Session Five: Teach Me to Pray (Part II)

Opening Discussion

1. The third commandment commands that we honor the sabbath day by keeping it holy. Many argue that they don't have to go to church to do that. They can talk to God on the boat while fishing, or they talk to God while on the commute to work every day. They fail to understand that true worship is about God talking to us (the Means of Grace). And notice how when it comes to the most personal and intimate aspect of our relationship with God—prayer—Jesus begins the prayer of all prayers with the pronoun "our." He prays, "Our Father, who art in heaven…" What might this suggest?

2. Read Matthew 6:1-18. The Lord's Prayer in the Gospel according to Matthew is situated within Jesus' "Sermon on the Mount." At play in this passage is a contrast between the disciples of Jesus who pray to be in relationship with God and the hypocrites who pray to be noticed by others. Also, you will see how forgiveness is highlighted at the end of the passage.

    - What does Jesus discuss prior to giving the Lord's Prayer? (See verses 5-8.)
    - How do you think we should apply Jesus' encouragements to pray in secret and to pray without heaping up empty words?
    - How does it feel to know that God know what you need before you ask Him? Why should we pray if He already knows what we need?
    - What sounds similar and what sounds different when you compare what Jesus says Matthew to what we pray when we say the Lord's Prayer? Similarly, how does this compare to what you find in Luke 11:2-4?

3. In Matthew 5:14-15, Jesus highlights the importance of forgiveness, even after teaching the disciples to pray the 5th petition of the Lord's Prayer—"forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors." In fact, notice how Mathew's version even explicitly states that we ***have already*** forgiven not that we "might" or "should" forgive. Notice also how both Matthew's and Luke's version of the Lord's Prayer use financial words to describe the sins of others that we are to forgive. What might that imply?

HOW DO I PRAY?

Martin Luther was once getting his hair cut (500 years ago!) and the barber asked, *"Luther, I have a hard time praying. I just don't know what to say. Could you help me."* So, Luther went home that day and wrote a little pamphlet entitled "A Simple Way to Pray." Luther's advice provides a simple, four-step procedure for how to pray. First, he begins with "Instruction." Luther teaches us to remind ourselves of what the Bible or the Catechism teaches us about God and His promises. The second step is "Thankfulness." We give God thanks for the certainty of His Word and His faithfulness. Third is "Confession." We repent of how we have failed to trust and live out the assurance and promise of His Word in our words and actions. Fourth, and finally, we "Petition" or ask God for what we need.

Let's practice...

A prayer for safe travel.

Dear _____,

INSTRUCTION

THANKSGIVING

CONFESSION

PETITION

A prayer for a friend that is having a hard time.

Dear _____,

INSTRUCTION

THANKSGIVING

CONFESSION

PETITION

Notes:

It's always good to listen to good prayers or find some good examples of prayers such as the very first page and pages 305 – 318 in the hymnal. Remember that prayer doesn't have to be perfect. Much of the time, we might find it difficult to put our thoughts and worries into words. Perhaps on those occasions, we can use the prayer Jesus taught us as a great outline for our prayers. We can just pray each line of the Lord's Prayer one at a time, and then pause and fill in our own thoughts. For example: "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven…' then we can add, "Lord, I know what I want isn't always what you want. Help me to trust your good and gracious will." However we pray, just know that more we do it , the more natural it will feel. Perhaps this is why the Bible is constantly urging us to pray!