



Chico Alliance Church  
June 4, 2017



## ***“Divine Dialogue”*** ***Part One***

Prayer is one of the most talked about topics in the Bible. It is also one of the most misunderstood and mysterious topics of the Bible. Prayer is probably the least practiced discipline among God-followers.

At its simplest level, prayer is talking with God rather than talking to God. True prayer is a dialogue. Sometimes we talk about what is on our heart. Sometimes we bring Him our requests. Dialogue includes talking and listening. God reveals His side of the dialogue by various means.

A simple way to get your head around prayer is to think of the relationship between a child and father. For some, that may be difficult, but imagine how a HEALTHY relationship might function.

There would probably be general conversation.

There would be times of instruction and advice.

There would be times of pouring out our heart concerning the struggles of life.

There would be times of asking for advice or wisdom.

There would be times of expressing gratitude and appreciation.

And of course, there would be times of requesting help.

We generally think of prayer only as asking God for something. Just as a conversation in a healthy relationship with a parent, a relationship with God goes much deeper and further than just asking. Today and for the next several weeks, I want to focus on the subject of talking with God. I remember a famous radio teacher from many years ago who began every program with these words.

***“God is still on the throne and prayer changes things.”***

One of the greatest struggles regarding prayer involves the stark realization that for most of us, much of the time, prayer seems to change very little. The intensity or immensity of our prayers doesn't seem to make a bit of difference. Hundreds of people prayed concerning my dad's open heart surgery. He died anyway. Hundreds of people prayed for past church members. Eleanor, Gene, both Carols, both Bills. They all died. Numerous people have prayed for my MS – I still have it, though it currently seems to have minimal interference.

How many times have you asked God to show you where you lost stuff with no answer? How many times have we prayed for healing for someone? We have asked God to heal numerous people in the past 22 years without one immediate healing. Most of us have a long list of times when prayer didn't seem to make any difference.

Is there power in prayer or not? How many times do we trip over the passages that clearly promise to ask whatever we will and God will answer? We read of miraculous interventions and supernatural events all through the Bible and church history wondering where they are now. We sometimes wonder if there is even any point in praying.

Gideon from the time of the Judges wondered the same thing.

*The angel of the LORD appeared to him and said to him, "The LORD is with you, O valiant warrior." Then Gideon said to him, "O my lord, if the LORD is with us, why then has all this happened to us? And where are all His miracles which our fathers told us about, saying, 'Did not the LORD bring us up from Egypt?' But now the LORD has abandoned us and given us into the hand of Midian." Judges 6:12-13*

It is not the power or intensity of our prayers but the working of an all wise and powerful God who has graciously included OUR prayers as an essential element in accomplishing HIS ends. The act of prayer alone doesn't change things or people. God changes things and people sometimes in response to the prayers of the saints but always in harmony with His ultimate plan. Prayer only has power when God gives it power.

If God is all-powerful and perfectly knows what is best and loves us infinitely, why doesn't he answer our prayers. I will address that question more thoroughly later. James is clear that sometimes he doesn't answer our prayers because they stem from a selfish motive. It's clear that other times, our request does not fit with his ultimate plan. If a father has planned a fabulous day for his children and wants to surprise them, he will deny their pleas to do something else. They will think he is not being fair by not letting them play at Charlie's that day. They may resist getting in the car and complain because they had their own agenda in mind. All the while, there is something much more significant in store.

God is much more interested in what the practice of talking to Him does **IN** us than what it does **FOR** us. Prayer may seldom change things (especially if they run contrary to His plan) but they almost always bring about significant change in the one engaged in Divine dialogue.

Here are the questions we will attempt to address in the next several weeks.

- Perspective on Prayer (What is prayer?)
- Purpose of Prayer (Why Pray?)
- Prerequisites for Prayer (What is required to talk with God?)
- Problems concerning prayer (Why doesn't God answer Yes?)
- Promises related to prayer (What has God promised?)
- Postures for prayer (What body positions promote prayer?)
- Passion of Prayer (How fervent does my prayer life need to be?)
- Patterns of Prayer (Are there Biblical models to follow?)

## **I. PERSEPCTIVE ON PRAYER -- What is it?**

### **A. PRAYER MISUNDERSTOOD & MISUSED**

What sort of scene emerges in your brain when you hear the admonition, "You need to improve your prayer life!"? I know what comes to my mind. I visualize myself on my knees agonizing to sustain some highly spiritual sounding and substantially prolonged prayer time but quickly running out of words to say. Then I see myself lapsing into a paralyzing load of guilt because it has only been five minutes since I began this attempt at high impact spiritual discipline. We visualize long hours of grueling, pleading, longing, waiting, heart wrenching petition that we aren't even sure rises past the ceiling let alone all the way to the Throne of Grace

These are cultural not Biblical portraits of prayer. This is not what God intended prayer to be. Our struggles are not unique. It was not much different even in Jesus' day. Prayer had degenerated to a point of dutiful devotion and meaningless ritual rather than meaningful dialogue.

#### **1-- Prayer had become a formal exercise of the head rather than a free expression of the heart.**

Prayer became a system of formalized prayers for every conceivable occasion that slashed the very heart out of effective, meaningful communication with the Almighty.

#### **2-- Prayer time had become ritualistic periods of "necessary" interruption throughout the day at 9, 12, 3 that must be done only in specially appointed places.**

#### **3-- People perceived that God was only impressed with long drawn out prayers of great spiritual and linguistic eloquence.**

One prayer stacked 16 adjectives before God's name. Almighty, most holy, gracious, loving, faithful, eternal, invisible, all knowing, all powerful, just and righteous, merciful and unchangeable, self-sufficient and immutable God.

#### **4-- Prayers were also characterized by meaningless repetition.**

The key to Jesus prohibition regarding repetitions prayer was “meaningless.” God is as impressed with heartless repetitive prayers as He would be with a recitation of “Mary had a little Lamb.” He warned that meaningless repetition in prayer brings no reward. Oh, I don't do that. Don't we? How about prayers at night time with the kids or meal time with the family? We develop a “prayer language” of certain well-worn, overworked, predictable phrases. These show up perhaps most often in our public prayers than our private ones, but our private conversations are not exempt from this problem. Some of the examples I am about to share are not bad in themselves, they do have some wonderful meaning behind them.

The problem is that we, over the years, unconsciously recite the vocabulary in our head rather than share passion of our heart. We can rattle off a wonderfully sounding prayer that has no specific purpose or impact other than it sounds good and spiritual. Again, be assured that these may be great phrases if we really understand and feel what we are saying. It is much better, in my estimation, to use phrases generated from my heart and communicate my heart than sound good to those around us. We cannot communicate our heart using someone else's words until we have made them our own.

**"Bless so and so"**

(This seems too general to be effective. How will we know if God answers?)

**"Lead, guide and direct"**

(This sounds spiritual to the ear but these words really all mean exactly the same thing.)

**"If it by Thy will"**

(This is OK only after I have tried to find out what God's will might be.)

**"Be with us now and bless this time"**

(Isn't He always with us? What do we want Him to do specifically?)

**"Thank you for this time we have had together"**

(Meeting closer or true gratitude?)

**"We come before your throne of grace"**

(Do we really realize the concept behind this privilege? What does it mean to be standing before the throne of a Holy God who has made it possible to extend His grace to those deserving death?)

**"Dear Heavenly Father"**

(This is a wonderful and Biblical I might be quick to add, but are we aware of its impact? Better to vary our address of God. That is the reason He has provided us with so many different names and visual pictures of Himself.)

**"In Jesus Name Amen"**

(This is certainly Biblical, but has become an auto-tag on nearly every prayer. There is a profound meaning behind praying in the name of Jesus that will be explored later in this study.)

**"Lord I JUST pray"**

(What does that actually mean?)

Another issue deals with the unconscious use of the Lord's name almost as a punctuation mark at the end of a phrase or used as filler that makes my prayer sound more "spiritual". I realize that this can be a habit picked up through exposure in our developmental days. If the repeated use of God's name is conscious and an expression of the heart, it can be a powerful practice. If it has become automatic and unconscious, it could border on using the Lord's name in vain or without meaning. Would we employ this means of conversation in a casual conversation with a good friend.

*"John I really liked your talk yesterday John. And John I would like to get together sometime for lunch. And Johnny I wonder if you would talk to Jake for me John. John, ahhh John, I look forward to getting together again John."*

You get the idea??? My purpose is not to pick apart one's prayer style but to motivate us to focus on meaningful dialogue rather than methodical rhetoric.

**5. -- At the time of Jesus, prayer was practiced as an opportunity for pride rather than a demonstration of dependence.**

Jesus related the story of the proud Pharisee and the humble tax collector. The Pharisee prayed to HIMSELF. The tax collector connected with God.

**B. PRAYER PROPERLY UNDERSTOOD**

As we have emphasized, prayer is simply humble conversation with God both as Sovereign King and Loving Father. The term "Abba" is difficult to translated but it carried both the tender father image and the respected King sense. Prayer is honest expression of our heart to God's ear and His heart to ours.

**C. PLACE OF PRAYER IN THE LIFE OF JESUS**

The study of Jesus and prayer is a rich study. Here is a brief overview. There are fifteen recorded references to Jesus and prayer in the Bible. All the recorded prayers of Jesus could be recited in 10 minutes.

**1. DIVERSE OCCASIONS**

**a) BEFORE DIFFICULT OR IMPOSSIBLE TASKS**

- \* The raising of Lazarus John 11:41-42
- \* The Garden of Gethsemane Lk 22; Matt 26; Jn 18
- \* The choosing of the disciples Lk 6:12

**b) DURING DIFFICULT TIMES**

The first and last words on the cross were prayers. Forty strenuous days of temptation were thoroughly resisted with prayer and fasting.

**c) AFTER A DIFFICULT AND TRYING DAY**

He prayed after a long day of ministry and confrontation with Satan's kingdom. Lk Lk 4:42; Mk 1:35

Mark recorded that after a very long day of ministry:

*"And in the morning, rising up a great while before day, he went out, and departed into a solitary place, and there prayed."*

Mark later recorded one of the busiest days in the life of Jesus and that followed a busy day before that. Everyone needed rest. The crowds still hunted them down to hear more before they could find relaxation. Jesus continued to minister to them throughout the rest of the day, healing, feeding, teaching.

Finally Jesus sent the disciples on ahead by themselves while He dispersed the crowd. Then the text says:

*"And after bidding the crowd farewell, He departed to the mountain to pray. Mk 6:46*

Jesus knew where to refuel. He knew where His energy to sustain a people ministry was to be found. Quiet intercourse with His Father with whom He had conversed from eternity.

**d) DURING TIMES OF JOY AND SUCCESS**

As a result of the joyful return and report of the seventy missionaries Jesus took time to thank God for the revelation of truth that had been opened to them. Lk 10:21

**e) TO AVOID TRAP OF NOTORIETY**

*But so much the more went there a fame abroad of him: and great multitudes came together to hear, and to be healed by him of their infirmities. And he withdrew himself into the wilderness, and prayed." Lk 5:15-16*

**f) AS A HABIT OF LIFE**

He went to a certain familiar place like it was a custom. This incident was 1 to 2 1/2 years into His time with the disciples.

g) BLESSING AND THANKS FOR FOOD

- At the feeding of the five Thousand Lk 9:16
- At the Passover celebration

2. VARIOUS LOCATIONS

- In the Jordan river Lk 3:21,22
- Solitary place Mk 1:35
- Desert Lk 4:42
- Wilderness Lk 5:15,16
- Mountain Mark 6:46
- Certain special place Lk 11:1

3. NUMEROUS TIMES AND DURATIONS

- In the morning, a great while before day. Mk 1:35
- All night Lk 6:12
- Special Needs i.e. Peter's faith not fail
- Evening
- Day Time
- Long
- Short
- Continual present-day intercession for us Heb 7

4. VARIABLE INTENSITY

- With great Joy
- With thanksgiving
- With blood and sweat
- With heartbreak
- With loud cries

*In the days of His flesh, He (Jesus) offered up both prayers and supplications with loud crying and tears to the One able to save Him from death, and He was heard because of His piety. Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered. And having been made perfect, He became to all those who obey Him the source of eternal life. Heb 5:7-9*

5. HE PRAYED ALONE

6. HE PRAYED WITH OTHERS

7. HE PRAYED FOR

- Children Matt 19:13
- Disciples as a group
- Disciples individually
- Future generations Jn 17

## CONCLUSIONS

Here is something I want you to consider. If Jesus practiced talking with His Father as an essential part of His life and ministry, how much more should we? As I mentioned when we touched on prayer in Philippians, I am not anywhere near where I want to be or probably should be. I desire growth in this area for myself and for you. I want to see this be a true value of our church family demonstrated by practice. After explaining the protective armor necessary to do battle with Satan, Paul called for persistent prayer.

*And receive THE HELMET OF SALVATION, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God praying at ALL times in the Spirit with ALL prayer and petition, and with this in view, keeping watch with ALL perseverance and petition for ALL the saints... Ephesians 6:17-18*

### ***Jesus Prayed***

*He prayed upon the mountain, He prayed for you and me,  
He prayed in humble dwellings, He prayed beside the sea.*

*He prayed in early morning, Prayed with all His might,  
He prayed at noonday and at dusk, He prayed all thro' the night.*

*He prayed for those who scorned Him, For those who killed Him, too,  
He prayed, "Father forgive them: They know not what they do."*

*He prayed when He was lonely, He prayed when He was sad,  
He prayed when He was weary, He prayed when He was glad.*

*He prayed for those in sorrow, He prayed for those in sin, He  
prayed for those in trouble That they might come to Him.*