



A COMMUNITY
OF PRAYER

A Word from the Vicar

Dear Brothers and sisters in Christ,

Shalom. As part of the discipleship process of the church, we will be preparing a series of teachings for the cell groups to use. The theme for the material will center around the Church as a Community. Of course, there are many aspects of being a community. Therefore, we ask what kind of community.

The church is an assembly made up of many people in the congregation. The bigger the size of the church, the more alienated the members are. The cell groups, therefore, become a vital link and mechanism to care for the members spiritually and physically. The members make up the cells, and the cells make up the church. Each piece plays their part and they are all important.

We start by learning how to be a Church as a Community of Prayer.

Prayer is an important part of Christian life. It is the way we rely and communicate with God. It is also the way we show love to each other.

Somehow, many failed to pray. The often used excuses are 1) don't know how to pray and 2) no time to pray.

Well, pray we must. If we want to keep sane and survive in the physical and spiritual world, then pray without ceasing is our only way.

Rightfully, we start with prayer. So, let us learn to be a community of prayer together.

Just to let you know the overview of things to come, we will be building the church as a community:

- Of Prayer
- Of Praise and Worship
- Of Belonging
- Of Healing
- Of Growth in Holiness
- Of Compassion, concern and care
- Where God's gifts are given and used
- Of Preaching and Teaching
- Of Welcome and Witness

Revd Barry Leong

“Prayer is the first thing, the second thing, the third thing necessary to a servant of Jesus Christ. Pray then.... Pray, pray, pray”

Edward Payson

What Is PRAYER?

"The essence of prayer does not consist in asking God for something but in opening our hearts to God, in speaking with Him, and living with Him in perpetual communion. Prayer is continual abandonment to God.

Prayer does not mean asking God for all kinds of things we want; it is rather the desire for God Himself, the only Giver of Life.

Prayer is not asking but union with God.

Prayer is not a painful effort to gain from God help in the varying needs of our lives. Prayer is the desire to possess God Himself, the Source of all life.

The true spirit of prayer does not consist in asking for blessings, but in receiving Him who is the Giver of all blessings, and in living a life of fellowship with Him."

- Sadhu Sundar Singh

Church as a Community of Prayer 1

Are You Too Busy for God?

“The men (& women) who have done the most for God in this world have been early on their knees. He (or she) who fritters away the early morning, its opportunity and freshness, in other pursuits than seeking God will make poor headway seeking Him the rest of the day. If God is not first in our thoughts and efforts in the morning, He will be in the last place the remainder of the day.” –

E. M. Bounds

For the church to be a community of prayer, her people must be people of prayer. They must see prayer, both personal and church prayer, not only as important but the lifeline to faith, which must be given the topmost priority.

Prayer is the thermometer that measures the depth and authenticity of our faith and love for God. It indicates where our heart is and where our dependence lies; on God, on self, on people or the things of the world. How often we pray, what we pray about, how we pray indicate whether our faith in God is deeply rooted or just skin-deep. The essence of our prayer also reflects how important or unimportant God is to us.

We often give the excuse that we are too busy to pray; there are many things that demand our time and attention. However, it is not that we have no time; the truth is we have no time when it comes to prayer.

We are never too busy to do the things we like to do, e.g. shopping, sports / hobby, feasting, watching our favorite TV program, etc. We are also never too busy to do what is important to us, e.g. work. Hence, something is wrong if we drag our feet when it comes to prayer. Our reluctance to pray may actually mean that we don't enjoy spending time with God and / or we think spending time with Him is not that important.

James Houston in his book *The Transforming Power of Prayer* said; “Prayer will have a very low priority, at the very best, for people who live busy lives. None of us is too busy for the things that we regard as priorities. We are only too busy for those things that are of low or no importance in our daily schedules. We may live by the clock, but more importantly, **we live by our priorities**. When friendship is a low priority, we have no time for our friends.” Likewise, if God and spending time with Him is low priority, we will have no time for Him.

The Disease of Busyness

For those who are too busy to pray, Houston warned; “Busyness is an addictive drug, which is why its victims are referred to as ‘workaholics’.” What are we busy about? And why do we allow these things to take up so much of our time and attention?

Houston believed busy people are often those who are “determined not to ‘miss out on life’.” Behind much of the rat-race of modern life is the unexamined assumption that what I do determines who I am.” He said that busy people are more concerned with the outer world than their inner world, with how they look than who they really are. They are often preoccupied with achievements and material success.

Houston once asked his students to find out what the bible says about the word ‘achievement’. After extensive research, they discovered that there is not a single trace of the word ‘achievement’ throughout the whole bible. What does the bible’s silence on the subject of human achievement say to us? That it is not important! If it is not important to God, should we then let it have priority in our lives?

Putting Prayer as Priority in our Lives

The medieval monks lived the rhythm of *ora et labora* (prayer and work); they prayed first and then went out to do their work. They started and also ended their day with time spent in God’s presence.

Let’s start our day with prayer. The busier we are, the more we need to pray. Nothing, not even our church involvement, should substitute our time with God in prayer. Commit our day to God; thank Him for each new day. When our whole life revolves around prayer we will have a fresh perspective of life and what are its essentials.

William Law, a writer said, “The man or woman who has learned to pray has learned the greatest secret of a holy and a happy life.” Never be too busy to pray!

For Cell Group Discussion / Personal Reflection

Text: Daniel 6: 1-23

What Sacrifice Would You Make to Spend Unhurried Time with God Daily?

1. Daniel's devotion to God was known to the people around him. He would pray and give thanks to God 3X a day (vv. 3-4, 10). But king Darius' injunction would stop him from doing that. What did the injunction forbid (7-8) and what was Daniel's response (10-11)?
2. What sacrifice was Daniel ready to make in order to protect his daily prayer times? What does Daniel's response tell you about his faith and devotion to God? What sacrifice would you make in order to spend time in prayer daily?
3. What was the result of Daniel's faithfulness and what does Dan 6: 23b say to you personally?
4. Who / what is competing with God for your time and attention? What specific steps do you need to take in order to spend unhurried and undistracted time with God daily? / Share with others in the group how you have / will live out the *ora et labora* principle daily?
5. End with a time of prayer and ask God to give you the wisdom to know your priorities and the discipline to spend unhurried and meaningful time with Him daily to pray and to read His word. Pray that the Holy Spirit will protect you from distractions and the devil's ploy to lure you away from God. Pray that the church will be transformed by the Spirit to be a community of prayer.

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Church as a Community of Prayer 2

Prayer is to Speak to God Heart to Heart

“To be a Christian without prayer is no more possible than to be alive without breathing.” – Martin Luther

To some Christians, prayer is nothing more than bringing to God their list of needs, hence, they approach God only when they need Him. To others, prayer is the mere recitation of the ‘Lord’s Prayer’ or the solemn reading of the prayers in the Prayer Book. Talking to God without these prepared prayers can be a frightening experience for them. There are also believers who see prayer as engaging the devil in warfare and are constantly battling demonic forces whenever they pray. We also have believers who equate prayer with Benedictine or Gregorian chanting.

Prayer is not a religious activity; we should also not see prayer as a duty or obligation to be grudgingly observed. The distinctiveness of the Christian faith is, we are called to a relationship with God and prayer is communication between the immortal God and mortal beings. Without prayer, there is no relationship, hence, no faith.

The health of any relationship depends on the communication between the parties involved. E.g. in a marriage, the strength of the marital relationship depends on the regularity and nature of the communication between husband and wife. Hence, the depth and the strength of our faith in God depend on how & what we talk to God about and how often we communicate with Him.

Prayer should be relational and not just functional; coming to God to get what we want or to engage in spiritual warfare, etc. Prayer is to seek to know God and to involve Him in every aspect of our life, sharing with Him our fears and struggles, as well as, our joys and dreams. Prayer is to enjoy God’s presence and to delight in God, knowing also He delights in us.

True prayer comes from deep within our souls; it is to speak to God heart to heart. Not only can we pour out our heart before God; we can be totally honest and vulnerable with Him, knowing that He will not judge us. Prayer, therefore, is our greatest privilege and joy.

James Houston in *The Transforming Power of Prayer* said that prayer is a friendship not a rigorous discipline, a relationship and not a performance. Sharing from years of walking with God, Houston believed that when we pray, our whole

beings are lifted into the presence of the Lord and we experience intimately His forgiveness, His love and His holiness. Houston said heaven becomes real to us when we pray.

Houston emphasized that the focus of our prayers should not be the act of prayer or our endless needs but the Trinitarian God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Prayer involves seeking the mind of Jesus, the heart of the Father and appreciating the role of the Spirit in our lives. It is enjoying union with God, knowing what it means to belong to Him, to trust Him and to share with Him all of our life. How tragic it is then that for many of us, personal prayer is the most neglected area of life.

In conclusion, prayer is not a skill to master so that we can manipulate God to do what we want. Neither should prayer be seen as a duty to be performed religiously. In prayer, we know our identity, our security; who we are in Christ. It is a time of relationship-building where we experience with certainty how precious we are to God, learning also to discern what is on our Father's heart.

Our prayer life reveals the depth of our devotion to God, our trust in Him and our appreciation of who He is and what He has done for us. In other words, our enthusiasm or disinterest in prayer is reflective of our dependency or lack of trust in God. A crisis in prayer is really a crisis of our faith!

For Cell Group Discussion / Personal Reflection

Text: Psalm 91

The Privilege of Being in God's Presence

1. Share a time when you had a heart to heart talk with God / when you felt the presence of God embracing you when you were praying. How did this experience refresh, comfort or transform you? How would you encourage a believer who said he doesn't know how to pray to come into God's presence daily?
2. What did the Psalmist say about the presence of God (v. 2)? How did he feel dwelling in 'the shelter of the Most High' and abiding in 'the shadow of the Almighty' and what did he believe God would do for him (3-7)?
3. What will God do for those who take refuge in Him and dwell in His presence (9-13)?
4. What did God promise He will do for the person 'who holds fast to Me in love' and 'who knows my Name' (14-16)? What does it mean for you to hold fast to God in love and to know His name (14)?
5. Pray for yourself and one another that 'heaven becomes real to you' or that you can feel the closeness of God when you pray. Pray that God will help you to open your heart to Him and that you will also hear what is on His heart.
6. End with the song "As the Deer Panteth for the Water" based on Psalm 42. The group can either sing or listen to the song on Youtube.

As the Deer Panteth for the Water

As the deer panteth for the water
So my soul longeth after Thee
You alone are my heart's desire
And I long to worship Thee

Chorus

You alone are my strength my shield
To You alone may my spirit yield
You alone are my heart's desire
And I long to worship Thee

You're my friend
And You are my brother
Even though You are a King
I love You more than any other
So much more than anything

I want You more than gold
Or silver
Only You can satisfy
You alone are the real joy giver
And the apple of my eye

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Church as a Community of Prayer 3

Coming Before the Throne of Grace

“I have been driven many times to my knees by the overwhelming conviction that I had absolutely no other place to go.”

– Abraham Lincoln (16th President of the United States).

For many Christians their prayer times are like the Meet-the-People Sessions with the Member of Parliament (MP) in the constituency. We approach God the way we go to the MP to tell him what needs to be fixed and what he needs to do to resolve the problem. The focus of the meeting / prayer is on the problem and our expectations.

We forget that in prayer we are coming before the throne of God Most High who rules over the world and the whole universe. He is the great and mighty God before whom every knee must bow. To be able to come before His heavenly throne is a great privilege and we should approach Him with eagerness and reverence.

What Should Be Our Attitudes in Prayer?

Charles Spurgeon in his book *“The Power of Prayer”* said that we should check our hearts and make sure that we have the right heart posture / attitudes when we approach God seated on the heavenly throne. Spurgeon said, first, we should come before God in a spirit of **reverence and respect** desiring to praise and give honor to the King. All pride and self-focus should be cast aside as we approach the throne. We do not come to make demands; we come to bow down before the King of kings and Lord of lords.

Second, we should approach God’s throne with **joy and thanksgiving**. It is a privilege to be among the favored few to stand before the King and we should be thankful that we can bring our petitions to Him. Let us, therefore, bring our requests to the Sovereign God with joy & praise knowing that He listens to all our prayers and knows our every need.

Third, we should approach God Most High with **humble submission**. Our attitude should not be to instruct God on what we expect Him to do for us. Who are we to dictate to the all-knowing and all-powerful God? Instead we must humbly accept that our ways are not His ways and our thoughts are not His thoughts. Our prayers should be, “Not as we want, but as You will.”

Fourthly, if we are bringing our petitions before the Almighty God, we ought to come with **unwavering trust** instead of doubt which should be far from our hearts. We should approach Him with unwavering faith and confidence that He has the power to help us and will help us because of His unwavering love for us.

Finally, we should always approach God with **honest sincerity**. Will our Lord be delighted to hear words coming from a thoughtless mind, a frivolous tongue or an insincere heart? Prayer is not something to be taken lightly or to be done half-heartedly. Indeed, it is a great privilege that, as children of God, we can come before the throne of Heaven at any time we will and wherever we are.

Let us not forget that it is no trivial thing to come before the throne of God and let us come before Him on bended knees. As the Psalmist says; *“O come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the LORD our maker. For He is our God; and we are the people of His pasture, and the sheep of His hand.”* (Psalm 95:6-7)

For Cell Group Discussion / Personal Reflection

Text: Psalm 95

How should we Approach the King of kings and Lord of lords?

1. How does the fact that in prayer you are standing before God Almighty seated on the heavenly throne change the way you pray; how and what you pray about?
2. What did the Psalmist say are 5 things we should do as we come before the throne of God (Psalm 95: 1-2; 6)?
3. What did the Psalmist remind us to remember about the God to whom we come in prayer (vv. 3-5, 7)?
4. What would you say is your normal heart posture / attitude when you come before God in prayer? On a scale of 1-10 (1 being lowest, 10 highest) how would you rate yourself in the following? Which attitude/s are you weak in and what can you do to be strong in this area/s?
 - Reverent Respect.
 - Joyful Thanksgiving.
 - Humble Submission.
 - Unwavering Trust & Confidence.
 - Honest Sincerity.

5. What warning did the Psalmist give about our heart (Psalm 95: 8-10; cf. Exodus 17: 1-7)? In what ways can our prayers test God and reflect hardness of heart?
6. End the time with prayer. Pray for yourself, for one another and for the church., that God through the Holy Spirit will open our eyes to see His greatness and power. Pray also that the Spirit will do a deep work in our hearts that we will have a reverent awe of God and that our hearts will be ready to submit to His will, trust Him in spite of our situations and eager to seek His presence.
7. The group may want to end with the hymn "How Great Thou Art". Sing it as a prayer to the Lord.

How Great Thou Art

O Lord my God, when I in awesome wonder,
Consider all the worlds Thy hands have made;
I see the stars, I hear the rolling thunder,
Thy power throughout the universe displayed.

Chorus:

Then sings my soul, my Savior God, to Thee,
How great Thou art! How great Thou art!
Then sings my soul, My Savior God, to Thee,
How great Thou art! How great Thou art!

And when I think, that God, His Son not sparing;
Sent Him to die, I scarce can take it in;
That on the cross, my burden gladly bearing,
He bled and died to take away my sin.

When Christ shall come, with shout of acclamation,
And take me home, what joy shall fill my heart.
Then shall I bow, in humble adoration,
And then proclaim, "My God, how great Thou art!"

Church as a Community of Prayer 4

Prayer is to Come into Our Father's Presence

"Prayer is confessing our needs to God, and baring our hearts to Him, as children lay their troubles in full confidence before their parents." – John Calvin

Throughout the OT God is often referred to as Yahweh, the name which His people dared not utter for fear of offense. Fewer than seven times is God referred to as a Father to His people. Yet in the gospels, Jesus casting aside all restraint speaks of God as Father more than 70 times. It is a radical and new revelation that God is our Father. Suddenly our relationship to God is put in a new light. God enters our lives to become our Father, one who is perfect in love, wisdom and faithfulness. In prayer we come as beloved children eager to be in the presence of our Father who knows our every need.

For us to have a vibrant & intimate relationship with God we need to know His Fatherly nature. Unless we begin to grasp what kind of person our heavenly Father is, we will not be able to enjoy the close, personal relationship God wants to have with us. We also would not be able to love or trust Him fully if we hardly know Him.

Phillip Keller in *A Layman Looks at the Lord's Prayer* said the most outstanding attribute of our heavenly Father is His love. Keller elaborated that this love is totally selfless and different from our human understanding of love. So much of our love is self-centered and conditional. With our heavenly Father, however, His love for us is steadfast, unconditional and without measure. His care, concern and affection for us are not dependent on His moods or our good behavior. As we approach our heavenly Father in prayer, we can be confident that He will not turn His back on us.

Keller also said that God, our Father does not stand apart and aloof from our trials. He does not sit sternly in condemnation & judgement of His children. Rather, He looks upon us with compassion and deep concern. He is moved by our little efforts to resist evil and to do what pleases Him. And He extends to us His helping hand to lift us up when we fall or are in distress. He also offers to those who are weary and overwhelmed by life's many problems His shoulder to lean and to cry on.

When we approach God, our Father, we are drawing close to One who completely understands us. This should give us enormous comfort and consolation.

Sometimes we don't even understand ourselves. Only God fully understands why we are who we are and why we do what we should not do. He knows our struggles & our problems. He not only knows and understands, like a Father, He will always stand by our side and be with us even if the whole world is against us. Hence, we can come to God, our Father, confident to receive from Him His compassion and kindness, understanding and affection, grace and forgiveness. How good to know there is Someone who truly understands; who knows all about us and even though He knows the worst about us, He still loves us.

Keller said that wrapped in this expression, 'Our Father,' lies a whole dimension of intimate companionship between Father and us. It is a special relationship of trust, love and understanding. God is our Father; you and I are the objects of His constant love and attention. His concern and care for us are never ending. His patience, compassion, and understanding are always extended to you and me. In every situation of life, no matter how difficult, we can have this quiet assurance in our hearts that; 'I am His and He is mine.'

Because He is our Father, we can be sure that our prayers are heard. We can also be sure that our Father will answer our prayers, perhaps not in the way we expect but definitely, for our well-being.

Our Father – just two short words. Yet they have a whole world of meaning wrapped up in them. They convey to our heart and mind the intimacy and the oneness imperfect beings can have with the Almighty.

No other religion in the world promises such an intimate relationship between God and man. No other philosophy or teaching so intimately touches the human heart. Do you really know God as your Father? You can!

For Cell Group Discussion / Personal Reflection

Text: Matt 6: 9-13

Prayer is to Confide in Your Heavenly Father

1. How can our relationship with our earthly father adversely affect our relationship with our heavenly Father? List 10 things a good father would do for his children besides providing for their material needs.
2. Which aspect of God's fatherly love described in the article speak to you personally?
3. What insights did Jesus reveal about God, our heavenly Father (vv. 6-10)? How should it change the way you pray?

4. What did Jesus teach His disciples about praying to the Father?
- “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your Name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven” (vv. 9-10), that is, to remember _____

 - “To give us this day our daily bread” (11), meaning to ask God for _____

 - “To forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors” (12), that _____ is, _____ to _____

 - “To lead us not into temptation but to deliver us from evil” (13), that, _____

5. End with time of prayer. Remember that you are talking to your Father in heaven what would you say to Him. Ask Him to reveal to you, the group, the church what is on His heart and what is His will for each person.

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