

DEVOTIONAL GUIDE

WEEK # 4

IGNITE!

Re-Discovering the
Christian

Passionate
Life

Once Jesus was in a certain place praying. As he finished, one of his disciples came to him and said, "Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples."

Luke 11:1 (NIV)

Prayer is such an incredible gift from God. A passage-way into the throne room of the creator and sustainer of the universe. In His goodness we don't have to crouch like thieves behind a heating grate, but we can enter His presence with the assurance of a son or daughter of Him. Just as God's love for us orchestrated Jesus' death on the cross, it also marks the way for us to come and speak to our omnipotent Father.

It may be hard to imagine why the disciples would ask Jesus how to pray. It's not as if people didn't pray and Jesus was the first to do it. The Bible is filled with prayers from the Old Testament forward of prayers from David, Solomon, the prophets, and others, but there was a uniqueness to Jesus' prayers. Of course other rabbis taught their disciples how to pray as well, but the disciples pursued the issue with Jesus. This question in Luke led to his recording of the prayer we commonly call the Lord's Prayer. It was of course a model which points out a couple of things. First, there is a desire within us to communicate with God. That's why the disciples asked for the instruction in the first place. Second, God wants to hear from us. He desires this, not because He needs our help and insight, but because communication is essential for a relationship to flourish.

Communication is essential for the life of any relationship. When people stop talking a relationship starts dying. It is part of the social nature of who we are as human beings. It is one of the foundations to discovering who we are and demonstrates trust in the level of confidence we are able to share, based upon the level of confidence we have in the other person.

How do you communicate with God? How often? What are some of the things that distract from that communication? Why do they do that?

"Woe to me!" I cried. "I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty."

Then one of the seraphs flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar. With it he touched my mouth and said, "See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for."

Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?"

And I said, "Here am I. Send me!"

Isaiah 6:5-8 (NIV)

This is one of the most awe-inspiring encounters in scripture in my opinion. In the midst of Isaiah's worship in the temple, he is suddenly brought into the throne room of God. It is an encounter that transforms his life. Really meeting God will do that. Not only does he see himself for who he is deep inside, a sinful man, he also begins to view the world differently; compared to God, everyone is sinful. But God responds to Isaiah's helplessness as He brings purity to his life. But God isn't finished with the lesson this encounter is to bring to Isaiah, for now a question is heard and Isaiah can't help but respond. "Who will go?" "Here am I. Send me!"

This may be one of the core issues with why we hesitate to pray. When you are in the presence of God and experience Him and recognize His blessings, your soul cries out to respond. And that scares us. It is easier to stand at a distance than to sense the pull of God in our lives. But God inexorably calls us close, then commissions us outward.

How would you respond to an experience like this? Have you had one? Why or why not?

Has God called you to do something? Have you responded with passion to fulfill the call? Why or why not?

I always thank my God as I remember you in my prayers, because I hear about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints. I pray that you may be active in sharing your faith, so that you will have a full understanding of every good thing we have in Christ.
Philemon 4-6 (NIV)

One of the great things about talking to someone is the change it can bring to you. Teachers recognize this as one of the benefits of this role. When you are called upon to communicate something it requires a deeper understanding of the subject than those you will be speaking with. You prepare yourself for the questions you recognize may come up, but you also field questions and thoughts you would never think of on your own.

As Paul writes to Philemon he points out one of the great blessings in actively sharing our faith. We will develop a full understanding of our faith through our active communication of it. We will deal with the questions we may have as well as encounter new questions we may never have thought of before, yet in all of that, God will be interacting with us as well to lead and guide us through every conversation we are able to have. That should be our desire.

Last night our daughter Brittany called us to tell us about some good news she had gotten about the opportunity to sing a solo in a special program at her university. It was good, exciting news and she couldn't wait to tell it to people who cared about and loved her. That is how all of us respond to good news. Whether it's the news that you are going to have a baby, that you're going to get married, that the tests came back negative, our nature desires to share the news with someone who cares and can share our emotions.

When was the last time you shared the Good News with someone? Do you understand it? Do you understand its value to yourself and for others? What holds you back from sharing it? Why not trust God to truly open your mind to a deeper understanding by doing it?

But God's angry displeasure erupts as acts of human mistrust and wrongdoing and lying accumulate, as people try to put a shroud over truth. But the basic reality of God is plain enough. Open your eyes and there it is! By taking a long and thoughtful look at what God has created, people have always been able to see what their eyes as such can't see: eternal power, for instance, and the mystery of his divine being. So nobody has a good excuse. What happened was this: People knew God perfectly well, but when they didn't treat him like God, refusing to worship him, they trivialized themselves into silliness and confusion so that there was neither sense nor direction left in their lives. They pretended to know it all, but were illiterate regarding life. They traded the glory of God who holds the whole world in his hands for cheap figurines you can buy at any roadside stand.

Romans 1:18-23 (MSG)

What does it take to get your attention? God communicates daily with us through the expanse and intricacy of His creation. Maybe if we were blessed with the ability of the fictional Dr. Doolittle to communicate with the animals we would recognize the testimony of creation better. While scientists and activists are scurrying around the world warning us about the dangers we face from poor ecological choices, many are deaf to the testimony of God's creation. We choose to reject God and exchange His love and truth for the lies of mankind and the deceiver.

But God will get your attention, from a still small voice to a painful trial, God will capture us in some way. The question is, on what terms do we want it to be? Will we bow to God in humble adoration and recognition of the salvation He has provided? Or will we wait until the judgment when all will bow, but not all will be saved?

How has God been speaking to you in the world around you this week? Today? Make a list of five new things you have learned about God today.

These things happened as a warning to us, so that we would not crave evil things as they did, or worship idols as some of them did. As the Scriptures say, "The people celebrated with feasting and drinking, and they indulged in pagan revelry." And we must not engage in sexual immorality as some of them did, causing 23,000 of them to die in one day.

Nor should we put Christ to the test, as some of them did and then died from snakebites. And don't grumble as some of them did, and then were destroyed by the angel of death.

1 Corinthians 10:6-10 (NLT)

It is interesting the ability that being negative can have on people. If you spend very much time with someone who has found something to complain about, you'll soon find yourself discovering things that you can gripe about as well. There is a contagious quality to complaining, a viral affect to negativity that God warns us of on the same level as sexual immorality and idol worship. In fact, Paul reminds us that God had people killed in the Old Testament because they complained.

Complaining opens the door to the reality of our trust in God. Do we really trust Him with our lives? When things don't go the way we think they should or the way that accomplishes the things we think should be done, do we trust that God can work it out? Even when someone doesn't do things your way, can God work through that? The question should be rhetorical, but let me make sure you understand.... Yes. God can and will and does work through the circumstances, situations, and people who we don't like. So quiet down and trust God and you may discover that God can do even more things His way, than yours.

What frustrates you about your life right now? How is or how can God work through that now? What lessons can you learn? Do you really have the biggest picture in mind?

Don't use foul or abusive language. Let everything you say be good and helpful, so that your words will be an encouragement to those who hear them.

Ephesians 4:29 (NLT)

It's an old adage that many of us grew up with—"If you can't say anything good, then don't say anything at all." It may be old advice, but it is good advice.

We live in a world that is fueled by sarcasm, cutting remarks, and a famine on encouragement. As Christians we are called to encourage one another, especially as the day of Jesus' return draws near (Hebrews 10:25, 26).

Paul calls upon the Ephesian church to be encouragers to people, not just other believers, but to everyone we speak to in our lives. Every word is an opportunity to communicate the love of Jesus in one form or another. To give people courage to face the day ahead of them. To incite a positive belief in what God can and will do for them. To be a cultural irritant to the world around us by our belief in God and His ability to work through, in, and for everyone around us, especially those who have placed their faith and lives in His hands.

It's hard and demands a controlling of the tongue that can be exhausting and impossible. But, as James says, "If anyone considers himself religious and yet does not keep a tight rein on his tongue, he deceives himself and his religion is worthless." (James 1:26 NIV).

One of the true tests of our faith is how we speak to other people. Are we communicating the love and help of God or the mindless negativity of the world around us? The choice is ours.

Did you miss the opportunity to encourage someone today? Examine why you missed it and how you could be prepared to encourage tomorrow. Pray that God will make you sensitive to those chances every day.

Make this your common practice: Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you can live together whole and healed. The prayer of a person living right with God is something powerful to be reckoned with.

James 5:16,17 (MSG)

Confess our sins? Now that is just asking for trouble. And in some cases that would be true. But the command here is pretty straightforward. I have heard this explained and twisted so that we become relieved of the responsibility to obey this command and in doing so we miss the freedom that God has planned for us.

Part of the problem is the whole image thing. The fear that if people really knew who we were down deep that they wouldn't be able to care for us the way they do. The dread that if our friends or family ever found out about what goes on in our lives that they don't know about they would have nothing to do with us limits our ability to have real heartfelt fellowship within the church. It's not that people don't know we're sinners, it's the fear that they may find out our sin that separates the church from being the community God envisions in scripture.

Can we really trust people? What if they tell someone else? What if everyone finds out the person I really am? Imagine living without pretending to be something you aren't. Can you imagine the freedom to own up to who you are and be able to live from there? No shame, no fear, no regrets, forgiven and understood. That is what God offers and so should the church.

What thing do you fear the most that people will discover about you?

How would your life change if you didn't have to hide parts of your life? How would your life change?

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