

Lesson 3: Prayer

Key concept

Prayer in a personal
relationship with God

Objectives

- ❖ Understand meditative and affective prayer
- ❖ Practice these methods to apply them in your prayer life

Prayer Study

*(Note from your pastor: Dick Kaufmann, my mentor and the man God used to birth Harbor, has shaped my prayer life in very significant ways. I want to pass along to you the blessings that I have received from him on **meditative** and **affective** prayer. May his insight on prayer bless you in the same way that it has me!)*

Meditative Prayer – A.C.T.S.

If you want to grow spiritually, then learning to pray meditatively is one of the best ways to do so. Prayer, and specifically meditative prayer, is one of the best ways to deal with doubts and intellectual objections to the faith because it brings you into a conversation, a relationship, with a living God. Prayer centers you and stills your soul in a noisy world. It takes you beyond mere intellectual knowledge *about* God and takes you into intimate, transformative knowledge *of* God. Even demons know intellectual facts *about* God (James 2: 19); yet, knowledge *of* God is far different, for it stems from an experience of His presence that touches and changes you, drawing you into a personal relationship with God.

J.I. Packer, in his helpful book *Knowing God*, summarizes this well: “How can we turn our knowledge *about* God into knowledge *of* God? The rule for doing this is demanding but simple. It is that we turn each truth that we learn *about* God into a matter for meditation *before* God, leading to prayer and praise to God.”

Packer says that meditation is “a lost art today,” and Christians have suffered from their lack of it. Some followers of Jesus speak of a “quiet time,” and in doing so they are typically referring to a Bible study and prayer. But Packer sees meditation as the indispensable ingredient that transforms a “quiet time” into an encounter with God.

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So, what is meditation? “Meditation is the activity of calling to mind, and thinking over, and dwelling on, and applying to oneself, the various things that one knows about the works and ways and purposes and promises of God. It is an activity of holy thought, consciously performed in the presence of God, under the eye of God, by the help of God, as a means of communion with God.”

How do we go about meditating? The approach that has influenced me the most is Martin Luther’s “A Simple Way to Pray.” In 1535, Luther wrote this as a letter to his barber, Peter Beskendorf, who had asked Luther for advice on how to pray. Luther said, “warm the heart up” through meditation before praying. Using Luther’s ideas, I read one or more Psalms (or any other portion of God’s Word) and identify one or two verses that especially helped me. I then meditate on these verses by asking the following questions:

1) **Adoration:** Lord, what are You showing me here for which I can praise You? What attributes of Your character are revealed to me here?

2) **Confession:** What does this require of me? How have I fallen short? What wrong behaviors, harmful emotions, or false attitudes result in me when I forget that You are like this or have done this?

3) **Thanksgiving:** How is Jesus the ultimate answer for my sin and/or longings? Think about the life of Jesus in the gospels and give thanks for specific ways that He was successful in areas that you just confessed.

*Note: You may have used or heard of the acrostic A.C.T.S. in which the thanksgiving section centered more on being thankful for God’s blessings in your life (health, provision, family, etc.). This model is different. It requires gospel thanksgiving, and this section of gospel-thanksgiving is the lynchpin of learning to pray in a gospel-centered way. You see, the Gospel is the good news of Jesus (not necessarily the blessings that Jesus provides). Therefore, the goal of meditative prayer is for you to meditate on Jesus and gospel-thanksgiving is the lynchpin in this model of prayer.

4) **Supplication:** Jesus, here are my needs (or supplications). My family and friends? My church? My city? The world? What we just thanked You for—make it so in us!

Affective Prayer

What Is Affective Prayer?

Affective prayer deals with the affections of our heart. In affective prayer, we pray the Gospel into our hearts in order to take the affections of our hearts off of false lovers and offer up our hearts to the Lord.

Why Is Affective Prayer Important?

True spirituality ultimately is a matter of the heart. Jesus' criticism of religious people is that they worship God with their lips but their hearts are far from Him (Mt.15:8). Religion makes "nice" people; the Gospel makes "new" people. Jesus says religious people are like "*whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of dead men's bones*" (Matthew 23:27). Religion focuses on external behavior; the Gospel is after the heart. Jesus says religious people "*clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence*" (Matthew 23:25). Instead they should "*first clean the inside of the cup and dish, and then the outside also will be clean*" (v.26). Religion causes us to appear to be better people than we really are; the Gospel changes us from the inside out. Why is affective prayer important? It goes after the inside of the cup – the heart. Non-religious people don't repent; religious people repent only of external sin; Christians repent of the sins of the heart.

When Do I Do Affective Prayer?

I have used two different types of affective prayer:

1) *Interventive Affective Prayer*. This type is triggered when I become aware of a pressing need, usually in the form of moral failure, circumstantial crisis, or negative emotions.

2) *Preventive Affective Prayer*. While "interventive" is triggered by the awareness of a need, "preventive" seeks God's grace for daily life; specifically, to head-off sinful attitudes and to empower for everyday ministry opportunities.

How Do I Do Affective Prayer?

The critical events are repentance and growing in faith. The two errors I continue to fall into are: 1) I deal with the surface sin instead of the root sin, and 2) I pray moralism instead of the Gospel into myself. The following is an outline I have found helpful in doing affective prayer:

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❖ **Down the slope of repentance**

Objective: To see and confess that I am a bigger sinner than I thought.

- **See And Own Your Sin**
Return to “Confession” under Meditative Prayer. Examine yourself in the mirror of God’s Word, your negative emotions and attitudes, and the responses of others to you. Guard yourself against sin’s deceitfulness: the tendency to water down God’s standard, compare ourselves to others, shift the blame, or commit ourselves to trying harder.
- **See The Sin Beneath Your Sin**
Don’t move too quickly to confess and receive forgiveness for the surface sin. Push the “Why?” question until you find what you are looking to other than Jesus for meaning and sweetness in life.
- **Expose the Idols/False Lovers of Your Heart**
 - **They are helpless**
They can’t deliver when you succeed; they can only raise the bar. They can’t forgive when you fail; they can only lower the boom.
 - **They are hurtful**
They hurt you spiritually, emotionally and physically. They hurt others by undermining your ability to love.
 - **They are harmful**
Most importantly, by going after these idols/other lovers you are saying to God, “Jesus is not enough.”

The conclusion: “I am a much bigger sinner than I thought. I am a worthy recipient of God’s judgment. Trying harder won’t cut it. I am helpless and hopeless in myself. **BUT** there is One...”

❖ **Up The Slope of Faith**

Objective: To thank God that Jesus is a much bigger Savior than I thought. I think about and give thanks that:

- **Jesus Lived for Me**
Think about and give thanks for specific ways Jesus has lived obediently where I have failed.

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- **Jesus Died for Me**
Think about Jesus' death on the cross for my specific sins and idolatry. Thank God that my sin has been punished once and for all.
- **God Sees Me in Jesus**
Think about how God sees me in Jesus, clothed with His perfect righteousness. Thank Him specifically for how He provides for me in Christ all that my idols/false lovers promised but could not deliver.
- **Jesus Lives in Me**
Thank God that He does not leave me to live the Christian life on my own, but the Spirit of Christ now dwells in me. Ask Him to live His righteous life through me, specifically in the areas where I have confessed sin.

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Individual Study and Group Discussion

Study and Discussion Questions

1. What are the three main struggles you have experienced in your prayer life?
2. Notice that the model for meditative prayer hinges on gospel-thanksgiving. How is gospel-thanksgiving different from traditional thanksgiving, and why is this so important for meditative prayer?
3. What did you find to be most helpful AND most challenging about the model of affective prayer?
4. How could you build *preventive* and *interventive* affective praying into your daily life?
5. PRACTICE: Read Psalm 23. As a group, pick one or two verses that you would like to use for meditative prayer. Go through and pray each section together (adoration, confession, thanksgiving, and supplication).