ...

In other words, the goal of prayer is not to get good at prayer, not to see who can spend the longest time in prayer ... The goal of prayer is to live all my life and to do all my ministry in the joyful awareness that God is present, right here, right now. This is the prayer-filled life that can sustain and empower a life of ministry. (John Ortberg, "Getting Good At Prayer Isn't the Point")

- a. Ortberg says the measure of the state of our prayer life is how we live. Agree or disagree? Thoughts?

- b. How does this expand your idea of prayer? How does it challenge or motivate you?

III. PERSONAL APPLICATION (Choose 1 of the following if time is limited)

6. Using any measure you choose, share briefly about how your prayer life is these days, and how you want it to be.

7. Erik said the challenge is not about WHAT we need to do, but about WHO we need. How does this help you to think about your prayer life?

8. How have you felt challenged, convicted, or blessed about prayer?