

# PRAYER: YOUR SUPERNATURAL LINK

Five Guiding Values

## **Matthew 6:5-18**

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When I was a college student, I had an amazing experience. I spent part of a Christmas vacation at the University of Illinois attending a conference on international ministries. Some of the world's greatest theologians and Christian leaders were there. One day while standing in lunch line, I noticed a thin English gentleman next to me. Instantly, I knew him. He was a world-renowned author, an Anglican priest and a spiritual confidant for the Queen of England. I was thoroughly intimidated. If you can imagine me speechless, this is a good time to imagine that. I could hardly think of anything to say. I was so surprised to see him in line with us. My mind raced for words and also ideas. Finally, I settled on a pitiful joke. I remembered when Jesus said, "I had food to eat, ye know not of," (that's the 17<sup>th</sup> Century, King James Version of the Bible) so I told the famous leader: "I'm so surprised you are in line with us. I thought you had food to eat that we know not of." I was so proud. Not only had I overcome my stupefaction (at least in my mind), I actually quoted Scripture to the man. Impressive! The man asked, "Do you know where Jesus says that in the Bible?" In a split-second,

my balloon of pride popped and all the air gushed out. I was clueless about where Jesus said that. I went from pride to fear in a fraction of a second because this man would know shortly that I wasn't such a scholar after all. He was going to find me out. He said it again, "Do you know where Jesus says that in the Bible?" I think I answered, "The New Testament" or "The gospels." Like a Doberman going for the jugger vein, he asked, "Which gospel?" I wouldn't answer, and he turned his attention elsewhere. What was exciting became a totally dissatisfying conversation. My fear and pride prevented me from being honest, open and receptive to a meaningful relationship with a famous leader.

I share that story because I think many of us have a parallel experience with prayer. It can be a dissatisfying experience. The thought that the creator of the universe is listening to us is a nice sentiment, but it seems worlds away from reality. After all, if we are intimidated by the presence of a famous clergyman, political dignitary or entertainer – and they are as human as we are – how much more would we be stupefied by a meeting with God? Yet, isn't that the essence of prayer? Isn't it in essence a meeting with God? That is what Jesus taught in the gospel of Matthew. If then you are intimidated by mere human beings but comfortable with prayer, does not that comfort level suggest disbelief? Does it not suggest that you have not yet come to believe that God is present and hearing you?

For many of us, prayer is a religious formula we try. We work the formula based on our hopes, hurts and belief that it will make a difference. We request others to pray

for us either because we believe that is part of the formula or because we are not confident that God will respond to us.

It is exactly that understanding Jesus refuted in his sermon on the mount. He taught people not to think they would get anywhere because their prayers impressed others, used certain words, or were long and unrelenting like people of other religions. Prayer is not a religious formula. It is not a righteous act. Instead, Jesus declared prayer to be a meeting with God. "Shut yourself up away from others," he coached. "You are meeting with your Father," he told them. He was instructing people to be genuine and open with someone who really loved them, God almighty.

For the people who listened to Jesus, it was obvious that he was connected to God. It was obvious that he was well connected. They saw God answering Jesus' prayers. They saw Jesus enjoying a confidence and an intimacy with God. As a result, they hung on every word. What was Jesus' secret? The disciples had a hint. They witnessed Jesus' amazing faith and the extraordinary periods of time he spent in prayer. They saw clearly that he had a supernatural link.

The one difference between Jesus and every other human being, according to Peter and other disciples, is that Jesus did not suffer from the sin of unbelief. He was free to form a perfectly trusting and obedient relationship with God, and though tempted otherwise, he did. At every turn, he encouraged people to believe in God's love for them. He encouraged people to believe in God's ear for them. He encouraged people to believe in God's arm and hand at work for them. Finally, he encouraged people to believe in God's mission through him. God was reaching out to our ancestors and God is reaching

out to us through Jesus. In embracing Jesus, we receive all the rights of Jesus. God wants us to have those rights. God wants us to have the same link with God as Jesus. God wants you to have the same supernatural link as Jesus. Do you believe that? What you believe makes all the difference. It makes all the difference in what you attempt and what you experience.

Do you believe that God really loves and values you? Yes or no? Do you believe that God actually listens to what you say? Yes or no? Do you believe God has a heart for you? Do you believe that God is dumb, mute or unwilling to speak to you? Do you believe God is bound and unable to respond to your requests? What do you really believe?

Sometimes, we are unwilling to answer questions like that directly. We are afraid of what will be exposed. That is what happened with me the day I stood in a lunch line with a world-renowned leader. My pride and fear robbed me of a great opportunity to learn, be blessed and enjoy an unusual man. What is pride and fear doing to us, right now?

For six weeks this fall I spoke on Bethany's mission statement. We live with this imperative: *Go and bring people to faith and freedom in Jesus Christ*. That is not a call to merely fill these pews. That is not a call for you to enroll in a program. In ten years of study and twenty years of experience, I've learned that churches do not grow with gimmicks, advertising or programs. They grow only as you build people. People are wary of gimmicks and advertising, and programs can only do so much. I believe that we

can only pursue our mission effectively if we build people here. People love people. People bless people. People bring people. People help people.

I discovered that the Bible values five things that really builds people. One of those five is prayer. The other four we will talk about in the next four weeks. Without prayer, you have no link to God. Prayer is your supernatural link. Prayer is key to many changes in my life. Through prayer I've established a link with God that has revealed his love and displayed his power. Jesus saw prayer as a key. I do too.

Prayer is key to my intimacy with God. Prayer is critical to my vision, my awareness, my obedience and my faith. If there is one thing we need to do at Bethany to help you fulfill your purpose in living, to help you embrace your call in life, to help you live as a disciple, it is to help you pray.

Go to classes on prayer, like the one going on in the Adult Sunday School class. Join a prayer group, like the one held on Tuesdays. Get someone to pray with you regularly. Let a prayer team minister to your needs, like the one available each Sunday morning. Call them to your home. Expose yourself to prayer, and start calling out to God. God is your divine father, your papa. God is not an absent father, an abusive father nor a sinful father. Call to him. Get alone and call to him. You have a supernatural link that will build you and change you. Don't let your pride or fear get in your way. Don't squander your opportunity.

