

Margaret Charlton grew up in a wealthy family in England. She enjoyed finer things and anticipated eventually marrying a rich man to enjoy life with. But tragedy struck her family. Her mother was twice widowed. So Margaret lost her father and the father figure in her life.

Her mother, however, had a great hope in Christ. She heard about a preacher in a village a 13 miles down the road. In those days, 13 miles was a very long day's journey there and back even with a horse and carriage. So Margaret's mother decided they would move to Kidderminster to sit under the teaching of this young pastor named Richard Baxter.

Margaret's mother delighted in Baxter's teaching. But Margaret was unimpressed. She had little liking for him and even less for the people of the town. Kidderminster was a poor town. She disliked poverty and the strictness of the people. She was far more interested in having fun and going to parties and as Baxter himself wrote "glittering herself in costly apparel."

But the Holy Spirit was at work in her life. A series of sermons Baxter preached on the doctrine of conversion was "received on her heart like a seal onto wax." Her spiritual transformation was swift and evident. But Pastor Baxter not only delighted in Margaret's new faith. He delighted in Margaret herself. Slowly but surely, they were drawn toward one another until they married in September of 1662. He was 47. She was 26.

Their marriage came during a very difficult time for pastors not part of the Church of England. A new king with loyalty to Rome came to power. He and parliament instituted the Act of Uniformity 2 weeks before Richard and Margaret's wedding. It required all pastors to completely conform to the rites of the Church of England or face dismissal. 2000 pastors refused. So they were all expelled from their churches. Richard Baxter was one of them.

This forced Richard and Margaret to move. It was now illegal for him to preach or lead worship anywhere in England. Margaret stayed with him. Upon her mother's death, she inherited considerable wealth. She rented rooms where Baxter could preach out of sight of the authorities. But these meetings were frequently discovered and they would have to move again.

Sometimes he would be imprisoned. Baxter recalls how during his first imprisonment in 1669, she cheerfully went with him into prison. She brought her best bed and did much to remove the inconveniences of prison in their cell.

Both suffered physically. He was often ill and in pain. She suffered from obsessive irrational fears, nightmares and dread. Some said it was caused by nearly dying 4 times before she even met Baxter. She also was traumatized during the Civil War when her mother's castle was besieged, taken and ransacked. She saw men killed and lay before her. She also had regular bouts of migraine and congestion in the lungs. They were not able to have children and she died at the age of 45. Baxter lived another 10 years to die at the age of 76.

Yet, she was a light in Baxter's life during the 19 years they had together. And she prayed. One of the first signs of Christ's radical change in her life showed up in her prayer life. She chose to pray in a damaged portion of her mother's house that was unused. She thought she could not be heard. But her mother and friends heard her prayers. According to Baxter, they said, "They never heard so fervent prayers from any person."¹

Margaret prayed often because of their trials, her fears and health problems. Yet the example of her prayer life impacted her mother, friends and Richard. I wonder if you've been affected by the example of someone else's prayer life. Does anyone come to mind that has a prayer life you might like to imitate? What kind of a prayer life example are we setting for those who live with us or we have opportunity to influence at this time in our lives?

We have been talking about prayer through the month of September. We started by looking at Psalm 69, a prayer for the overwhelmed. Then we talked about the necessity of prayer and the greatest prayer request that we can offer on behalf of others – "that they may know God better." Last week we examined a definition for prayer – "conversing with and encountering God." So we've talked a lot about prayer this month.

But how do we actually do it? How do we learn to pray? One way is by following examples or patterns practiced by others. But whose example can we follow especially if we can't think of anyone who practices a growing prayer life? Today we are going to look at some patterns for prayer practiced by those who have gone before us. I hope God will use something from today's message that will help and aid your prayer life so you can go deeper and know Him more.

Example #1 is of course Jesus Himself. We have already talked about the importance of prayer in Jesus' life. We read at least four times in the Gospels that Jesus got up early to pray. Mark 1:35 - "Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up and went to a desolate place where he prayed." Jesus prayed for healing in others and cast

¹ Michael A. G. Haykin, 8 women of faith; Crossway, Wheaton, Ill., 2016, 37-52.

out demons through prayer. He taught the disciples “how to pray” with the Lord’s Prayer. He prayed through the most intense suffering of his life in the Garden of Gethsemane and on the cross.

He also taught his disciples to follow His example and learn from him. So Matthew 11:29. “Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart and you will find rest for your souls.” Or Luke 9:23 – If anyone would come after me, let him or her deny themselves, take up their cross and follow me.” So you can learn to pray by spending time in the Gospels observing Jesus’ life – where he prayed – when he prayed and what he prayed. If we follow Jesus’ example and teaching in prayer, we will learn how to pray. He is the perfect example.

We might say, “Why would we need any other example? Is there Biblical foundation for us to imitate or follow others in learning the Christian life? After all, every Christian is a sinner, imperfect and can err in their ways.” Those are good questions. But I believe we can find solid Biblical foundation for imitating others who walk with Christ. One example is found in Philippians 4:2-9 if you want to find that in your Bibles or on your devices or in the pew Bible – page 834.

In this letter, the apostle Paul strongly encourages the believers at Philippi to keep the faith. He shows great concern that they grow in their Christian faith and grow as a community of Christian faith. He is confident God will do his work. He exhorts them to work out their salvation. He commands them to have an attitude of humility towards one another. He warns them about those who put confidence in the flesh and pursue a salvation by works. But then he concludes with practical commands on how to live out their Christian faith and grow in Christ. This brings us to Philippians 4:2-9.

Philippians 4:2-9 (ESV)

I entreat Euodia and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord. [3](#) Yes, I ask you also, true companion, help these women, who have labored side by side with me in the gospel together with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life.

[4](#) Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. [5](#) Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; [6](#) do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. [7](#) And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

[8](#) Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. [9](#) What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.

What's required to grow in the Christian faith? Paul writes we need to agree with one another and reconcile. There were 2 fairly prominent women in the church who had a disagreement. It had grown to the point everyone knew about it. So Paul writes about it. These letters were read out loud to a gathering of the church. So can you imagine Euodia and Syntyche sitting there listening to this the first time its read? Suddenly, every eye turns to them about their need to agree with another and stop the fighting.

Then he commands them to rejoice in the Lord always. In case they missed that, he writes "again I will say, rejoice." There might not be much to rejoice about in the circumstances of life. But there is always something to rejoice about with respect to Christ. Growing Christians also must be reasonable or gentle people. Verse 5 – "Let your reasonableness be known to everyone for the Lord is at hand." That's interesting. If you knew the Lord was coming back next week, would being a reasonable or gentle person be at the top of your priorities? Yet, Paul emphasizes this especially in dealing with outsiders so that they might be drawn to Christ before it's too late.

Then verses 6-7 are some of my most favorite in the Bible. They talk about dealing with anxiety through prayer. Paul instructs the Philippians to spend energy they normally expend on anxiety and direct it towards God in prayer. When we take our worries us to the Lord in prayer, we can gain the peace of God Himself. Notice that in verse 7 – And the peace of God which transcends all understanding will guard your heart and minds in Christ Jesus. So this is not personal peace – it's the peace that God Himself enjoys. His peace will stand guard like a night watchmen over our hearts and minds which is where anxiety happens.

In verse 8, he directs the Christian's thought life to that which is glorifying to God. We can be so lazy with our thought life. We can let whatever arises just travel into our mind and lodge there – whether they be anxious thoughts; self-condemning thoughts; sinful or hateful thoughts; lustful thoughts. We conclude that "these are just my thoughts and I can't really control them." But we can discipline our minds. We can present ourselves to the Lord and be transformed by the renewing of our minds. So we focus our thoughts on the list in verse 8.

But verse 9 gets us to this question of following human examples. "What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me – practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you." Now isn't that arrogant on Paul's part. "Well if you want to know how to live the Christian life, just look at my life." If someone said that today, we would ask "who do you think you are?"

But Paul is not bragging. He mentions the need to imitate him several times in his letters because he laid out a pattern for others to follow in living. But it's not his pattern. A key verse in understanding Paul's motivation is 1 Corinthians 11:1 - Be imitators of me as I am of Christ. So Paul didn't come up with some brand new way of living that he wanted everyone to imitate along with buying his book on the subject. He imitated Christ's life to the best of his ability. It was this pattern that Paul calls the Philippians and others to follow.

So this gives us a principle for learning to pray – Example 2 – **Paul We learn to pray by following the example and teaching of Jesus and others who imitate Him.** We spent some time two weeks ago looking at Paul's prayer in Ephesians 1. Last week, we looked at Paul's teaching about prayer and how God has made a way for us to be close to Him in Romans 8. So if you read Paul's letters, you can learn more about how he prayed and what he prayed.

But with this principle of imitating others who imitate Christ, we can find others who have shared their patterns of prayer. The three we're going to look at today are fellow humans who had their flaws. Their writings are not inspired Scripture. But they did pray. They do show us patterns that they followed helping them to remain connected to God and know Him better.

The first is a man now known as **Augustine**. He lived from 354-430. He is considered the Greatest Theologian of the first 1000 years of Christianity. God saved him out of an empty life that tried to find meaning in pleasure. As his writing and teaching ministry grew, people sought out his counsel. A Roman widow named Anicia Proba wanted to learn how to pray. She survived the sacking of Rome in 410. She fled with her granddaughter Demetrias to Africa where Augustine lived. She writes asking how she should pray.

First principle – Admit that your heart's loves are out of order. Augustine said that to live the Christian life does not primarily require a reordering of our *lives* but a reordering of our *loves*. God is supposed to be supreme. Unless we recognize this heart disorder and realize how much it distorts us, our prayers will be part of the problem rather than the solution. So first, admit this when we come to God in prayer.

Second – Pray for happiness in Christ. Psalm 27:4 states "One thing I have desired of the Lord, one thing I seek; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord to behold the beauty of the Lord." We can allow our problems or needs to dominate our prayer lives. But we need to continually recall that we always have reason to rejoice in Christ. Jesus never

promised us an easy life. But He promised His presence with us through life. It seems Augustine believed that this step in prayer would help Anicia move away from constantly asking to return to the life she once had.

Third – Follow the outline of the Lord’s Prayer. So we have started to pray in full awareness of the disorderedness of our hearts then we remember where true joys are found in Christ, you can be guided in the specifics of how to pray by studying the Lord’s Prayer. **Fourth – In dark times, admit you don’t know what to pray.** When trials come, should we pray that God brings relief or for strength to endure them? Jesus prayed in Gethsemane “Let this cup pass from me, yet not my will but yours be done. Augustine believed Anicia’s sufferings were ultimately a benefit. *They defended her from the illusions of self-sufficiency and blindness that harden the heart, and they opened the way for the rich, passionate prayer life that could bring peace in any circumstance.* He calls her to embrace her situation and learn to pray.

Then we come to **Martin Luther** who lived from 1483-1546. God used him as a catalyst to launch the Reformation. It was Luther who nailed his 95 theses to Wittenberg church door on October 31, 1517. It was Luther who was called before church officials for writing “salvation was by faith and grace alone. Luther was excommunicated by the church of Rome. Through Luther’s translation of the Bible into German, the common people could read the word of God in their own tongue. The reformation spread across Europe like wildfire.

Yet Luther had a vibrant prayer life. One of his friends wrote “There is not a day on which he does not devote at least three hours, the very ones most suitable for work, to prayer. Once I was fortunate to overhear his prayer. What faith in his words! He speaks with the great reverence of one who speaks to his God, and with the trust and hope of one who speaks with his father and friend.”

One day, Luther’s barber asked him for a simple way to pray. Luther’s response is preserved in the letter written to the barber by that title. Here’s Luther’s pattern for prayer. **1 . Cultivate prayer as a habit through regular discipline.** Pray twice daily. Make it the first business of the morning and the last at night. I had been praying only in the mornings. But once I began this practice of prayer before going to bed, I was relieved of carrying all my thoughts and concerns of the day into my sleep. Pray whether you feel like it or not.

2 – Focus thoughts and warm your affections for prayer by reciting some part of Scripture. Prayer lifts your heart to God. So read or recite and then pray some part of Scripture. By this practice, your heart will be stirred and guided, rightly warmed and inclined toward prayer.

3 – Meditate on Biblical commands. Luther prayed about the commands. He would pray and acknowledge the command as coming from God. He would thank and praise God for the wisdom and glory of this command. Then he would confess where he needed to repent of ignoring this command. Last, he would pray that God would enable him to live out this command.

Tim Keller writes – “Luther teaches us how to generate a small but rich spectrum of insights that can immediately be lifted to God as prayer. Those who have practiced this particular discipline of meditation know that as it proceeds, it creates its own energy. It forces you off the abstract to consider what biblical truth should actually do to you and in you – how it should lead you to praise God, to repent and change your heart, and also what it should lead you to do in the world. Luther thinks in the presence of God. This is meditation.

4 – Pray through each petition of the Lord’s Prayer, paraphrasing and personalizing each one using your own needs and concerns. This keeps us from distracting thoughts. I have tried to incorporate praying and personalizing the Lord’s Prayer during some of my lunch hours. **5 – Pray from the heart.** As a reformer, he completely opposed external religion with internal emptiness. He says “pay attention to the preaching of the Holy Spirit.” Remember what he says and note it well.

Last we come to **John Calvin** who was another Reformer following Luther. He lived from 1509 to 1564. He’s famous for his massive theological work called “The institutes of the Christian Religion.” Calvin wrote extensively on prayer in this work. He calls his pattern “Rules for prayer.

Rule 1 – Consider carefully that you talk with the God of the Universe. Yes, we talked last week about the privilege of calling God – Abba, Father. Yet we still talk with Almighty God. It’s like meeting a famous person that you have greatly respected or read about. You are not afraid of being hurt or punished. Rather, you are genuinely afraid of doing something stupid or saying something that is inappropriate to the person and the occasion. Your joyful admiration has a fearful aspect to it. You are in awe, and therefore you don’t want to mess up. The very fact that we have access to God’s attention and presence should concentrate our thoughts and elevate the heart.

Rule 2 – Acknowledge needs, sins and weaknesses. This creates a strong sense of our dependence upon God and a readiness to recognize and repent our own faults in particular. We must come like a beggar. This seems harsh to our modern ears but Calvin simply tells us to drop the fakeness.

Rule 3 – Trust the will of God. We must pray to trust him even when things do not go as we wish them to. One of the purposes of prayer is to bring our hearts to trust in his wisdom, not in our own. It is to leave all our needs and desires in his hands in a way that is possible only through prayer.

Rule 4 – Pray with confidence and hope. This apparently contradicts rule 3. However we need to pray with a certain hope that our prayers will be answered. God often waits to give a blessing until you have prayed for it. Why? If we receive good things that we do not ask for, our hearts usually interpret this as fruit of our own wisdom and diligence. Gifts from God that are not acknowledged as such are deadly to the soul, because they thicken the illusion of self-sufficiency that leads to overconfidence and sets us up for failure.

Rule 5 – The Rule against Rules – Calvin urges us NOT to conclude that following any set of rules could make our prayers worthy to be heard. Nothing we formulate or do can qualify us for access to God. Only grace can do that. When you flick a light switch, the bulbs illuminate. But the light switch does not provide the power for the bulbs. That comes from the electricity. The switch has no power in itself, but rather it connects the bulbs to the power. In the same way, our prayers have no virtue to obtain access to the Father. Christ has done that. Prayers that are in accord with a gracious God, however, can connect us to him.

Now we have some patterns that we can begin to work with. Which ones might fit with who you are and how God created you? It might seem that this is so far away from where you're from right now. But we're not in a contest to see if we can out do Martin Luther in prayer. The whole purpose of this series is to draw closer to the one we need to know most – God Himself. What might He have spoken to you about during our time together today? What obstacle needs to be dealt with that hinders your prayer life? Will you come to Him now and ask for His help to follow the pattern of prayer of our Lord and those who followed Him?