

A Lenten Progress

A Six Sundays' Journey to the Cross and Resurrection of Jesus

Sessions

1. Confession of sin
 2. Confession of dependence
 3. Questions and Doubts
 - 4. Seeking God's Face**
 5. Longings and Affections
 6. Making His Words our Words
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What is the purpose of prayer?

1. Review

Last week Mark talked about struggling in prayer and gave an exhortation to develop intimacy with God through prayer. At times people struggle with why they should pray if God knows what they need, want, or is going to do anyway. Clearly that does not deter anyone in scripture from prayer and seems to have the opposite affect on their prayer. They pray because they know God knows and because they know God is able to do something about it.

2. **We must ask what is prayer? Whatever we say about what prayer is, we must seek to say it in such a way it shows the uniqueness of Christian prayer.**

1. All the major religions have prayer. Prayer is clearly not unique to Christians and a vast majority of humans of all cultures and throughout history have prayed. Even people who do not believe in God have some way of attending to their own thoughts and desires, of seeking to gain peace between their inner life and their outer life.
2. Things that are similar: Talking to a deity in requests, adoration, or confession is not distinctive to Christians. Praying to achieve some sense of peace with our circumstances or who we are is not distinctive. Nor is seeking to have a spiritual experience with the divine.

3. Things that are dissimilar: Christian prayer is not irrational or unemotional or purely intellectual or psychological. What is distinct about Christian prayer and meditation from eastern forms of meditation and mysticism is God is personal. Christian prayer requires serious mental and emotional reasoning. But it is also experiential for it is an encounter with the divine personality, and the fullness of God as we pray to the Father, through the Son, and in the Spirit. It is not the same as Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) that seeks to reinterpret our personal narratives along secular atheist lines. Because in prayer with God, we are reinterpreting our personal narratives according to his redemptive story.

3. Christian prayer is primarily about seeking the face of God.

1. Many things are secondary to seeking his face. Adoration, Confession, Petition, Intercession, Thanksgiving are all in response to the kind of God he is, whom we would not know if he did not show himself to us.
2. If your prayers are filled with requests, you are missing out on a deeper experience of prayer. You will be tempted to love God for what he gives, rather than for who he is

4. Moses request, Ex. 33:12-23

1. "The Lord would speak to Moses, face to face, as one speaks with a friend." (Ex. 33:11)
2. Moses knows he cannot go forward, if the Lord himself does not go with them. The Lord honors his request, which is not for their success, but for the Lord's presence. He requests to see his glory.
3. Lord instead passes over Moses, declaring his attributes in Ex. 34:6-7:

And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, "The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation."

5. Let prayer begin, consider the nature of God and his attributes.

Do not neglect your body, its posture and tension before you begin. Use deep breathing exercises to relax your tension, especially in anxious times like the present one.

6. Meditate on the passage, prior to praying it. Consider the Ignatian example of Scriptural meditation¹

- ~ Quiet your heart and mind, and focus on the presence of God. Focus on the truth of how the Lord views you. You are the Beloved.
- ~ Seek to become still. Seek to quiet your mind.
- ~ Offer your will and actions to God. Ask God for the grace to receive what you most need during this prayer.
- ~ Read *reflectively* the Scripture passage and enter the place of this Scripture.
- ~ Receive and reflect noting any movement around a word, phrase, thought, idea, or image.
- ~ Ponder what rises to the surface. Embrace it, meditate (“chew on it”) it. Ask the Lord to clarify what He says to you.
- ~ Reread the passage, this time with the word, phrase, thought, or idea that came to the surface. See if God brings additional insight to you. *Receive and ponder what He stirred within you. This is meditation.*
- ~ Speak to God as your heart and mind are moved. You might talk it through with Him, journal, draw, sing, etc.
- ~ **Concluding your time:** Spend some time sitting with what has been received by you during this time with Him. Allow Him to determine the outcome, not you.
- ~ Close with gratitude and any form of prayer you desire. (A formal prayer like *The Lord's Prayer* or a spontaneous colloquy).

7. For this week, use the Ignatian Examen. Start your day with a the Lord's prayer or a Psalm, and conclude your day with the Examen.

Please note, I only recommend this on the assumption we know the Lord's character and trust the scriptures lest it descends into the problems of mysticism.

¹ Guides taken from class notes by Deborah Swanson, Denver Seminary, *CF 611 Christian Formation and Soul Care Intensive. Summer 2016*

An Outline of the Examen

This outline is based on Ignatius's presentation of the Examen in the *Spiritual Exercises* (43).

- Transition:** I become aware of the love with which God looks upon me as I begin this Examen.
- Gratitude:** I note the gifts that God's love has given me this day and I give thanks to God for them.
- Petition:** I ask God for an insight and a strength that will make this Examen a work of grace, fruitful beyond my human capacity alone.
- Review:** With my God, I review the day. I look for the stirrings in my heart and the thoughts that God has given me this day. I look also for those that have not been of God. I review my choices in response to both and throughout the day in general.
- Forgiveness:** I ask for the healing touch of the forgiving God Who, with love and respect for me, removes my heart's burden. [the emphasis here is to *experientially receive* God's forgiveness and grace, comment, mine.]
- Renewal:** I look to the following day and with God, plan concretely how to live in accord with God's loving desire for my life.
- Transition:** Aware of God's presence with me I prayerfully conclude the Examen.

NOTE: The Examen is fundamentally relational, not a seven-step exercise to be accomplished, achieved, or worked through. It is *received*. It can be said that Examen is done *to us* by the Trinity as it is received in the context of a loving relationship. In this sense, it is a spiritual exercise; something we do to create time and space to encounter God. But is it also something that God does as we open ourselves to Him. It is both/and. It is a time of mutual self-revelation and fosters spiritual growth.

Outline: Timothy M. Gallagher, OMV. *The Examen Prayer: Ignatian Wisdom for Our Lives Today*. New York: Crossroad Publishing, 2006. p 25.