

The Prayer That Changes You
Part 4 - A New You For A New Year
Matthew 6:7-13
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Last week I ended my message by talking about how important it is to nurture your enthusiasm if you want to reach your goal. That's true when it comes to your faith, too. You have to nurture your enthusiasm for following Christ each day of your life if you want to keep your faith alive. Today I want to pick up on that idea and tell you: there is no greater way to nurture your enthusiasm for following Christ than to spend time with the Lord each day. The psalmist said, "**Lord, every morning you hear my voice. Every morning I tell you what I need and I wait for you to answer me.**" (Psalm 5:3) God called the psalmist "a man after my own heart" because he sought God every morning. The morning is the most important time of day to spend time with God.

Doctors will tell you, the most important meal of the day is breakfast, because that's the meal that will give you the energy to get through the day. It's important to start your day off with a good breakfast. It is also important to start your day off with a good quiet time with the Lord. Spending time with the Lord before you start your day will be an important way to nurture your faith. Some people have a quiet time each day but it doesn't change their life. Some people have breakfast each day but it doesn't do much to nourish them because they don't eat the right stuff. That's true for a quiet time with God too. Not all quiet times are life changing because they don't include the right stuff.

We call it a quiet time because it's a time to get away to a quiet place where you won't be interrupted and do four things. **The first thing you do in a quiet time is read from God's Word.** Now, maybe you don't like to read. Did you know you can get the entire Bible on CD. You can even get the entire Bible on DVD, complete with dramatization. If you don't like to read, then listen to a passage on your CD player or Ipod or your MP3 player. Whatever. Just do it. You don't have to read a lengthy passage, just read long enough until you hear God speaking to you. If the only Bible you have is a King James version, just maybe you ought to go out and buy a new Bible because we don't talk like that today. It's difficult to understand and there are so many good translations available to us today. Pick one you can understand and enjoy reading.

The **second component** of a daily quiet time with God is **being quiet.** That might be obvious to some of you but there are people who never sit quietly for any reason. They always have to be doing something or listening to something. You also don't want to have your daily quiet time with the Lord while you're still in bed. There is a tendency to fall back asleep, so you definitely need to get out of bed before you have a quiet time. What you do while you are quiet is you meditate on what you read. Some people think meditation is creepy; that it's what new age weird people do. There have been a lot of jokes about people who meditate. Seventy four times in the Bible we are told to meditate on God's Word. So what does that mean?

Does anyone know what "rumination" is? If you own cows you probably do. A cow chews and chews and then swallows and then burps that grass back up and it chews and chews some more. Then it swallows again and burps it back up and chews and chews again until it gets every ounce of nutrition and nourishment out of the grass or grain that it possibly can. That's the process of rumination. Meditation is a synonym for rumination. Meditation is thought digestion. It's the process of getting every bit of meaning out of a passage that you possibly can. It's chewing on a passage or a thought in an effort to get the most meaning out of it. So when the Bible talks about meditation, it's not telling you to zone out in some psychic new age trance. Nor is it telling you to put your mind in neutral and contemplate the lint in your navel. That's not it at all. The meditation the Bible commands us to do is focused attention on the Word of God.

How many of you know how to worry? How many of you would say, "I'm really good at worrying?" Worrying is taking a negative thought and turning it over and over in your mind. If you take a verse of Scripture and think about it over and over in your mind, that's meditation. So which do you think is going to do you the most good this year - worry or meditation? Daily rumination on God's Word is what will change our lives for the better.

The third component of a daily quiet time is to talk with God. That's called prayer. And it's not supposed to be a speech to God. It's to be more of a conversation with God. God's not going anywhere. It's not like you're going to lose his attention. I can remember as a kid with both parents working and no relatives around, when I found an adult who would listen to me, I'd talk their ear off. I wasn't used to focused attention from an adult. When I got it, I didn't want to lose it and I'd talk a mile a minute because nobody ever listened to me. That's not the way it is with God. He is always there and always listening. When we talk with God we also need to listen. It's a conversation not a speech.

The third component of a daily quiet time with God is to review your day with him. Go down through your day and lift the various things you have planned, lift them before his throne of grace and ask him for help with each goal, with each task, with each responsibility you have ahead of you. Ask for the strength and wisdom you will need. Ask him for the ability to recognize the opportunities he will place in your path to share Christ's love with others. Bring before the Lord the goals you have for the day and ask him for the strength and ability to accomplish your goals. If you should happen to set some goals for yourself as we go through this sermon series on *A New You For A New Year*, write them down and bring them before the Lord in your daily morning quiet time.

Becoming good at praying is harder for some people than for others. It has a lot to do with how you were raised. Growing up a Lutheran, I was fifteen before I realized you can pray without a written prayer from the worship book. All I ever heard in church or at home were prayers out of the worship book. It was hard for me to learn how to pray my own thoughts and words. Apparently, those early disciples experienced the same thing as me. They came to Jesus one day and said, "**Lord, teach us how to pray...**" Jesus said, "When you pray, don't be like those people who don't know God. They say the same things over and over that mean

nothing, thinking that God will hear them because of their many words. Don't be like them, because your Father knows the things you need before you ask him. So when you pray, you should pray like this..." (Matthew 6:7-8) And he gave them what we call today Lord's Prayer. Jesus didn't say, "This is **what** you should pray" because he wasn't intending to give them a prayer to pray but a guide when praying. He said, "You should pray like this...." Now, it's ok to pray the Lord's Prayer. We do it every Sunday. But it's more important to understand that Jesus was giving a template for prayer and not a prayer to pray. So let's look at this template Jesus gave the disciples for prayer. Let's look at the steps we are to take when we pray.

STEP ONE IS TO CONNECT WITH GOD AND FOCUS ON HIM. It begins, "*Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name...*" (Matt. 6:9b) So the first thing you do when talking with God is connect with him. Focus on him. Acknowledge him as your heavenly Father who is above all else, holy. Prayer should begin with connecting to God by acknowledging who he is. I would add one more thing that Jesus teaches us here. When we pray, we should also acknowledge that we are not in this alone - we are part of the family of God. We should begin our prayer acknowledging that we are not alone as a believer but we are in this thing called the Christian faith with all the other believers who have gone before us, who are alive on the planet right now and even those who are yet to be born. That's the fellowship of believers that transcends space and time. We are not in this alone. We are part of a huge family. So the first step in prayer is to get connected to God by acknowledging who he is and as you do, celebrate the fact that you are part of an awesome family. He is our father in heaven. There's a whole host of his children out there that you are connected to. This is the key to emotional health.

STEP TWO IS TO SURRENDER TO HIS PURPOSE AND WILL. The second line of the Lord's Prayer is: "*May your kingdom come, may your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.*" (Matt. 6:10) To pray this we must surrender our wills to his. You want to be successful in life then here's what you must do. **Stop trying to include God in your plans and start asking God to include you in his plans.** That is the key to success in life. Stop telling God, "God, I've got all these great plans and I know I'll be a success if you will just come over here and bless my plans." Instead, when you pray, ask God to include you in his plans, in his agenda. Offer your life to be used for his purposes today. Offer your body as a living sacrifice to be used for his glory. When you do that you will experience spiritual health.

STEP THREE IS TO TRUST HIM TO MEET ALL YOUR NEEDS. The third line in the Lord's Prayer reads: "*Give us this day our daily bread.*" (Matt. 6:11) When you trust God to provide all that you need, your stress level will go down. This step is the single greatest antidote to worry, ever. Jesus is not just talking about bread here. He's talking about whatever you need to survive today. When you pray, tell God how you are trusting him to supply all your needs for today. Tell God how you are expecting him to meet all your needs for today. God wants you to depend on him. He will supply all your needs one day at a time. Jesus tells us to ask for what we need one day at a time. It doesn't say, "Give us this week, or month or year,

what we need." We are given what we need one day at a time. And we are to trust God to give us what we need one day at a time. This is the key to financial health.

THE FOURTH STEP WHEN PRAYING IS TO ASK GOD TO FORGIVE YOU. The fourth line of the Lord's Prayer reads: *"And forgive us our sins as we forgive those who have sinned against us."* (Matt. 6:12) This is the key to relational health. This is the key to having healthy relationships. We live in a broken world and none of us are perfect. In fact, we're all selfish. I think more about me than I think about you. You think more about you than you do about me or anybody else. So we hurt each other. Sometimes we hurt each other intentionally and sometimes we hurt each other unintentionally. When I hurt you, it causes guilt in me. When you hurt me, it causes resentment in me. The solution or antidote to both of those things is forgiveness. This prayer asks God to forgive us and it declares our commitment to forgive others. After all, what right do we have to ask God to forgive us when we aren't willing to forgive others? The fourth step in prayer is to receive God's forgiveness and release others for the things they have done to us. Let it go. That's the key to relational health.

THE FIFTH STEP WHEN PRAYING IS TO ASK GOD TO PROTECT YOU. The fifth line of the Lord's Prayer reads: "Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil." (Matt. 6:13) This is the key to physical health. What is this step all about? It's about asking God in your quiet time for help in the areas you are struggling in. If I'm in debt and I've set a goal to get out of debt, why did I get into debt in the first place? Real simple - I spent more than I made. I bought things I didn't need with money I didn't have to impress people I didn't even like. That was the temptation. If I'm unhealthy it's because I didn't keep in shape. It's because I put the wrong things in my body or not the right things in my body, I don't move enough, or whatever. There are temptations always to do the easy thing. If you want to get healthy, you need to pray for God to lead you away from temptation and protect and shield you from the evil one who would like nothing less than to undermine your efforts to get healthy.

STEP SIX IS TO ACKNOWLEDGE GOD'S ULTIMATE VICTORY. The sixth line of the Lord's Prayer reads: *"For yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen."* (Matt. 6:13) What are we being told to do here? We are to acknowledge that God is the ultimate victory. No matter what happens today, no matter how many problems I face, no matter how much I mess up, in the end my life is secure in Christ. That's the good news. Jesus said, *"My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand."* (John 10:27 & 28) The apostle Paul understood this and that is why he said, *"I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from his love. Death Can't. Life can't. The angels can't. Demons can't. Our fears for today can't. Our worries about tomorrow can't. Even the powers of hell can't keep God's love away from us. Whether we're high above the earth or in the deepest recesses of the ocean, Christ is our Lord."* (Romans 8:38 NLT)

I hope you can see that the Lord's Prayer, while it was not meant to be what we are to pray, it certainly is an excellent guide for how we are to pray. Tomorrow morning I encourage you to use this template for your prayer time with God in your quiet time. The Lord's Prayer

truly is a prayer that will change you, not simply by saying it over and over but by using it as a guide for your daily prayer time.

There is no greater way to nurture your enthusiasm than to spend time each day with the Lord, reading his word, meditating on it, talking with God in prayer, and reviewing your daily goals with God, asking him to provide the strength you need to reach those goals.

What ever **F.A.I.T.H. goals** you set, make them **Focused**. Words like "more" or "less" are not specific enough. Make them **Attainable**. Unrealistic goals will only discourage you. Make them **Individual**. That means they are to be set by you and for you. Make them **Trackable**. Chart your progress toward a target date. Finally, let them be heartfelt. Make sure they are something you are passionate about.

If you haven't set any faith goals yet for this New Year, it's not too late. God desires for his people to grow and improve in all the many areas of our lives. You may need to set some goals in the area of your physical health. In that case you would begin by asking, "How would I like to be healthier?" You may want to work on your spiritual health. The question then would be, "How would I like to grow in the coming year to have the mind of Christ and see things as He sees them?" Maybe you need to set goals to improve your intellectual health. The question then would be, "What would I like to learn?" Maybe you recognize your need to improve your relational health. The question would then be, "Which relationships do I want to improve and what can I do to improve them?" Perhaps you need to improve your vocational health. In that case you might ask, "What new skills do I want to learn?" Maybe you need to work on your financial health. The question there would be, "What do I want to change?" Or maybe you would like to work on your emotional health. In that case, the question would be, "What can I do to get more connected with the Lord and with other believers for support and accountability?"