

Great Prayers of the Bible



**Eagle United Methodist Church
Lenten Sermon Series
February 15, 2010 – April 4, 2010**

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The Last Lesson is Coming Soon!

The High Priestly Prayer (John 17:9-23) March 29-April 4

How to Use This Study Guide

1. Join a small group for Lent, the seven weeks of the study (February 15 to April 4). If you need help finding a small group, contact Laura in the church office. (939-0108 or Laura@eagleumc.com)
2. Prior to your group meeting each week, answer the questions and do the prayer exercises found in each of the three segments for each week’s lesson. This isn’t quite “daily” – but the idea is to do one segment each day, allowing more grace for missed days.
3. Meet with your group to discuss and share your thoughts, insights, and questions.
4. Attend worship on Sunday morning to hear a sermon on the scripture and topic you have just studied.

Introduction

We've probably all heard or been taught that prayer is one of the most important things we do as Christians. It is our communication with God, a primary way of building a relationship with God. This is true. However sometimes the well-meaning people who say and teach these things, fail to take the next step and actually teach their listeners how to pray!

There are many reasons we may not pray, or may not feel comfortable praying. It is the goal of this study to help overcome some of these barriers. The lessons in this study are centered on "Great Prayers of the Bible." While you will read and study these prayers, the core of the study is the actual experience of prayer.

Here's how it works:

- Each week's lesson is divided into three segments. You should plan to do each of these segments on a separate day.
- Each segment asks you to read a passage of the bible, answer a few questions about the passage, and then enter into a time of prayer.
- There is an outline for different prayer focuses in each segment. This is the key part of this study. You don't become an athlete by reading about races. You don't learn to pray by only reading about prayer! If we want to improve and strengthen our prayer lives – we must spend some time actually doing and practicing prayer.
- Following each time of prayer, you are asked to record your thoughts or impressions from the prayer time. This also is critical as it helps you see what you learn, as well as share your experience with your small group.

I personally have learned to see prayer in some new ways as I have been writing this study. The examples of prayer in the Bible have great things to teach us about who God is and what it means for us - human beings - to communicate with him.

It is my hope, and has been my prayer as I write, that these lessons and exercises will strengthen your prayers, introduce new ideas into your life of prayer, and help you to grow stronger in your relationship with Jesus Christ.

Smiles,
Laura Hibberd

With Sighs Too Deep for Words

Romans 8:26-27

Week of February 14 - 21

Throughout the Bible, an astonishing truth is revealed. The Creator of the world, the God of the universe, not only allows us to speak to him, but in fact *desires* that we speak to him! What an amazing gift it is to express our thoughts, feelings, and emotions to God, to be given the opportunity to build a relationship with Him. However, many people seem to be almost afraid of prayer. “I don’t know what to say,” or “I don’t know how to pray” or “Oh, I can’t pray out loud” are statements I frequently hear. It is our hope that over the course of this study you will “just do it” and just experience prayer – an open communication with God, who loves you very much.

Key Point: Prayer is not about eloquent words. Prayer is about honesty and openness with God.

Key Verse: ...for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. **Romans 8:26**

Segment 1 - Warm-Up

Open your time of study with prayer:

Father, as I begin this study of prayer, please lead me to know you better. I want to know how to talk to you. Please help me to learn more and more. Amen.

1. What uncertainties or fears do you have about prayer?
2. How would you describe your prayer life currently? How do you feel about that description?
3. What joys or successes have you experienced in your prayer life? What failures?
4. What do you hope to learn, or gain through this study on prayer? Are there any specific ways you would like to grow in prayer?

Pray:

Spend some time in prayer now. Express your thoughts and feelings about prayer to God. Lift up any hopes or fears you have. Then be silent and listen. What might God have to say to you?

5. What thoughts/feelings/ideas/impressions do you have from this time of prayer?

Pray:

Spend some time in prayer now, focusing on Romans 8:26-27. The Bible, the Word of God, is “living and active” (Heb. 4:12), not just words on a page. Reading the Bible can be a type of prayer, a way for God to communicate personally with us. If this is new for you, try praying with the following pattern:

- Invite God to be with you. Ask him to reveal what he would like for you to know in these verses.
- Read the verses (Romans 8:26-27) completely through at least twice, out loud if possible.
- What word or phrase stands out to you?

- Hold this word or phrase in your mind. Think about the words. Listen for what God may be saying to you through this word or phrase of the Bible. Record your thoughts/feelings/impressions:

- Repeat this process: Read the verses completely through at least twice, out loud if possible.
- Does a different word or phrase stand out to you?

- Hold this word or phrase in your mind. Think about the words. Listen for what God may be saying to you through this word or phrase of the Bible. Record your thoughts/feelings/impressions:

9. How did you encounter God through this prayer? What did you learn?

Segment 3 – Hannah’s Prayer

Open your time of study with prayer:

Heavenly Father, I long to be able to pour out my heart to you, to share my deepest hurts, longings, and joys. Yet I am hesitant as well. Please help me to trust you enough to express whatever I think or feel. Amen.

Hannah has been unable to have a child. In her society – where honor was gained by bearing children – being childless was a terrible social stigma. This passage begins just as Hannah is preparing to go to the Temple to pray.

Read 1 Samuel 1:9-18 (begin reading at 1:1 if you would like the full context)

10. What does the text tell you about the attitude, behavior and actions of Hannah as she prays? Why might Eli (the priest) think Hannah is drunk?

11. What attitude, behaviors, or actions do you usually have as you approach God in prayer? Are these working for you? What might you learn or try in your own prayers based on this example of Hannah’s prayer?

12. How is Hannah changed after pouring out her heart to the Lord?

Pray:

There is no set formula for prayer. Different things are helpful to different people. As we experience change in our lives and in our journey of faith, things that may have been helpful to us in the past may no longer be helpful now. We are free to try different things in prayer, trusting that the Holy Spirit will lead us and teach us to pray. Below are examples of things some people find helpful as they pray:

- Speak your prayers out loud
- Kneel as you pray
- Sing your prayers
- Pray before bed
- Avoid prayer lists, and pray for things/people/situations as they come to mind
- Allow yourself to cry
- Pray silently, but mouth the words
- Stand to pray

- Use a book or devotional with pre-written prayers
- Pray with your eyes open
- Read a Psalm as a model for prayer
- Journal/write as you pray
- Pray early in the morning
- Write out your prayers
- Light a candle
- Allow yourself to sing and praise
- Keep a list or notebook of prayer requests
- Walk as you pray
- Pray with your eyes closed
- Use familiar prayers. For example: “Now I lay me down to sleep...”
- Have hymns or praise music playing in the background
- Draw, paint, or sketch your prayers
- Pray during your lunch break

In this time of prayer – and throughout the rest of this study – feel free to experiment with these suggestions, or anything else you’d like to try.

Hannah was deeply upset as she poured out her heart to God. But her prayer can remind us that no matter what we feel – strong emotion or apathy – God is ready to hear anything from our heart and soul.

Enter a time of prayer, and tell God about the emotions and thoughts you are experiencing right now, whatever they are. Joy? Don’t feel like praying? Frustration? Angry? Apathy? Stress? Contentment? Wondering what to make for dinner? Wondering how to invest your retirement? Struggling with a situation at work? Excited about an upcoming event? Whatever it is, take time to just talk with God now about whatever is on your mind.

13. What did you find yourself expressing to God? Did God give you any new insights into your situation?

14. What did you feel after talking to God about the things that were on your mind?

Abraham's Prayer

Genesis 18:22-33

Week of February 22 - 28

Last week we looked at prayer as honest, open communication with God. Yet you may still be wondering: Just how honest does God really want me to be? Am I allowed to question God? Or argue with God? In this lesson we will look at Abraham's prayer for Sodom, an example of extreme boldness in prayer tempered by recognition of who God is.

Key Point: God welcomes our boldness and persistence in prayer.

Key Verse: Then Abraham approached him and said: "Will you sweep away the righteous with the wicked? What if there are fifty righteous people in the city? Will you really sweep it away and not spare the place for the sake of the fifty righteous people in it? Far be it from you to do such a thing – to kill the righteous with the wicked, treating the righteous and the wicked alike. Far be it from you! Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?" **Genesis 18:23-25**

Segment 1 – Boldness in Prayer

Open your time of study with prayer:

Father, I have so many questions and doubts when I pray. I wonder if you listen to me. I wonder if you care what I have to say. Please help me to know what is true about prayer and what is true about you, that I may come before you with increasing faith. Amen.

Read Genesis 18:16-33, out loud if possible.

1. What is your reaction to the way Abraham speaks with God in this passage? What impresses you most about this conversation?

2. How does God respond to Abraham's bold questioning? Do you think Abraham's prayer pleased God? Why or why not?

Pray:

This is our Lord's will... that our prayer and our trust be, alike, large. ~ Julian of Norwich

Think about some of the ways this conversation could have gone differently. God could have said, "What I plan is just, simply because I said so!" Or he could have said, "Save your breath Abraham, there aren't even 10 righteous people in the city." But God didn't. What can we learn from this?

Spend some time in prayer now, focusing on **Genesis 18:22-33**. The Bible, the Word of God, is "living and active" (Heb. 4:12), not just words on a page. Reading the Bible can be a type of prayer, a way for God to communicate personally with us. If this is new for you, try praying with the following pattern:

- Invite God to be with you. Ask him to reveal what he would like for you to know in these verses.
- Read Genesis 18:22-23 at least twice, out loud if possible.
- What word or phrase stands out to you?

- Hold this word or phrase in your mind. Think about the words. Listen for what God may be saying to you through this word or phrase of the Bible. Record your thoughts/images/feelings/impressions:

- Repeat this process: Read the verses completely through at least twice, out loud if possible.
- Does a different word or phrase stand out to you?

- Hold this word or phrase in your mind. Think about the words. Listen for what God may be saying to you through this word or phrase of the Bible. Record your thoughts/feelings/impressions:

3. How did you encounter God through this time of prayer? What did you learn?
What did God reveal to you?

Enter a time of prayer. Choose one of the names of God above, or any other name from scripture and begin your prayer by focusing on that name of God. What does God want to reveal to you about himself through this name? You may wish to use the questions below as a guide – filling in the blank with the name of God you chose.

- What does it mean for God to be (the) _____?
 - What does it mean for God to be MY _____?
 - How do I need God (the) _____ in my life right now?
 - What attitudes or actions in my life need to change if I fully trust God as (the) _____?
6. What did you learn through this time of prayer? How did God deepen or challenge your understanding of who He is?
7. In this time of prayer, did God bring to mind anything you need to allow him to change in your life?

Segment 3 – Persistence and Intercessory Prayer

Open your time of study with prayer:

Father God, I see so many things around me that I would like to change. I see friends who are hurting or struggling and a world that has so many problems. Please help me to bring these concerns to you, trusting your love and power. Amen.

Read Genesis 18:16-33, out loud if possible.

“Intercessory Prayer” is a big phrase that simply means praying for others. We “intercede” on their behalf by praying for them.

8. Why do you think Abraham is willing to risk such boldness before God as he prays (intercedes) for someone else in this prayer?

9. Do you think Abraham was right to be so persistent in his prayer for the cities? (From 50 righteous, down to 10 righteous?) Did he stop too soon?

10. Read Luke 18:1-8. What does Jesus teach about being persistent in prayer?

Pray:

This is our Lord's will... that our prayer and our trust be, alike, large. ~ Julian of Norwich

I (Laura) attended an evangelism seminar once that encouraged us to get to know people by asking: “If God could work a miracle in your life today, what would you want it to be?” I don’t know how I feel about that question as an evangelism tool, but it did get me thinking a great deal about my prayers. I believe God can work miracles... yet frequently my prayers do not reflect that. Are my prayers too small?

Give some thought to “big” prayers – for others, and for yourself. No matter how big or “impossible” it may seem, or no matter how many times you have prayed for it before, I encourage you to bring it to the Lord now. Be honest with God about what you long for, your questions or doubts, your hopes and thoughts. Then make sure to be open to hearing what God may be trying to tell you about the situation.

Enter a time of prayer now.

- If God could work a miracle in your life, what would you ask for? Lift this up in prayer.
- Take time to listen – Ask God if there is anything he is trying to tell you or teach you through this request and this prayer.
- If you could ask God to work a miracle in the life of someone else, what would you ask for? Intercede in prayer on behalf of this person.
- Take time to listen – Ask God if there is anything he is trying to tell you or teach you through this request and this prayer.
- Is there anything you have “given up” praying for? Take time to exercise persistence in prayer now. Lift up an ongoing request, no matter how many times you may have prayed about it before.
- Thank God for hearing your prayers, loving you and caring for you enough to listen and respond to your needs.

11. What did you learn or experience during this time of prayer? Did God reveal to you anything about himself or his will? Did you learn anything about your own life?

An Apostles Prayer

Ephesians 3:14-21

Week of March 1 – March 7

One of the things that stands out to me in this prayer is Paul's obvious view of the "richness" and "abundance" of God. It's a beautiful prayer, demonstrating an amazing understanding of God and desire to see others know God more fully.

The richness and depth found in just these few verses is nearly overwhelming. To help us take in all that Paul is saying here, we will read the entire prayer each day but look closely at smaller sections of verses.

Key Point: God's abundance lavished upon us.

Key Verse: I pray that, according to the riches of His glory, He may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through His Spirit, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love.

Ephesians 3:16, 17

Segment 1 – Christ Dwelling in Us

Open your time of study with prayer:

Heavenly Father – I have been taught that "Christ dwells in me", yet I don't think I know what that really means. Please expand my understanding and teach me to trust in your Spirit in me. Amen.

Read the entire prayer (Eph. 3:14-21), out loud if possible.

Then look closely at 3:14-17.

1. Paul prays for the believers to be strengthened. Look closely at what he says. What is the source of this strength? Where does this source need to exist in the life of a believer?

Pray:

Spend some time in prayer now, focusing on **Ephesians 3:14-21**. These verses are rich in meaning and knowledge of God. Allow them to be a form of prayer, a way for God to speak to you.

- Invite God to be with you. Ask Him to reveal what He would like for you to know in these verses.
- Read the verses completely through at least twice, out loud if possible.

- What word or phrase stands out to you?

- Hold this word or phrase in your mind. Think about the words. Listen for what God may be saying to you through this word or phrase of the Bible. Record your thoughts/images/feelings/impressions:

- Repeat this process: Read the verses completely through at least twice, out loud if possible.
- Does a different word or phrase stand out to you?

- Hold this word or phrase in your mind. Think about the words. Listen for what God may be saying to you through this word or phrase of the Bible. Record your thoughts/feelings/impressions:

2. How did you encounter God through this time of prayer? What did you learn? What did God reveal to you?

Segment 3 – God’s Power At Work in Us

Open your time of study with prayer:

Lord, as I’m studying these great prayers of the Bible, please don’t let my study be wasted in only intellectual understanding. Please build my spirit so that in the future I will pray great prayers to you with all my heart. Amen.

Read the entire prayer (Eph. 3:14-21), out loud if possible.

Then look closely at 3:20-21.

7. What does it mean that God can do immeasurably more than we can ask or imagine? Why is this so?

8. What happens when we limit God by our own ability to understand? How can we get past this failure?

Pray:

It seems to me that many Christians understand prayer as primarily something we do for others. We pray for friends and relatives with health concerns. We pray for co-workers and their families when they are going through something difficult. These are certainly great prayers, yet they also leave something out – what about praying for ourselves?

As I read Paul’s prayer here, I kept thinking, “I want to be this kind of person too!” Do you want to be the kind of person Paul prays for here? Someone who is strengthened by God’s Spirit dwelling in your inner being? Someone who grasps the vast abundance of God’s love? This prayer is every bit as valid for us to pray for ourselves as it is to pray for others.

So spend some time in prayer for yourself. Tell God about the kind of relationship you want to have with Him. Tell God about the thoughts or fears that are holding you back. Ask God to show you what ideas you hold that are too small. Then use Paul’s prayer as a guide to pray for your own relationship with God.

9. What did you experience as you prayed this prayer for yourself?

10. Did you learn anything about yourself? Anything about the kind of relationship God would like to have with you?

A Hypocrites Prayer

Jonah 2:1-10

Week of March 8 – 14

The story of Jonah is certainly more dramatic than most of our own stories, however the attitudes of Jonah are universally human. What can we learn about God, ourselves, and the way God relates to us through Jonah's story? What does Jonah's prayer have to teach us about our own prayers and God's response to them?

Key Point: God welcomes, hears, and may even answer our prayers – no matter how selfish, stubborn, or foolish we are behaving.

Key Verse: When my life was ebbing away, I remember you, Lord, and my prayer rose to you, to your holy temple. – Jonah 2:7

Segment 1 – Knowledge...

Open your time of study with prayer:

Father, I want to be the type of Christian who actually lives my life around what I know about you. Please help me to live with integrity – let my actions reflect what I say I believe. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

1. **Read all of Jonah (it's only 4 chapters) to get the whole story.** As you read, consider: What does Jonah seem to know about the Lord? What statements does he make that tell you this?

2. Look back at the list of statements you made above, and then consider Jonah's actions. Do Jonah's actions make you think he truly *believes* what he "knows" about God? Why or why not?

Pray:

Jonah seems to know a lot about God, yet obviously doesn't want to obey what God has told him to do! Have you ever felt like that? The dramatic and obvious nature of this story makes it easy to ridicule Jonah for "not getting it", but the reality is that most of us have areas of our lives where we act just like Jonah.

Spend some time in prayer now using the story of Jonah as an outline for your own prayer.

- Begin by considering what God may be asking or commanding you to do that you are running away from. Perhaps you don't need to ask, and you already know what you are avoiding. (Spend some time asking what you may be avoiding. However, if nothing comes to mind, don't force it – don't look too hard for a problem that doesn't exist! Skip directly to thanksgiving.)
 - Admit that you are running away, admit your stubbornness. Ask God to show you what "storms" in your life might be a result of your running away.
 - If you are ready, perhaps ask forgiveness for your stubbornness. If not, continue to lift up your struggles to God.
 - Conclude with thanksgiving – thank God for the ways he has saved you and reached out to you in the past. Thank Him for his patience with you when you "don't get it".
3. What did God reveal in this time of prayer? Are there any areas where you are "running away" from God?
4. What did you experience as you tried using Jonah's story as an outline for your own prayer?

Pray

It is easy to view desperate prayers as not sincere. After all, doesn't EVERYONE pray in some form when they get desperate? Yet for all the faults we could find with Jonah's attitude and Jonah's prayer, God answers Jonah and saves him. Why? Had Jonah's heart changed? If it had, it doesn't appear to have changed much based on what we read in the rest of the story. Yet, in the end, judging of the heart is a task that belongs to God alone, and God is capable of seeing and rejoicing in even the smallest movement toward Him.

If you are at a time in your life when you are praying (or could be praying) a desperate "absolutely no way out" prayer to God, spend some time in prayer now. You may wish to use Jonah's prayer as a model by crying out about the desperateness of your situation and acknowledging that you believe God is capable of saving you.

If you are not in that kind of situation now, recall a time in your life when you have prayed a desperate prayer - sincerely, hypocritically, hopefully, or otherwise. Did God meet you in that situation, regardless of your attitude? Did that time of desperation draw you closer to God? Spend some time in prayer now, recalling that time, asking God to show you what his purposes were in that struggle and how it has shaped your relationship with Him. Thank Him for what He reveals about His work in your life.

7. What did you learn during this time of prayer? What did God reveal about who He is? Did you see any of the situations in your life (past or present) in a different way?

Segment 3 – Grudging Obedience

Open your time of study with prayer:

Father God – I am guilty of seeing your commands as drudgery. Please help me to find the joy in doing your work. Help me to see the blessings you wish to pour out on others through my obedience, and to find fulfillment and pleasure through your work in me. Amen.

Read Jonah 3 & 4

8. How is Jonah's response here different from the first time "the word of the Lord came to Jonah"? What do you think caused this change? From what you read in these last two chapters, has anything else about Jonah's attitude changed?

9. What do you learn in this story about the power of God to work through grudging, stubborn, arrogant human beings? What do you think might be possible for God to do through a person who is more willing than Jonah?

Pray:

It is up for debate whether Jonah went to Nineveh the second time because he'd had a change of heart or because, after the storm and fish incident, Jonah felt he didn't have much choice. Again, this is where the story of Jonah, though dramatic, is a very human story. Do you recognize your own attitudes here? Doing something just because you "have to"? Acting grudgingly, then getting angry when the results are not what you wanted? Failing to see the worth of others because of your own biases? Aren't those very human failures?

The story never tells us if Jonah changed after this. Did he ever apologize to God for running away, being stubborn, or getting angry at God's mercy?

As you enter into a time of prayer now, use Jonah's story to help you examine your own life and experiment with prayers of confession to God. Notice where you have negative thoughts or attitudes like Jonah, and confess these to the Lord. This list may help trigger your thoughts:

- ...when I know what God has asked of me, and I do not obey.
- ...when those around me recognize the power of God, but I am too callous to see.
- ...I endanger, or don't bring the best, to those around me because of my own failure to do what I know is right.
- ...I turn to God only when I'm desperate.
- ...I do what God says I have to do, but without enthusiasm or joy.
- ...I am angry when God shows mercy to people I deem unworthy.
- ...I fail to recognize my own faults.
- ...I believe I am entitled to good things and do not recognize them as God's gifts.

Conclude your time of prayer with thanksgiving. God is a God of mercy and compassion. He has promised to forgive our wrongs and failures when we admit them to Him. He has promised his Holy Spirit at work in us to help change us. Thank Him for these gifts.

10. What was your experience with these prayers of confession? Difficult? Easy?

11. How did you feel after this time of confessional prayer? Did you experience God's presence through your confession(s)?

The Pharisee and the Publican

Luke 18:9-14

Week of March 15 - 21

As far as we know, humans have always wanted answers to the big questions of life: Why am I here? What is the meaning of life? In this parable, Jesus gives us the answer to one of those big questions: What makes us right with God?

The answer Jesus gives in this parable likely shocked those who heard it for the first time. It still surprises us today.

Key Point: Our humble reliance on God, not our own actions, is what gives us a right relationship with God.

Key Verse: ... For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted. – Luke 18:14

Segment 1 – What makes us right with God?

Open your time of study with prayer:

Heavenly Father, I struggle with the big questions of life. Why am I here? What does God want from me? What makes someone a good person? Please help me to look to you – the author of life – to find the right answers. Amen.

Read Luke 18:9-14

In Jesus day, the Pharisee's were a religious group that dedicated their lives to rigorously following the laws of the Torah (Jewish scripture). In fact, they were so fanatical about this that they not only followed the original laws, but hundreds of additional or expanded versions of the laws just to make sure they were following all the rules!

In contrast, tax collectors (or publicans in some translations) were viewed as thieves and traitors. They worked for the Roman government to collect taxes from the people. Their salary was anything they collected above what was actually owed to Rome. Their methods of collecting these taxes were not always friendly.

If Jesus were to retell this parable today he may say something like, "A pastor and a drug lord went into a church to pray..."

With this modern concept in mind – Read Luke 18:9-14 again.

12. What does the word "righteous" mean, and how is that relevant to this parable?

13. How would you describe the difference between someone who is “righteous” and someone who is “self-righteous”?

14. What does justified mean? Why do you think Jesus says the tax collector went away justified, when the Pharisee did not?

Pray:

During Jesus day, it was common for Jews to pray standing up, with their arms outstretched, head turned upward and hands raised to God. It is likely the Pharisee’s prayed in this posture. The tax collector was also standing to pray, yet his posture is very different – head downcast, arms beating his chest which was a sign of lament and sadness. For both characters in this parable, their physical position and movement was a part of their prayer as well.

As you enter a time of prayer today, give some thought to your physical position as you pray and try something different. You may find that different postures/actions feel more appropriate for different types of prayer. Here are a few suggestions:

- Sit in a chair with your hands folded
- Stand with your head down
- Sit on the floor
- Walk as you pray
- Lay on the floor, arms out stretched, face down (prostrate)
- Kneel
- Kneel, and then lay forward as if bowing on the floor
- Stand with your arms out stretched and head looking up
- Pray as you workout (swim, run, elliptical machine, etc.)
- Lay on the floor, looking upward
- Sit, with your hands held open in front of you

Sometimes we can use movement as a part of our prayer. Try this:

- Stand up with your arms straight out to your side and your palms pointing to the ceiling and pray: "Creator God".
- Bring your hands together in front of you, forming a triangle with your thumbs and forefingers, and pray: "The three in one".
- Keeping the triangle shape, move your hands down to touch the ground and pray: "Be in this place".
- Stand up again and place the triangle over your chest praying, "Be in my heart", and over your forehead praying, "Be in my mind".
- Take the triangle above your head and pray: "I love you and adore you".
- Bring your hands down to the starting point and you can start to pray again.

15. How did it feel to move, or be positioned differently as you prayed? What effect did this have on your prayer?

Pray:

I love the use of exaggeration to make a point. However, I think exaggeration has its dangers too. When a problem is pointed out in dramatic, obvious fashion, it can be easy for us to ignore how it may be present in our own lives in less dramatic forms.

The Pharisee, full of pride, lists the ways he is better than other people, as though his actions will win God's favor. Most of us are not that brazen about pointing out how good we are, but we harbor similar thoughts and attitudes in our minds.

Enter a time of searching prayer now.

- Ask God to search your heart, and help you to see how he wishes to transform you.
- Look back at the words you used to describe the Pharisee (question #7) and ask – in what ways are these attitudes present in my own life?
- As you find these wrong attitudes, ask God to help you see how they are affecting your relationship with him and with other people.
- If you are ready, ask God to forgive you for these attitudes. Ask for his help in changing your heart.
- Thank God for showing you how to become more like him. Thank him for his love of you no matter what your faults.
- Conclude your prayer by simply being in God's presence. Just be, and feel the love God has for you.

19. Were you surprised by anything that was revealed as you prayed for God to search your heart?

Pray:

Spend some time in prayer now, focusing on **Luke 18:9-14**. Jesus used parables to illustrate profound points in simple and easy to understand stories. As you pray now, allow yourself to focus on the story, not intellectual questions. Allow Jesus to speak to you through this parable.

- Invite God to be with you. Ask Him to reveal what He would like for you to know in these verses.
- Read the verses completely through at least twice, out loud if possible.
- What word or phrase stands out to you?

- Hold this word or phrase in your mind. Think about the words. Listen for what God may be saying to you through this word or phrase of the Bible. Record your thoughts/images/feelings/impressions:

- Repeat this process: Read the verses completely through at least twice, out loud if possible.
- Does a different word or phrase stand out to you?

- Hold this word or phrase in your mind. Think about the words. Listen for what God may be saying to you through this word or phrase of the Bible. Record your thoughts/feelings/impressions:

23. How did you encounter God through this time of prayer? What did you learn?
What did God reveal to you about prayer?

Jesus in the Garden – The Prayer that is Always Answered

Mark 14:32-42

Week of March 22 - 28

In this prayer, Jesus gives us a model of how we should pray when we ask God for something (prayers of petition). It is a short prayer, but don't let its length deceive you. While the words are simple, the prayer offered by Jesus in this passage is far from simplistic. We will look at this prayer in detail and from different perspectives in each of this week's segments.

Key Point: Jesus' model of prayer: Being honest about our own desires, but ultimately submitting to obey and work toward God's will.

Key Verse: Abba, Father, for you all things are possible; remove this cup from me; yet, not what I want, but what you want.. – Mark 14:36

Segment 1 – If you are willing...

Open your time of study with prayer:

Father, Daddy – It really is my desire that I want the same things you want. Help me to talk with you in such a way that I come to understand both what I want, and what you want, and that those are closer and closer to being the same thing. Amen.

Read Mark 14:32-42, focus on verses 35- 36

This prayer is found in the gospels Matthew, Mark and Luke. Each states the first part of the prayer slightly differently:

"If it is possible..." (Matthew 26:39)

"Everything is possible for you..." (Mark 14:36)

"If you are willing..." (Luke 22:42)

24. "Abba," the term Jesus uses to address God at the start of this prayer is Aramaic for "Father." Yet a more intimate form, closer to "dad" or "daddy". Why might Jesus use this term as he prays in this situation?

25. Verse 35 states Jesus prayed that "if it was possible" the hour (the suffering ahead of him) might pass from him. If all things are possible for God, why would he pray this? What do you think he means by "possible" here? How do the other gospels, especially Luke, add insight here?

Pray:

Take some time now to focus just on the prayer Jesus offers (Mark 14:35-36). Jesus was an example we should model our lives after, and this prayer is no exception. Allow God to speak to you through this scripture passage.

- Invite God to be with you. Ask Him to reveal what He would like for you to know in these verses.
- Read the verses completely through, slowly, at least twice, out loud if possible.
- What word or phrase stands out to you?

- Hold this word or phrase in your mind. Think about the words. Listen for what God may be saying to you through this word or phrase of the Bible. Record your thoughts/images/feelings/impressions:

- Repeat this process: Read the verses completely through at least twice, out loud if possible.
- Does a different word or phrase stand out to you?

- Hold this word or phrase in your mind. Think about the words. Listen for what God may be saying to you through this word or phrase of the Bible. Record your thoughts/feelings/impressions:

26. What words or phrases stood out to you? Did any images come to mind for you? What did you learn as you let God speak to you through these verses?

Segment 2 – Remove this cup from me...

Open your time of study with prayer:

Holy Spirit – I thank you for knowing my heart, and making sense of my prayers when I do not have words to express what I feel. Yet, I also confess sometimes I am simply lazy and do not want to put in the effort to think about what I want or feel. Forgive me for this. Help me to be honest with myself and honest with you in my prayers and requests. Amen.

Read Mark 14:32-42. Focus on verse 35-36.

27. In what ways can praying, “Let your will be done” sometimes be a cop-out, lazy prayer rather than a prayer of truly submitting to God’s will? (Bonus points if you come up with a situation from a relationship in your own life that helps to illustrate this.)

28. What does Jesus do or say here that makes this NOT a cop-out?

29. What is the difference between actively seeking God’s will then praying “thy will be done” and saying “thy will be done because I don’t want to think about it”?

30. How might clearly lifting up what we want from a situation make praying “not what I want, but what you want” more honest? Do you think we can effectively surrender our own desires to God if we don’t know what they are?

Pray:

It has been my experience in prayer that sometimes when I say, "I don't know what God is telling me to do!" that my lack of knowledge is due to my own laziness rather than a lack of God's communication. I haven't put any effort into the situation - I haven't thought about it, I haven't prayed about it, in many ways I have ignored it and hoped it would just "fix itself". When I do this, I find it is nearly impossible for me to tell the voice of God from the voice of my own thoughts.

However, when I do put some thought into a situation, when I am honest with myself about what I want, I can then approach God and say, "God - here is what I think I would like to see happen in this situation. Is that inline with what you want?" Then I am often able to more clearly understand what in fact God's will is. It is not wrong to approach God with a preference! Sometimes God's will is the same as what I want. Sometimes it's not. Sometimes God's plan is far better than what I could have hoped to want! Sometimes God's plan means me giving up something that is hard to surrender. It isn't always clear of course. But most of the time I find it to be more helpful than my "ignore it and hope it goes away" approach!

So, with that in mind, enter a time of prayer now.

- Think about a situation in which you would like God to act.
- Clearly tell God what you would like to see happen in that situation. Be clear, be honest, be detailed, don't give any kind of fuzzy, "if it's your will" kind of stuff. This is your time to tell God what you would like to see! Perhaps more importantly, this is a time for you to clarify in your mind, what you are thinking and feeling about the situation. Don't worry if this take's awhile!
- Are you sure you've clearly told God what you want? Don't be shy.
- Next - now that God has listened patiently to you, it's your turn to listen to him. Ask: God, is that in line with what you want? What do you, LORD, want out of this situation?
- Then listen. God doesn't always give you an answer, but many times he does. Be patient, be open, and really listen.
- If you feel like you have heard an answer, double check it in your prayer: "God, I feel like you're saying _____ is what you want. Am I hearing you right?" Feel free to ask God questions too.
- Now it is appropriate to pray, "not what I want, but what you want", if you are willing to surrender what you want to what God wants.
- Conclude by giving thanks to God for any insights you have gained. Ask him for help in bringing your desires in agreement with his.

31. What did you learn as you tried this? Did the situation become more clear? Were you better able to hear God's will?

Pray:

Some people refer to the prayer Jesus makes here as “the prayer that is always answered.” When they say that, they are referring to the idea that God will always answer the prayer that His will be done. While this is true, I think it’s also misleading. God will find a way to accomplish his will, no matter what we do, or fail to do. However, God has also clearly given human beings some responsibility, and privilege, to be part of his plans. Therefore, “not what I want, but what you want” is answered more easily when humans willingly surrender to God’s plans.

The reality is that Jesus made a choice. He looked at a difficult situation, and over the course of this prayer he choose to follow God’s will over his own will. Moment by moment, day by day, we are all called to make the same choice. Will we follow God’s will or our own will?

Take time now to write out your own short prayer stating your desire to follow God’s will - Your own prayer of surrender. Make it short enough that you can easily remember it, and use it to help you in your daily choices.

Write your Prayer here:

Spend some time praying this prayer. Ask God to help you remember this prayer, and affirm it again in the challenges of your daily life.

35. Are you willing to share your prayer with the group?

36. What did you find meaningful to you as you wrote your own words to express your desire to surrender to God?