

St. John's Parish Church

Community Group on Prayer

Prayer: Experiencing Awe and Intimacy with God

by Tim Keller

Week 4

Encountering God (ch.5, pg. 66-80)

For this week's study please read chapter 5 in the book, "Prayer", by Timothy Keller. If you have any observations or questions in the reading please feel welcome to bring them to your Group.

Main point for the Study:

Conversation with God leads to an encounter with God. Prayer is not only the way we learn what Jesus has done for us but also is the way we "daily receive God's benefits." Prayer turns theology into experience. Through it we sense his presence and receive his joy, his love, his peace and confidence, and thereby we are changed in attitude, behavior, and character. (Keller, Prayer, pg.80)

Primary Bible Scripture for the week:

Galatians 4:4—9 (ESV)

4 But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, 5 to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. 6 And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" 7 So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.

8 Formerly, when you did not know God, you were enslaved to those that by nature are not gods. 9 But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how can you turn back again to the weak and worthless elementary principles of the world, whose slaves you want to be once more?

Reflection and Response Questions:

1. In Paul's letter to the Galatian church, he describes prayer as a response to the Holy Spirit entering our very hearts with the knowledge of God.

·Read Galatians (vv. 4—9) and observe the variety of terms used to describe what it means to have a relationship with God.

What do these reveal about a relationship with God?

Observe Paul's message in verse 9— that having an intimate relationship with God means knowing, and being known by, God. Because of this we are free from the trappings of this world. When our prayers are predominately asking God to provide us with worldly things it may be evidence that we are turning "back again to the weak and worthless elementary principles of the world" (v.9). It is human nature to pray to God to give us things; to make us more successful; to change our circumstances; to better our lives, but Paul exhorts us to seek out something more in our prayer.

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·Between these two options, what does your prayer life look more like:

1—Is it a means to ask for things, so you will be happier in life or;

2—Is it a means to know God better in order that He actually becomes your happiness?

2. In our prayer lives, when we forget about the work of Jesus Christ, we are susceptible to putting the world ahead of Jesus. We need constant reminding that we are not able to save ourselves; only the work of Jesus can do this. Read the first two verses of the Galatians scripture above (vv. 4-5). Our relationship with God is possible through the work, the sacrifice and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Note the progression we find in this passage: first Jesus, then redemption, then adoption, then the Spirit, then prayer (communion), then freedom, and then heirs. It all starts with Jesus, the Son of God.

·When you pray, do you acknowledge and praise God for the gospel? (e.g., we all are sinners—none is righteous, it is only by God's grace that we are saved through faith in Christ, Jesus died for the lost, Jesus conquered death, etc.)?

If you need a great verse to give you some inspiration, John 3:16 is one of the most concise communications of the Gospel in the Bible. To know the gospel message through the power of the Holy Spirit fuels our passion and delight to come before God in prayer.

·What are some practical ways that you can incorporate the gospel into your prayer?

3. Read Galatians 4:6. The term "Abba" is Aramaic and it signifies the close, intimate relationship of a father and his young child. It is an expression of affection, confidence, and trust.

·As Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, how do you address God as "Abba"?

·When was the last time you truly spoke to God with the tone and attitude of a child coming to his/her father?

Remember, God is not an imperfect, broken, earthly father (as all are), but rather a perfect father who is always there to hold you up. Come before God today (right now) and bear your heart to Him. Make an effort to turn the theology of prayer into a true relationship with God, your father (see Keller, pg.80, last paragraph).