



# Growing as Disciples and Stewards

## Introductory Comments

When do you pray? Why do you pray? What is it that you pray for? Who do you pray for? When one thinks about life as a disciple and steward, prayer is a foundational faith and discipleship practice as it encompasses all of life. Prayer, by simple definition, is one's conversation with God. It is speaking to God and listening for God in an ongoing conversation about the gift of life. Prayer comes in many forms. Our prayers can express joy, praise, and thanksgiving. They also can express need and concerns in prayers of supplication, intercession, and lament. Our prayers can also take the form of those seeking advice, council, wisdom, strength, and clarity. In all cases, we are in conversation with God, not only sharing what's on our mind but also listening for God. As we engage in this discipleship practice on a regular basis, we grow in the understanding of God's grace and God's presence with us each day. Indeed, we experience both the joy and comfort that prayer can bring in our journey of faith.

The Psalms are great examples of prayer amid the stuff of life. As you read the Psalms, it is the experience of a conversation between the psalmist and God concerning the diverse aspects and issues of life. For in them, we hear expressions of joy, praise, and thanksgiving for God's continued presence and action in the lives of the people of Israel. The Psalms also reflect conversations seeking God's continued presence, care, and protection as one faces the questions, conundrums, and fragility of life. They also reflect the outreach of prayer as people around us, both known and unknown, along with life situations are considered in this ongoing conversation with God. Indeed, one can learn a great deal about prayer in the simple reading of the Psalms for they represent what prayer is, an ongoing conversation with God about all that is present in life.

Prayer is all about relationship with God. It is the faith and discipleship practice of prayer that embodies the "personal" of one's relationship with God. This takes place because prayer, at its core, embraces open and honest conversations with God about all that life brings to us. It is an ongoing conversation that envelops us in God's gift of continuing grace and presence in our lives.

## Growing as Disciples and Stewards

Prayer is a foundational element of growing as disciples and stewards. The practice of prayer recognizes God's desire to be in relationship with us and our delight of being immersed in God's grace in Christ. Prayer is essential in growing, nurturing, and deepening this grace relationship between God and believer. Taking this one step further, prayer is vital as one lives in and lives out God's grace each day through our discipleship and stewardship. As disciples and stewards, prayer surrounds all life and all we do as God's people.

# Bible Study



## *Philippians 4:4-7 and Matthew 6:9-13*

In his letter to the Philippians, the Apostle Paul encourages people to pray.

His exhortation comes at the end of his letter after reminding the Philippians of God's abundant grace in Christ, the joy of living in and living out this gift of grace, and instructing them in what it means to live daily in God's grace. Paul reminds the people to pray, not just occasionally, but always.

Paul is reminding the church at Philippi, and us, to pray in God's grace and the delight of God's presence with us. He uses the word "always" in the text when referring to an attitude of rejoicing and prayer. Always he says, not just when one may feel like it or the circumstance may require prayer, but always. Why always? Paul is reminding God's people of God's presence and grace in Christ which surrounds us always. Our continuing prayer is a response to and confidence in God who walks with us through the hills and valleys of our faith journey.

As growing disciples and stewards, prayer, to a very large degree, is a key component of a growing relationship with God and the everyday actions of living in and living out God's grace. It is a practice of faith and how we celebrate the gifts of God and our ever-evolving relationship with God in Christ. Paul is saying, remember all that God has done for you. Remember all of God's good gifts in your life and most importantly, the life - giving grace which comes to us Jesus Christ. In response to God's gift of grace in Christ, Paul exhorts the people of God to rejoice and pray always amid of all that life brings.

In the gospel of Matthew, an instruction concerning prayer emerges in the context of "The Sermon on the Mount" in which Jesus provides counsel on how to live in and live out God's grace and love. As Jesus addresses prayer and how we are to pray, he provides an example of prayer which we call The Lord's Prayer. In the Lord's Prayer, Jesus is teaching that prayer is relational. Prayer nurtures the relationship between the disciple and God by having a conversation with God that is not just "me"-based and simply a list of requests that we hope God will satisfy. The Lord's Prayer and its petitions are given to us as an example of how to pray and provides a foundation for the composition of all our prayers.

## Bible Study Discussion Questions

- The opening verse of the passage from Philippians encourages us to “rejoice in the Lord always.” What do you think Paul means when he says to rejoice always?
- Does this mean that we rejoice amid the bad things that happen in life? Why or why not? Do you think that Paul has a deeper meaning in mind when he tells us to rejoice? If so, what might that deeper meaning be?
- Read Philippians 4:6. What do you think this verse says about the relationship between God and God’s people?
- In Matthew’s gospel, Jesus teaches us about prayer. We are given “The Lord’s Prayer” as an example of how to pray. What does The Lord’s Prayer mean to you in your prayer life as a disciple? As you say the different petitions of the Lord’s Prayer, for what are you praying? Note: A good discussion resource concerning the petitions of the Lord’s Prayer would be Luther’s Catechism: The Lord’s Prayer.
- How do you think prayer enhances one’s relationship with God and is foundational in growing as disciples and stewards? How does prayer help us live in and live out God’s grace?

