

Sacred Rhythms: Prayer

Matthew 7:7-11; Matthew 21:18-22; 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18; Philippians 4:6-7

Creation: Walking and Talking with God

In Genesis 3:8-9, we see God walking in the Garden and calling out to humanity. Prayer began as communion. It was the natural rhythm of life in God's presence. Humanity was created for ongoing fellowship. Prayer is a relationship, not a ritual.

At this time prayer was simple and familial and just a part of life. It is direct proximity with God lacking distance and having no doubts. In a sense the entire story of the Bible starts at this point and speaks to the plan that God has to attain this state of prayer with us again through Jesus by drawing us to Himself.

The Early Patriarchs: Calling on the Name of Jehovah

In Genesis 4:26; 12:7-8; 21:33; 26:25, we see Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob building altars and calling on the name of the LORD. Prayer became a way to remember the covenant, seek guidance, and intercede for others. Notice the form that prayer takes here. It's no longer talking. It's a call, it has altars, and it's almost a special occasion. This carries a heavy implication of distance. God is sought but those involved clearly feel that He is not nearby and is hard to attain.

In our current state today, it is hard for us to think of God being far away, but at the time of the patriarchs, there were very few loyal parties (to the best of our knowledge, only Abram and Melchizedek).

Israel's Rhythm: Prayer in the Hebrew Nation

In Exodus 33:11, we see Moses speaking with God 'face to face'. In Deuteronomy 6:4-9, we find *The Shema* (daily rhythm of prayer) expressing love for God with heart, soul, and strength.

Here in Exodus and Deuteronomy, it seems like the people have come a bit closer to God now. The leader no longer calls to God but meets Him face to face. The people no longer look to the leaders alone for intercession but rather have their own rhythms for reminders and endearment.

In Daniel 6:10, Daniel is faithful to the rhythm of prayer three times a day. He was committed to the rhythm of prayer even to the point of risking his life because the rhythm was how he gained proximity to God. It was almost as an expression of loyalty and endearment.

In Hebrew culture, prayer was a communal act. It was a rhythm of remembering who God is and who they are as His people.

The Psalms: The Prayerbook of God's People

The Psalms give voice to every human emotion: joy, fear, anger, repentance, praise, etc. (see Psalm 5:1-3; 42:1-2; 51; 139) They are both personal and communal prayers. They form hearts in honesty before God.

We still join in this rhythm today when we use Scripture to shape our prayers and worship. The Psalms show us that prayer is not performance; it's presence. The Psalms are interesting in that they push what subjects and what manners are actually okay to be admitted as prayer. These prayers don't take the form of calling a distant God nor seeking direction nor setting a constant reminder but rather they are personal. They seem to indicate by virtue of the author's words that it is okay to question things, that it is okay to express your thoughts and

emotions, and that it is okay to praise and to weep. It's a pretty stark contrast to other sentiments of prayer that we see in the Old Testament. The author speaks from a relationship of proximity and also recognizes that God is actually present in their current circumstances.

Jesus and the Rhythm of Prayer

Jesus models constant communion with the Father. (see Mark 1:35; Luke 5:16; 6:12; John 17) Jesus teaches His disciples to pray. (The Lord's Prayer - Matthew 6:9-13) But more than words, Jesus reveals the heart of prayer: intimacy, dependence, and alignment with the Father's will.

I like the Lord's prayer because it's kind of an all-in-one relationship gospel. Line by line it gives you the focus. First recognize God's position then recognize the importance of prioritizing God followed by recognizing that God has the best of intentions for us. It then moves into recognizing that God is our security and that we are not to trust in our excess to deliver us but only him. And then it finishes off by teaching us about reconciliation with God and each other and also asks for personal growth in that it says do not deliver us to the test but away from evil.

Read Matthew 7:7-11. Prayer is a natural rhythm and conversation with our Father. He is not a magic genie granting our wishes. Parents won't give something to their children that is harmful... even if they ask for it

Read Matthew 21:18-22. I have seen this scripture be weaponized against people saying "You must not have had enough faith." However, it's not about not doubting that God will do what you want. It is about not doubting that He is good and that we can trust Him no matter what the outcome is. "Even if He doesn't"... Daniel 3.

It is important to notice. It's not about faith giving you superpowers, nor a competition of who has the most faith. The ending connotation is "in prayer". If it's asked in prayer, it probably needs to be in alignment with who you're praying to. I think the point is that God can provide anything when you're aligned with Him. When you're not aligned and not trusting, moving a mountain for you will reinforce your ideas instead of God's plans.

The Early Church: A Community Formed by Prayer

The early church continued Jesus' rhythm of prayer as their lifeblood. For the early church, prayer was not a pause before action. It was the action that shaped everything else.

Our Rhythm Today: Living a Life of Prayer

Prayer continues to form us as people who love God and love others. It aligns us with God's mission, keeps us rooted in His presence, and empowers us to be able to love.

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18.

Read Philippians 4:6-7.

Closer to a personal conversation and adoration with God. Almost back to walking in step with God. The separation is almost gone. The veil is torn.

Prayer as a Rhythm

Prayer is a rhythm. Not an occasional act. It's a constant way of being present to God's presence in all of life. It is not one way communication. Listen! Prayer requires something from you...sacrifice, God will sometimes tell us to do something. We have to be willing to listen and respond.

Reflection Questions:

- How does seeing prayer as a *rhythm* (not an act) change your understanding of your relationship with God?
- Which “era” of prayer do you feel your own prayer life most resembles right now — calling from a distance, structured rhythm, or intimate communion?
- What practices help you stay aware of God’s presence throughout your day?
- Have you had a time when you didn’t get the answer you were expecting?
 - How did you react?
 - Looking back, can you see how God worked things for good? If not, spend some time thinking about and praying for insight.