

Weaving the Word

Praying Like Children

Part 33 – May 31, 2015

Welcome to a place where we're opening our ears and learning to listen to the Lord!

How much does the tedium of monotony affect your prayer life?



When we left off, Jesus had warned His young apprentices of a certain way *not to pray*.

“... when you pray, **do not keep on babbling like pagans**, for they think they will be heard because of their many words.” – Matthew 6:5a, 7 NIV

Why would He need to tell ‘em not to babble? They babbled. **For 500 years the customary prayer of every devoted Jewish man had been the Amidah;** [ah-MEE-dah] 18-parts, [now 19 parts] 10-minutes, repeated three times every weekday. And, If you missed one, you doubled up the next.



The Amidah is beautiful and Biblical; but regurgitated in rote repetition 15 times a week, year after year, can take its toll!



Many would (and still do) babble through it as quickly as bab’able, focusing on the act, not the attitude, and thus allowing their prayer life to be driven into mechanical repetition by the sheer tedium of monotony.

Now, Jesus goes on to say ...

“Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.” – Matthew 6:8 NIV



Is He trying to talk ‘em out of praying? No. **He’s trying to talk ‘em out of talking.** He’s not saying to *pray* less; He’s saying to *talk* less. And that can sound confusing if you equate praying with speaking. But, there’s **speaking-prayer** and **listening-prayer**. And both are necessary for an active relationship with God. **But, guess which type of prayer has more benefit for the prayer. The trick is discerning when to zip our lip and listen.**

When you pray, how much thought, time, and effort do you put into listening for the Holy Spirit’s conviction, correction, comfort, impression, guidance, discernment, and wisdom?

He's not saying, "stop talking", just "start listening". Jesus is referring to the "sacrifice of fools", a phrase coined in Ecclesiastes, in reference to how we approach God to pray.

Go near to **listen** rather than to **offer the sacrifice of fools**, who do not know that they do wrong. Do not be quick with your mouth, do not be hasty in your heart to utter anything before God. God is in heaven and you are on earth, so **let your words be few**. – Ecclesiastes 5:1b-2 NIV



Talking is an offering that's best enjoyed in small amounts.

Like Sen-Sen! A little goes a *loooong* way. So, **Let your words be few and your ears be open.** What do you call a friend who won't listen? *Who calls a friend who won't listen?!*

If you want your prayer life and your relationship with the Lord to grow and flourish, you have to become a good listener.

How ironic that the Amidah is prefaced with "O Lord, open my lips". God's Word often says, "He who has ears, let him hear," but have you ever read, "He who has lips, let him speak"?



The disciples' heritage required a disciplined practice of prayer.

Besides the thrice-daily Amidah, there were prescribed prayers for waking, washing, eating, and finishing; a morning blessing, an evening blessing, and a bedtime blessing; weekend prayers, holiday prayers, and special prayers for seeing a rainbow, receiving bad news, smelling spices, eating fruit, and every detail of the Jewish daily experience.

It isn't that they didn't know how to pray; they didn't know how to stop ... *talking*. And, that's our problem to. Slowing down. Taking a breather. Being still. Pondering. Reflecting. Musing. **It isn't God who changes through prayer, it's us. And, that's why listening-prayer should take up the lion's share of the time we spend enjoying God's company.**

With speaking-prayer, the lesson is to lessen and listen. God speaks through His Word, His Spirit, and His people. So, how do *you* slow down and let the Father speak to you? *Like this ...*



Jesus shockingly knocks the religion right out'a that *Amidah!*

“This, then, is how you should pray: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name ...” – Matthew 6:9a NIV

Allow me to quickly read the opening praises of the *Amidah*:

O Lord, open my lips; and my mouth will declare your praise.

Blessed are you, O Lord our God and God of our fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob, the great, mighty and revered God, the Most High God who bestows loving-kindnesses, the Creator of all, who recalls the good deeds of the fathers and who brings a Redeemer to their children’s children for his name’s sake, in love. O king, helper, savior and shield. Blessed are You, O Lord, the shield of Abraham.

You, O Lord, are mighty forever, You are the Reviver of the dead, You are greatly able to save. You sustain the living in loving-kindness, You revive the dead with great compassion, You support the falling, heal the sick, set free the bound and keep faith with those who sleep in the dust. Who is like You, O Master of mighty deeds? Who compares to You, a king who puts to death and restores to life, and brings forth salvation? And You are faithful to revive the dead. Blessed are You, O Lord, who revives the dead.

You are holy and your Name is holy, and your holy ones praise You every day. Blessed are You, Adonai, the God Who is holy.

Jesus reduces this to, “*hallowed be your name*”, which connects the heart and mind far more than thrice-daily playing *beat the clock!*

When it comes to regurgitated religious prayer, your Father would much rather hear four *heartfelt* words of affection ... especially while fishin’!

To His flabbergasted disciples utter disbelief, Jesus then goes on to punch out the entirety of the *Amidah* in roughly 57 words.

“... your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one, for yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.” – Matthew 6:9b-13 NIV



This new abbreviated way to pray was so radically different from what they’d been taught by the rabbis and reinforced by John the Baptist, that they simply couldn’t. Wouldn’t. And *didn’t!* **How long do you think it took ‘em to adopt Jesus’ way to pray?**

[Well ...] One day [two-and-a-half years later] Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he finished, one of his disciples said to him, “Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples.” – Luke 11:1 NIV

This is likely a former disciple of John saying, “We’re ready to adopt your radically abbreviated way.”

Why would Jesus’ disciple say, “teach us to pray,” when He’d said, “*This, then, is how you should pray,*” 2.5 years earlier? **It took ‘em *that long* to break free from their tradition-stiffened shackles.**

It wasn’t too difficult; but too easy.

It wasn’t too draining; but too refreshing.

It wasn’t too religious; but too relational.

And, believe it or not, that’s a lot of our problem with prayer. **Legalism tells us that God likes it more when we like it less. So, we do our best to make it difficult, draining, religious, and legalistic, and then wonder why we want to avoid it.**

But now (about six months before His crucifixion), His disciples have finally adjusted to the idea of His radically reduced way. And, (*Jesus is so funny!*) **He now cuts His own prayer in half, challenging ‘em with an abbreviated abbreviation of the Amidah!**

He said to them, “When you pray, say: “‘Father, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread. Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us. And lead us not into temptation.’” – Luke 11:2-4 NIV

“Wait. We remembered it was short – but, *come on!* Can we at least still do the ‘who art in heaven,’ and ‘thy will be done,’ and the ‘deliver us from evil’ part”? And, didn’t it have a big ‘for-thine-is-the-kingdom-and-the-power-and-the-glory-forever-and-ever’ ending or something?”

He’s emphasizing that it’s a loose outline, not a tight script.

Because, **it’s not about the words, but the heart.**

It’s not about how much is in it as much as how much isn’t.

After all, **the heart is often best expressed *without* words.**



And, *anytime* we allow Him to speak *in any way*, that’s prayer. *Listening-prayer*. And, *that’s* how we cast our cares.

And *that’s* offering the sacrifice of the wise.

And *that’s* as far from babbling like pagans as you get.

That’s praying like *children!*