

Life Group Topic #3 January 25, 2009
Learning to Pray in the 21st Century

WELCOME: (15 minutes)

If you were have coffee with newly elected President Barack Obama, and could tell him one reason why you love being a Canadian, what would you tell him?

WORSHIP: (15 minutes)

Use whatever means possible to turn the group's attention to the wonder and majesty of our God- including music, prayer, meditation on the Psalms, and other art forms.

WORD APPLICATION: (45 minutes)

Briefly read or paraphrase the following sermon summary before moving to the heart of this section: the discussion around the application questions.

For many people today prayer is simply **BORING**. Of course we would NEVER say such a thing, but that is the way we often feel. Why? We live in a fast-paced, high-tech world and the mystical quest for God just can't compete.

Prayer is Keeping Company with God: Psalm 63: 1, 6-8.

- What we need is a whole new understanding of what prayer is.
- It was one of the early church Fathers, Clement of Alexandria who said that "prayer is keeping company with God". It is not a somber ritual reserved for bedtime, not a formula, not a transaction, it's a friendship.
- David knew this friendship with God. **Read: Psalm 63: 1, 6-8.**

Two Sides of Prayer: I want to talk about the two sides of prayer that we see modeled in Jesus.

1. Solitary Prayer: (Mark 1:35, Luke 6:12, Luke 21:37)

Despite all the demands on Jesus' time, despite all the expectations that people placed on him, he made it a point to spend time alone with His Father. In the mountains and hills of Judea Jesus found quiet places to meet with His Father. And Jesus challenges us to follow that same pattern. **(Matthew 6:6)**

If you call yourself a follower of Jesus, then **you must find a solitary place to daily get alone with God.** You know in first century Palestine, Jesus had to pretty much wander off into the hills early in the morning to get away from the crowds. In the Western world today, with all the privacy of big houses, we may find a quiet place right in our homes. But it will still take discipline to shut off all the electronic gadgets of our technological world, and all the demands of a fast-paced life to pursue solitude with the Father. It will take grabbing the alarm clock and setting it for 30 or 60 minutes earlier than we normally do, or shutting off the TV 30-60 minutes earlier than we normally do.

2. City Prayer:

But there is a second side to prayer. If we take a closer look at Jesus life- we soon discover that His connectedness to the Father didn't end when he came off the mountain back into the cities of Palestine. The relationship with his Father carried on throughout the day. **(John 5:19, 8:28, 29).**

It is very clear that everything Jesus did and said was not done on his own initiative, but prompted by His Father. As Jesus went about his work in the city, he knew the mind of his Father, and he carried out his will. The Father and Son were acting in unison. Though it was Jesus who people saw, it was the Father at work behind the scenes. Jesus again asks us to imitate this life-style! **(John 15:4,5)**

City prayer is keeping connected with God in the places where we work and live – throughout the day. City prayer is that ongoing pursuit of God in the busy places of daily life.

We can no longer think of prayer as an isolated fragment of our lives. Yet for most of my life I thought of prayer this way. When I finished my private prayers with AMEN, it meant THE END! Prayer time is over!

But when prayer is defined as keeping company with God, **then it's never over.** When we come off the mountain of solitude with God into the noisy cities of the 21st century, prayer will simply take a different form. We may be fully engaged in our study, our work, and our conversations with others; yet all along we are keeping company with God. We are aware of his presence, aware of his promptings, alert and listening to his signals.

We are learning that prayer is not primarily something we do. Prayer is clearly more of a posture before God. It is always watching, always listening, so we might respond to the impulses of God. James Houston writes: **As we learn to hear his voice, we become more concerned about knowing his mind than letting him know our thoughts.**

My dream for you is that prayer (keeping company with God) would become the greatest pursuit of your life. **My dream for you** is that your personal prayer life becomes so strong, that its vitality overflows into the Life Group where you belong. **My dream for our Life Groups** is that they would pulsate with powerful prayer like that of the early church. **(Act 4:31)**

Word Application Questions:

Please keep in mind that these questions are meant as catalysts to get the group talking...

- 1. What has been your growing-up experience of prayer? Positive or negative? Explain.**
- 2. If I mounted a webcam on your shoulder to document how much you pray in a given day, what would I find? Is prayer dead in the 21st century?**
- 3. Read Psalm 63:1, 6-8. What does this passage tell us about David's prayer life? Is the definition of prayer as keeping company with God accurate for David?**
- 4. Look at solitary prayer life of Jesus in Mark 1:35 and Luke 21:37. To what extent is it possible for us to follow this model?**
- 5. Consider the definition of city prayer: Keeping connected with God in the places where we work and live – throughout the day. Is that possible? What might that look like for you?**
- 6. Is it possible for God to speak to us throughout the day- prompting us to obey his still small voice? If so, how do we discern that it is God and not our own ideas?**
- 7. Consider Doug's dreams for Life Groups in the last paragraph above. Could that happen in your Life Group?**

WITNESS: (15 minutes)

This section is a vision-casting time designed to get the group making plans towards reaching outward to a lost world.