

INTRO

- If you could ask Jesus to teach you one thing, what would it be? Why?
- Tell of an experience when a prayer was answered.

Now Jesus was praying in a certain place, and when he finished, one of his disciples said to him, “Lord, teach us to pray....” —Luke 11:1

Qu: Curiously, what do you think it was about Jesus’ praying that the disciples were impacted the most by?

READ

Matt 6:5-7

REFLECT

Prayer is relatively common in our world across cultures, religions and even amongst the non-religious.

Qu: why do you think prayer seems to be part of our human condition?

But for many, prayer is difficult and hard. Typically, barriers to prayer can be grouped around how we view prayer, ourselves, and God.

Qu: think through these 3 barriers to prayer and give examples of how they can hinder our praying.

THE ESSENCE OF PRAYER

There are no shortages of definitions of prayer. This is to be expected since prayer is an exhaustive topic. However, it is helpful to describe prayer as **personal conversation with God in response to God**.

Qu: what does it mean to say prayer is personal? communication? in response to God?

The essence of prayer is in its *sincerity* (=free from pretence; to be genuine).

SINCERE PRAYER

Read Matt 6:5-7 again. Jesus calls out hypocrisy and empty phrases as real barriers to sincere prayer.

Qu: what does it mean to pray hypocritically and empty phrases? How can we avoid this?

The Psalms have long been the prayerbook of God’s people enabling them to relate honestly to God. They play an important role in our journey of prayer by equipping us in conversation with God. They offer sincere examples of prayer both in their **lament** (expressing pain & anger about what’s happening), and **praise** (expressing joy & gratitude for who God is and what he’s done). Speaking on prayer, CS Lewis noted, “*We must lay before him what is in us; not what ought to be in us.*”

Qu: what do you think CS Lewis means in light of Jesus’ warning in Matt 6:5-7?

PRAYING THE PSALMS

So, how do we make the psalms our own prayers since they were written in a time, place, and culture far removed from ours?

When reading a psalm, ask the following ABC questions (ps3 is provided as an example on the next page):

- **Acknowledge:** what situation or emotional response is being acknowledged?
- **Believe:** what about God (character, actions, purposes) is believed?
- **Confess:** in light of the above, what is the desire/prayer?
- Lastly, **what words or verses resonate with you and draw you to respond in prayer?**

Remember, keep prayer simple and sincere. Start where you are at.

RESPOND & PRAY

- What most challenged & encouraged you?
- Have a time of prayer in light of the above.

APPLICATION EXERCISE

Psalm 3: Using this psalm to shape your own prayer

Acknowledge: what situation or emotional response is being acknowledged? (Read v1-2)

- Desperation, overwhelmed, outnumbered
- Taunted, provoked

Believe: what about God is believed? (Read 3-5)

- God is my shield, protector, glory, lifter of my head
- God answered me in the past; he'll do it again
- God sustains me

Confess: in light of the above, what is the desire/prayer? (Read 6-8)

- I won't fear despite the odds
- God, do something—save me, help me!
- You're the one I look to for my salvation and help.

Now, what words or verses resonate with you and draw you to respond in prayer?

Begin praying!

Further Resources:

Prayer: Finding the Hearts True Home by Richard Foster

Red Moon Rising: How 24-7 Prayer is Awakening a Generation by Pete Grieg

A Praying Life: Connecting with God in a Distracting World by Paul Miller

Prayer: Experiencing Awe and Intimacy with God by Tim Keller

Answering God: The Psalms as Tools for Prayer by Eugene Peterson

Psalm 3 (ESV)

A Psalm of David, when he fled from Absalom his son.

1
O Lord, how many are my foes!
Many are rising against me;

2
many are saying of my soul,
“There is no salvation for him in God.” *Selah*

3
But you, O Lord, are a shield about me,
my glory, and the lifter of my head.

4
I cried aloud to the Lord,
and he answered me from his holy hill. *Selah*

5
I lay down and slept;
I woke again, for the Lord sustained me.

6
I will not be afraid of many thousands of people
who have set themselves against me all
around.

7
Arise, O Lord!
Save me, O my God!
For you strike all my enemies on the cheek;
you break the teeth of the wicked.

8
Salvation belongs to the Lord;
your blessing be on your people! *Selah*