

THE PRAYER LIFE OF JESUS

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To reflect upon prayer and the example Jesus has shown us in the gospel is uniquely different than that of other models in scripture. In large part much of Jesus' prayer life was centered in personal relationship between him and God and therefore the majority of Christ focus on prayer was spent in instruction rather than verbal exemplification. That is not to say that he did not practice it since there is numerous accounts of his personal pray life. The gospels however, spend little time detailing exactly what Jesus spoke in his prayer.

It is hoped that through exploring these accounts in the gospel that we could understand the concept which Christ believed about prayer, the moments and times of Christ's pray life, the approaches and methods in which he used, the environments and places he practiced, the people he prayed for, and the events or results that happened after his prayer. Through reflection on these accounts we can see how Christ's prayer life impacts us today and how we can practice it in our daily lives.

The first recorded prayer model by Jesus is known as 'The Lord's Prayer' (Matt. 6:9-13; Luke 11:2-4). The model does not seem to be different than that from earlier models in the Old Testament and even resembles a passage from 2 Chronicles 7:14-15. Jesus did not mean for the prayer to be a dictation but rather just a model of form as he began his instruction with "Pray *like* this..."

In teaching about the wrong way to pray in Matthew 6:5-9 Jesus illustrates not to pray in public eye with long repeated requests or babble. The principle was not that we can't pray publicly but that the people who were doing this were seeking prayer out of appearance to others and not to be in relationship with God. To pray privately is meant to seek God in an intimate manner which is a preparation of heart and not whether you are in public or not.

Jesus makes a specific point that many had began praying as other religions or cults did in a repeated statement and he wanted his followers to not be trapped in idolistic practices. However, it

does personally bring the question of the practice of meditation in a Christian context. What does the Christian practice of meditational prayer look like?¹

The gospels also give clear indication that Jesus believed prayer was to be used for our enemies and those that persecuted us (Matt. 5:44), that we were to pray for our Christian leadership and the growth of the church (Matt. 9:38), and that pray was to be our first approach to repentance and forgiveness (Luke 22:46). In all these practices it seems clear that prayer is our ability to allow God space and time to heal, build, and shape our lives in righteousness.

Perhaps the most puzzling lesson Jesus gave on prayer was his call to ask and we would receive (Matt. 21:22; Mark 11:24; Luke 11:5-13). How much can we ask for? This idea is puzzling and brought thoughts of the concepts of faith healing. Perhaps Luke's passage was more defined in that God knows what is best for his children and it is him who will decide in the way in which prayers will be answered.

Through out the gospels Jesus prayed in many locations both public and private. Many of these times took place just before or after he performed a miracle or taught the people. Despite the diverse number of places he prayed, Jesus' clear focus was an awareness of the presence of God and not his immediate surroundings.

On many occasions Jesus prayed among the people he was teaching (Matt. 11:25-27; John 17:1-26) and at times his prayer seemed to also edify those around him. Perhaps the practice opened the people to see a relationship with God that went beyond the confines of tradition and the walls of the Temple.

The dark open air of the mountains were also places where Jesus liked to pray (Matt. 14:23). Pray is something that is supposed to bring light to the human heart and it was once said to me that "there is no greater place to see the light then when you are surrounded by darkness."

¹ Due to size I will explore this at another time.

Jesus also spent his time of worship in prayer as he did while being baptized by John in the Jordan River (Luke 3:21). Jesus' prayer life was intimately connected to his calling and from his baptism we can see how he prayed aloud the Holy Spirit to bless him and the people around him.

Perhaps one of the most important principles that Jesus exemplified about prayer was to pray before expected future hardships and challenges (Matt. 26:36-46; Mark 14:13-22). Jesus prayed intensely the night that the Jews came to arrest him and God filled him with strength and courage.

When we look at the way in which Jesus prayed it seemed he naturally spoke them. Naturally, that they flowed as though it was a natural conversation with a present God and verbal as though he spoke out loud. With the exception of Psalm 51 on the cross Jesus spent most of his prayer life engaged in a personal dialogue with his Father.

He prayed often in praise of God for giving the truth to those who would listen and hiding it from those who would not (Matt. 11:25). Jesus also prayed for those who did not understand the scriptures and those who persecuted him as he did on the cross (Luke 23:34). Jesus also spoke of the need to pray constantly and to never give up in seeking out God (Luke 18:1-8).

Although it is not said to be an absolute requirement, on many occasions Jesus prayed for his believers by putting his hands on them (Matt. 19:13). The effects of which could be not only physical healing but spiritual and perhaps, emotional healing. As Jesus showed his believers that he cared for them in spirit through prayer, he also cared for them in brotherly love.

At other times, Jesus would look to heaven in prayer (John 17:1), kneel down (Luke 22:41), or lie face down in the ground in complete submission (Matt. 26:39). Jesus did not seem to hold any particular position or method as being a set way in which to pray. His focus was purely to be open in heart and speak freely with God as our Father.

Likewise, Jesus also prayed in many different areas. He spent a great deal of time retreating to the hills and mountains to pray (Matt. 14:23; Mark 6:46). It gave Jesus the opportunity to be alone with God and see his presence clearly.

There was also times that Jesus would wonder in the wilderness while fasting and praying (Mark 1:35; Luke 5:16). This act was not uncommon as many others also seeked God similarly (Elijah, John).

Jesus spent much of his time praying for his followers. What is most interesting is that he prayed not just for his disciples then but for those who would believe in him today (John 17:20). He also prayed for children and the youth of his community (Matt. 19:13). Jesus also used prayer to look to God for courage and strength in his own life (Matt. 26:36-46; John 17:1-8).

With out question the gospels clearly show evidence that Jesus spent a great deal of time in prayer and it was not always easy. Jesus felt physical strains in his time of prayer especially during his time on the Mount of Olives (Luke 22:44). It seems to show his spiritual strength as his own body would strain under the pressure he placed on it through prayer.

The out come though is significant as seen in Luke 3:21. Jesus demonstrates to us all that prayer opens the heavens allowing us and exposing us to the presence of God. It brings an awareness to the Holy Spirit in our lives and perhaps most importantly gives the greatest opportunity for God to speak to our very existence.

Jesus' exemplification of a life of prayer points to us acting not in mandatory motions of practice but, to seek after God in personal relationship and practice prayer with our hearts focused on submitting to his presence and molding of our lives.