The Good Life: What the Gospel Does To Our Everyday
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Prayer
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Colossians 3. 16-17

16 *Let the message about Christ, in all its richness, fill your lives. Teach and counsel each other with all the wisdom he gives. Sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs to God with thankful hearts.* ***17*** *And whatever you do or say, do it as a representative of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through him to God the Father.*

Whatever you do or say

- The gospel is designed to and indented to transform everyday life.
- We aim to desegregate spiritual and non-spiritual or regular life.
- *"Let the message of Christ, in all it's richness, fill your lives."*
- All of life can be worship. All of life can be interaction with God.
- This is what Jesus means when he says in John 10.10, *"life and life abundant."*

What does the Gospel do to prayer?

- Is all prayer Gospel based?
- Lots of people pray unreligious and religious alike.
- How many pray with a clear vision of the Gospel and first hand experience of God's true character?
- We're after the kind of prayer that's rooted in an involved, dynamic, loving God as evidenced through the person of Jesus.

An aid for Christian prayer – Lord, Teach Us to Pray (series)

1 Thessalonians 5. 17

Let's begin with a famous words on prayer from the Bible.

- "As a man prays so he is." – AW Tozer
- Prayer is the cultivation of relationship with a Person named God. Prayer is not a project to be endured or an end unto itself. It is communication, time, energy and intention that betters our knowledge of and experience of God.
- Prayer is the conversation or vehicle we use get to know God, and inevitably become more like him. As we all know the more time we spend around someone the more like them we become.
- We can measure the richness of life by the fullness of our relationship with God. We experience this fullness by engaging in prayer.
- This is why Paul encourages the Thessalonians to continually pray. *"Spend as much energy and time as you can on getting to know and experiencing the goodness of the One who made you."*
- Passages like 1 Thessalonians 5. 17 have often been misunderstood and therefore misapplied.
- When Paul says "pray without ceasing" is it because we need to build up some kind of credit with God, or twist his arm, or show him enough faith? This is why it's so important to frame and explore prayer in light of the Gospel and God's true nature.
- This isn't to say prayer shouldn't become routine or systematic. Routine is healthy.

- Prayer is not a project, prayer is about persons. The Person of God and the person of you, and the relationship you're cultivating one with the other.

Four approaches or manners of prayer rooted in the Gospel and God's true nature.

(and four responses that explore each approach or manner)

Prayer as Divine-awareness (or looking and listening)

- Sometimes it's easy to be aware of God, but even when it's easy we can miss him.
- *"All creation is a treasure hunt in which God has left clues – essentially pictures of himself. Each picture is intentionally pleasurable so as to increase our desire for more. For someone more." (DeWitt)*
- Sometimes our perspectives are narrowed and we almost forget God.
- Matthew 6. 26 – Jesus tells us to look and listen. He's teaching on anxiety but the practice he recommends is active remembrance and awareness.
- Before the conversation begins we need to acknowledge each other's presence.
    - Example: when someone walks in with a need without acknowledging you. It is dehumanizing.
- Brother Lawrence was a monk who lived a few hundred years ago in France and he spent much of his life practicing only Divine

awareness. In the monastery he lived in he was assigned to kitchen work for fifteen years:

- *"Even though he had a great aversion to doing kitchen work, he became accustomed to doing everything there out of love for God, and asked Him in every situation for grace to do his work. So he found that kitchen work became easy for him during the fifteen years he was assigned there. Now he found delight in cobbling shoes, but he was ready to leave this task like the others because* ***no matter where he was assigned, the thing that brought him joy was to do the little things for the love of God.*** *For him the fixed time of prayer in the monastic day was no different from other times. He made his spiritual retreats when the prior told him to do so, but he did not desire them and did not ask for them* ***because even his busiest work did not turn him away from God****."* (p. 50, Practicing the Presence of God)

- We often rush into prayer before acknowledging God's presence and enjoying the very fact he is with us and showing himself to us through creation, daily lives, and indwelling Spirit.
- Response: *God, you are in every place and every moment. Where are you right now, and what are you saying to me or showing me?*

Prayer as human expression (or sharing)

- We are designed to express.
- As important as it is to express to one another, it is infinitely more important to express to God.

- I don't have a problem with expression, unless I'm feeling overly introverted on a particular day, but I do sometimes struggle to express myself to God. This is because I sometimes believe that God is more interested in me acting a certain way (how I think wants to me to act) that knowing me. Sometimes I'll express myself to everyone and everything but God.
- In reality the best possible place to express ourselves, all our emotion and feeling is prayer. The best possible person to pour it all out to is the Person who can handle it all. And welcomes it.
- The Psalms, the many songs in Scripture and even Jesus remind us that God created expressive beings, and our expression, in all the highs and lows, is welcomed.
    - Example: How good does it feel to be shared with when someone gets good news (babies, engagements, etc.)? How heartbreaking is it when someone holds back their hardships? Sharing shows intimacy.
- Response: God, today I am _____. I know you care for me, and I know you welcome me to share my whole life with you. I choose to be honest and share with you.

Prayer as thankfulness (or perspective-gaining)

- One of the instructions Paul gives over multiple letters to the first Christians is: always say thank you.
- Paul swiftly follows "never stop praying" with always say thanks
- 1 Thessalonians 5. 16 – *"be thankful in all circumstances"*
- Thankfulness in prayer is vital for at least two reasons:

    - God is the maker and giver of everything. He is worthy of our thanks. No one else is more deserving. (James 1. 17 "*every good and perfect gift…")*
    - The second reason is that when we thank God our focus shifts to him rather than our circumstances (good or bad) and we remember his character.
- In remembering his character, or nature we are reminded in the highs of life that the gifts God gives are not what we live for but he is, and are comforted in the lows of life that God has given us what we need, namely his presence to perceiver in hardship.
    - Example: Wedding thank yous. Couples thank people for how they helped pull the wedding off. What they're really doing is showing appreciation for the breadth and depth of friendship they have around them.
- Response: God, thank you for every seen and unseen gift you give me today. May every one of them remind me of your good nature and lead my to live as generously as you do.

Prayer as trust (or faith/belief)

- Philippians 4. 6 *"Don't worry about anything; instead pray about everything. Tell God what you need and thank him for what he has done."* – easier said than done.
- Healthy communication (prayer) will always build trust.
    - This is why couples are trained in and encouraged to practice communication in pre-marital counseling.

    - This is also why communication is the first tool out of the belt in conflict resolution.
- Prayer not only *demonstrates* trust but it *builds* trust. Trust increases in any relationship when we choose to share and invest.
- Without communication there can be no trust in a relationship. By praying we learn God's character, are strengthened and encouraged by his Spirit and in tern begin to rely and trust him further.
- Response: *God, help me to continue to let you guide and instruct me. Help me to remember that my life is best in your hands and not my own.*