



river west church

The Single Most Important Thing in Prayer

Matthew 6:9

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Prayer = A Living Relationship with God

When you have a relationship with someone, you need to talk to them or it isn't a real relationship. You have to talk and you have to listen too. This is true in our relationships with people and it's true in our relationship with God as well. Do you talk to God? Do you listen?

Jesus taught us that prayer is grounded in relationship. That's why He taught us to pray to our "Father in heaven." This is a father, child relationship. He also taught us to pray in secret. The importance of praying in secret is that it is personal. It's you and God, privately, in relationship. This is why we are focusing on four key words to guide us in our thinking about prayer. Each one is relationship word. Here are the four words: Humble, Grateful, Trusting and Attentive. We come as a child to God our Heavenly Father. As children, we acknowledge our need for His care, provision, protection and wisdom. We come with humble hearts and acknowledge our complete dependence on Him. But we also come with grateful hearts. Gratitude is an attitude of the heart that best recognizes the love and grace of God in Christ. We make no demands on God. We are not demanders of rights; we are receivers of God's grace; gifts freely given by a loving father through Christ. This is the Gospel. When we "practice" coming to God in humble dependence and in heartfelt gratitude, we are delving deep into our Gospel centered relationship with God through Christ. We do this in prayer. This sets the stage for all true Christian prayer and relationship with God. But there is more...

The Single Most Important Thing in Prayer

The single most important thing in prayer is who you are talking to. Pause and think about that! It doesn't do any good to ask for help from someone who has no power or will to help you. You wouldn't ask for a loan from someone who is broke. If you did, it wouldn't help, no matter how eloquent the request or how inspired or sincere you felt when you asked. The fact is, our view of God is the most important thing we bring to prayer. This is why Jesus taught His disciples not to pray like the gentiles. They thought they would be heard for their many words. This reflected their view of God as they thought of Him as remote and reluctant. Their prayers fit into the pattern of their thoughts about God.

When you pray, Jesus taught us to say, "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name." So Jesus taught us to start with God; to start with our view of God. This first phrase in The Lord's Prayer is packed with profound meaning about who God really is. And this leads us to our third key word for our "practice" of prayer: TRUST. Every true and meaningful relationship is built on trust. All true prayer must be rich in trust. Jesus taught us that we must pray in faith (faith=trust) and if we do, amazing things will happen (Matthew 21:22). But how will we build trust? The answer is: our trust in God grows deeper as we grow deeper in our view of who God truly is; as we see more clearly who it is that we are praying to.

The Practical Application

To grow in prayer and to grow in relationship with God, you must spend some time thinking about who God really is. Not just any random thoughts about God will do. It's no good to just make up ideas about God, or think in contemporary generic spirituality terms about who God is. It's no good to just throw up your hands in despair and say, "Who really knows anything for sure about God?" That will certainly not lead you to humble, grateful, trusting, attentive prayer!

This is why there is always a direct connection between God's Word and effective prayer. God has revealed who He truly is in His Word – His Word in the Bible and His Word in human flesh, Jesus. So we need to always be on an active search to see God more clearly in His Word. When we do, then we make it our "practice" to bring something that we have seen of God in His Word with us into our praying. This is the way to build trust into our prayers. Try it this week. Spend a bit of time in a passage of scripture that

reveals the truth of who God is. Then take something you have seen about God and begin by talking to God about THAT FIRST! This often takes the form of adoration or worship. This builds your relationship with God and builds your trust as you pray. Here are some passages you can “practice” with this week to get you started:

Isaiah 40:9-31; Exodus 34:6-9; Luke 15:11-31; Revelation 4:1-14; Isaiah 42:1-10