

SUNDAY, January 21, 2024 EPIPHANY 3 "How to Pray for Myself"

Psalm 139 John 17:1-19

We continue in our sermon series "Preparing to Pray" with our focus on 'How to Pray for Myself'. It seems maybe a bit odd to pray for one self but when we reflect on Jesus' life, he prayed to God the Father, for himself many times. There might be a question around whether we should or ought to pray for one self because it seems this violates humility and draws attention to you as an individual rather than God. But what we need to remember is that praying for oneself is essential, if one is to share their hearts, gifts, thoughts and faith with other people.

Jesus told this story about praying in the temple as recorded in Luke 18: 10-14. "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other people—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.' "But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.' "I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For all those who exalt themselves, will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted."

What does it mean to humble oneself before God? It means to come before God and petition what you would like God to do for your life. It means to get down on your knees before God and pray, it's the only way you'll get on your feet! It is the way to grow as an individual, as a follower of Christ and as a child of God. This is what Jesus did. From John 17, we read from his time of prayer in the garden prior to his arrest, trial and crucifixion, that he prayed for himself. He states, "Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with you before the world was". Here, Jesus is asking the Father to lift him up and give him the glory because of what he had taught the disciples. And now he was preparing to return to Him, he is asking for people to believe in Him and God the Father as they are one. Jesus also prayed that the love with which God loved him may be in them and he in them as well. Jesus needed to pray to God for Himself so it is essential that we need to pray for ourselves.

But what kinds of prayers are needed for us? Our reading from Psalm 139 describes the relationship one has when God leads their life. God knows each of us from the time before we are born to the time we die. God knows what we do each day and knows us completely—from what we are about to speak to trying to hide in the dark. God knows us where we are because we cannot escape from him, nor can we hide. God also knows our hearts and what we have

done or not done. And it is because of God's knowledge of us that we can gratefully say, "I am fearfully and wonderfully made."

SO what do we say when we pray for ourselves? There are many things we might need but it is what is within our hearts/ minds and thoughts/feelings that guide our actions or inactions. We need God to guide us as we seek to understand who we are and we do this by sharing in prayer.

1) Psalm 139 (23-24) David asked God to search him, know him, test him and see if there was any offensive way. He asked God to examine him.

2) After being examined by God, the next step is to ask forgiveness for those things which went against God's teachings of love (Psalm 66;18; I John 1;9)

3) WE need to be renewed and refilled with God's Spirit from time to time. Last week, we renewed the covenant of hope as written by John Wesley. This is often viewed as a time to renew the Spirit. D.L. Moody a preacher was asked why he constantly sought a filling of the Spirit, he responded, "Because I leak." Each one of us need the Spirit to lift us up and refill us with hope for a better day.

4) Sometimes we need to be restored and strengthened. Just what kind of heart have you in this moment? Is it a heart of stone or of flesh? (Ezekiel 36:26) are you weary and despondent? You need to ask God to restore in you the joy of your salvation.

5) in a matter of seconds you have information at your disposal but is this what we need today? For most people what is needed is wisdom, that is Godly wisdom, that which comes from above. God will give us this generously and ungrudgingly. WE need to just ask (James 1:5)

6) We also need our minds protected. We are what we think (Proverbs 23:7) we each need to think good stuff. If we believe Christ lives in us through the Spirit, we need to ask for Christ's guidance.

7) WE are to resist evil and if we acknowledge this in our midst, it will flee from us. We know that evil exists and the choices we make may lead us in the ways that go against God, we need to be strong. (James 4:7)

8) The father of a demon-possessed boy needed to boost his faith from unbelief to believing. He asked Jesus, "Help me overcome my unbelief" as his boy was healed. (Mark 9:24) we too need

to ask God to increase our faith, especially when we are wondering what to do to bring him glory and bring others to believe.

9) In the Lord's prayer, we ask that God would 'lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.' (Matthew 6:13) This is a wonderful phrase of asking God to protect us and guard us against bad attitudes and choices. Each day we make over 35000 decisions which breaks down to a realized 70 informed choices that are significant and go beyond what to eat and what to wear. Evil is not eating the donut but going against acceptable behaviour to steal it. These are decisions of choice. Yet there are many people who are tempted yes, but choose not to act in evil ways.

10) How do we ask God to direct our daily schedule? Do we follow his direction regularly? Or do we often say, No I can't because. Proverbs 16:9 "In his heart a man plans his course, but God determines his steps." God will help us to keep on schedule. "If you want to make God laugh, tell him your plans." This Yiddish expression, popularized by Woody Allen, reminds us that all that occurs is under God's plan and God will change it one step as needed.

11) Another petition we might ask of God is to 'bless me and enlarge my territory' (I Chronicles 4:10) Don't put limits on what you might do. Seek more responsibility, influence others and take opportunities. God is worth the effort!

Praying for ourselves seems like a selfish act. But when we pray we need to remember that there are many kinds of prayers that God will hear. When we ask God to examine us and enable us to expand our possibilities, what we might do for Jesus' sake is unlimited. Praying for ourselves enables us to pray for others with new perspectives and we can excited knowing that Christ is within us, the Spirit is guiding us and God will give us the wisdom to do what is appropriate.

As we prepare to pray, let us remember Jesus' words to His disciples, that in order to be justified by God we need to be humble in faith and in action. For when we pray we are asking for God's strength and love as we acknowledge who Christ is in our lives and how the Spirit will direct us.

#### PRAYER

God we praise you and thank you that we may humble ourselves before you and pray for ourselves. Hear now the prayers of our hearts. SILENCE. AMEN>