

Two buddies were talking one day, and their conversation turned to spiritual things, and they were bragging that one knew more about the Bible than the other. One guy said, "I bet you don't even know the Lord's Prayer. I'll give you \$10 right now to say the Lord's Prayer from memory." "No problem," said his friend, "Now I lay me down to sleep, I pray the Lord my soul to keep. If I should die before I wake, I pray the Lord my soul to take." His friend just laughed, and reaching into his pocket to get a \$10 bill, he said, "Ha! I didn't think you knew it!"

Today, we're turning our attention to prayer and how prayer can turn the hearts of husbands and wives, moms and dads, and grandmas and grandpas to the Lord Jesus. Prayer has a vital, pivotal role in helping generation after generation of a family to be saved spiritually, and together with one another on the other side of death.

Last Sunday, we began this brief, three-week series with a verse that describes our preferred future. Here's the verse:

(3 John 4) "I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the faith."

John, the disciple whom Jesus loved, who wrote the books of John, 1,2,3 John and Revelation, is referring to people that he brought to Christ (i.e., his spiritual children). That interpretation applies to us today, but let's add this important dimension. You and I have no greater joy than to hear that our children and grandchildren and their children are walking in the faith – have surrendered their lives to Jesus Christ.

Everything in life is secondary to our families becoming followers of Jesus and spending all of eternity with one another and with Jesus, Himself. This matters more than money and the things that money can buy. Eternity for our family is of greater importance than the titles we're given, the degrees we earn, the status we achieve, the hobbies we pursue, the projects we complete. If the people we say that we love are not saved—our spouse, our children and grandchildren; our parents and grandparents, our siblings—what could possibly matter more?

Francis Chan, in his book *Until Unity*, writes: "Like a marriage that has no purpose, many churches have forgotten the point of their existence. They can quickly focus on the complaints of their people rather than on the cries of the lost. We get more emotional over Christians leaving to go to a different church than we do about people dying and going to Hell. Something is horribly wrong when we grieve more deeply over people rejecting us than those who reject their Messiah."

And can the same be said of our marriages and families? Have we lost sight of what is most important in life and that is to be united as a family in the next life with Jesus Himself?

For every generation in a family to "be walking in the truth" becomes our preferred future. How do we get there? Last week, I suggested that we think about GPS (global positioning system). Owned and operated by the federal government, GPS enables us to input a preferred destination on our devices and a network of satellites directs us to that destination. Similarly, if we want our preferred destination to be eternity with our families and Jesus, there are THREE

essential components to take us there: **grace, prayer, and scripture** (i.e., GPS). If we embrace these three elements, marriages, parenting and grandparenting will all be impacted in powerful and positive ways. Hence, last week, we focused on G for Grace; on forgiveness and mercy. When we decide to forgive one another, healing begins to happen. When in the strength of the Lord, we give grace, mercy, forgiveness to others in the family, no bitter root will grow to cause trouble and defile man (Heb 12:15). This week is about P for Prayer, and next week is about S for Scripture. GPS. That's our journey for these three weekends.

Now then, if I want my marriage to work, I must work at my marriage. For those of you who know Leah and me, you know that one of us is a bit strong-willed. I'll leave it at that. For our marriage to work these 46 years, we've had to work at our marriage and that requires communication. And the same is true when it comes to my/our relationship with God. If I want my relationship with God to work, I must work at my relationship and that requires communication. And communication with God is called prayer.

Last week, we looked at a couple of families in the Old Testament – one family who did not experience forgiveness and suffered the consequences of that decision, whereas the other family did experience profound forgiveness and they prospered as a result. Today, we are going to be in the New Testament, specifically in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. We will look at ONE individual and the role of prayer in His life, and that person is Jesus.

Think of the four Gospels as the family photo album of Jesus, and we will be looking at six specific "Kodak-moments" (i.e., a moment worth a picture) to discover insights about prayer from the life of Jesus, Himself: P.R.A.Y.E.R.

P for Priority

(Mark 1:35) "Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, he left the house and went off to a solitary place where He prayed."

(Luke 5:16) "But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed."

(Luke 6:12) "One of those days Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray and spent the night praying to God."

Prayer was a priority for Jesus. Is it a priority in our lives? What place does prayer have in your life and in mine? First place, or no place? Is prayer first in our thoughts or merely an afterthought? Notice a particular detail in this "Kodak-moment" and that being seclusion. Jesus made it a priority to be alone with God, to be in a place of solitude. Can we communicate with God while driving the car or riding a bike? Sure thing. Can we pray while cleaning the house or mowing the lawn? You bet. But there comes a time when God wants our undivided attention. A familiar phrase in the 23rd Psalm is, "You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies." Think with me. If it is our wedding anniversary and we are going out for dinner, we won't be going to a fast-food restaurant where what we are served is neither food nor is it fast. An anniversary dinner is not going to be served on a plastic tray and food wrapped in paper. The table will be set with fine linen, dinnerware, and food – and it will be a table for two, not for

ten or twelve. Likewise, everyday God sets and sits at a table with a veritable feast, and He's waiting to see if we will sit with Him.

To what degree is prayer a priority to you and to me? Anorexia is a disease of the mind in which a person thinks he or she is grossly overweight but in reality eats very little or not at all. Anorexia of prayer is a disease of the heart where we think we've got a great prayer life when in reality we pray very little or not at all. Be honest with God. Is that diagnosis true of us? Pictures often have a caption – and this “Kodak-moment” has this caption: Prayer must be my priority – not my last resort.

R for Relationship

(Matthew 6:5-9) “And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites who love to pray standing in the synagogues and on street corners to be seen by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. But when you pray, go into your room and close the door and pray to your Father who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him. This, then, is how you should pray, ‘Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.’”

Did you catch the number of times Jesus referred to God as Father? And not only did Jesus teach others to call God their Father, but Jesus Himself called God His Father! He practiced what He preached. Even in His last moments from the cross, Jesus spoke to God as His Father.

(Luke 23:34) “Jesus said, “Father, forgive them for they do not know what they are doing.”

(Luke 23:46) “Jesus called out in a loud voice, “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.” When He said this, He breathed His last.”

R for relationship. Prayer was not about a WHAT in the life of Jesus, it was about a WHO, and that WHO was none other than God Himself. Prayer is more than a practice, it is a relationship. This Kodak-moment about prayer in the life of Jesus is all about relationship. In Luke 11:1, the disciples asked Jesus, “Teach us to pray.” They saw what Jesus was doing; the miracles He performed, the wisdom with which He taught, the compassion that He showed others. The disciples connected the proverbial dots and realized it had something to do with His priority on prayer, and that was about a relationship with God. And then Jesus then taught them, “This, then is how you should pray, ‘Our Father...’”

It's as if God is saying to us, “I already know what you need, but I want to know if you want to talk to Me about what you need? And do you want Me more than just what it is that you want?” Prayer is a relationship. After all, how Jesus taught us to address God is the definition of relationship: “our Father.” Look at the details of “our Father.” You and I are NOT an only child. We are a part of a family and together we can call out to our Father for the wellbeing of the family. Moreover, God is to be respected and revered as Father. He is not the “big guy upstairs.” He is our loving, strong, faithful, and approachable Father. The question is, do we want a relationship with Him? Prayer is more about a relationship than it is about a request. This

Kodak-moment caption could be: Prayer is not a button to be pushed, but a relationship to be pursued.

A for Ask

(Matthew 7:7-11) “Ask and it will be given; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks, the door will be opened. Which of you, if your son asks for bread will give him a stone, or if he asks for a fish will give him a snake? If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask Him!”

A for ask. Clearly, Jesus taught that prayer was about asking God for “good gifts.” And what did Jesus mean by “good gifts?” Did that include money and the things that money can buy; for cars and clothes, for trucks and trips? To help answer that question, we take a look at another Kodak-moment from Jesus on asking in prayer. This moment was on the last night in His life, and not once, but more than six times in John chapters 14,15 and 16, Jesus told His disciples to ask in His name.

(John 14:12-14) “I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these because I am going to the Father. And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.”

Praying and asking in Jesus’ name is not like having movies streaming on demand. Look at the words in this promise of Jesus. Notice: “...what I have been doing.” What was Jesus doing? Specifically, He came to seek and to save what was lost (Luke 19:10). Jesus did not come to be served, but to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many (Mark 10:45). Are we “seeking the lost,” particularly those in our immediate family? Are we demanding to be served or are we serving others, particularly those in our immediate family? And what will “bring glory to the Father through His Son”? When our prayers are more about Jesus and what matters to Him. Later in His life, the Apostle John wrote about this very promise of prayer.

(1 John 5:14-15) “This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us – whatever we ask – we know that we have what we asked of Him.”

Are we asking “according to His will?” It is God’s will that no one be spiritually lost, but that everyone repent and be saved (2 Peter 3:9). Are we praying for our spouse, our children and grandchildren to “walk in the truth”? Are we praying for our parents and grandparents, and for our siblings to “walk in the truth”? Are we asking God to answer what we know is His will on earth as it is in heaven? Here’s a caption for this Kodak-moment: Effective prayer is asking God what He wants.

Y for Yield

(Matthew 26:39) “Jesus fell with His face to the ground and prayed, “My Father, if it be possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet, not as I will, but as you will.”

(Matthew 26:42) “He went away a second time and prayed, “My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done.”

(Matthew 26:44) “He...went away once more and prayed the third time, saying the same thing.”

Y for yield. This Kodak-moment in the life of Jesus shouts yield. Jesus yielded to the will of God. This is the last night of His life and Jesus is praying in the Garden of Gethsemane. Luke describes this moment that as Jesus prayed, sweat like drops of blood fell from His forehead (Luke 22:44). The word “cup” refers to the cup of God’s wrath. God, the Father, had never treated Jesus, His Son in this way before. The “wages of sin is death” (Rom 6:23), and God would pour out His rage, His fury, His anger, His wrath on His Son because of our sin. Jesus yielded to God’s will. Do we? Can we pray a prayer like that of Jesus? Perhaps it would sound something like this: “Lord, I am willing...to receive what you give, to lack what you withhold, to relinquish what you take, to suffer what you inflict, to be what you require. It may be that we are quick to think that God doesn’t hear our prayers because He is not quick to answer our prayers—in the way we want. God DOES answer our prayers.

(Jeremiah 33:3) “Call to me and I will answer you. I will show you great and unsearchable things you do not know.”

(Psalm 91:14-16) “Because he loves me,” says the Lord, “I will rescue him. I will protect him because he acknowledges my name. He will call upon me and I will answer him. I will be with him in trouble. I will deliver him and honor him. With long life will I satisfy him and show him my salvation.”

God doesn’t put us on hold. He doesn’t send us to His voice mail. He intentionally and actually answers our prayers – in keeping with His will. We need to learn to yield – and not only when it comes to our driving in a roundabout. We need to learn to yield to God when it comes to prayer – to avoid a “crash” in our relationship with Him. A caption for this Kodak-moment is simply...God’s will be done; nothing more, nothing less, nothing else.

There is something more that comes from this Gethsemane moment.

E for Enemy

(Matthew 26:41) “Watch and pray so that you do not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.”

Jesus told His disciples that prayer can intervene as a weapon against temptation. Moreover, earlier in the evening, when Jesus and the disciples were eating the last supper in the upper room, Jesus made this comment to Peter.

(Luke 22:31-32) "Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And you have turned back, strengthen your brothers."

E for enemy. Prayer is a weapon against the kingdom of darkness. Notice that Jesus called Peter by his formal, his legal name; and He said his name twice to get his attention about this most serious matter (i.e., Moses, Moses; Abraham, Abraham; Samuel, Samuel; Saul, Saul). Jesus interceded in prayer for him because Peter would be spiritually attacked by Satan later in the evening. Jesus said of Satan that "the thief has come to kill, steal and destroy" (John 10:10). The United States military has an enormous arsenal of weapons to defend our nation against our enemies. We, as Christians, have an enemy, as well as an arsenal. "Your enemy, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour" (1 Peter 5:8). A lion doesn't roar when hunting its prey; it roars after capturing its prey. Pray so that you will not fall into temptation. Pray for your marriage, children, grandchildren, and extended family so that they will not be "sifted as wheat" by the evil one. After all, "The prayers of a righteous person is powerful and effective" (James 5:16). A Kodak-moment caption declares that a life full of prayer is a life full of power.

R for Rest

(Matthew 11:28-30) "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me for I am gentle and humble in heart and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

R for rest. Prayer with Jesus is a place of rest. Jesus invites us bring all that weighs on us and wears away at us. When we think of our marriages and our families, we are not experiencing any suffering or struggles that have not been experienced before.

In the opening pages of Scripture, Adam and Eve experienced the overwhelming grief of burying one of their sons who was murdered by his brother. Ruth felt the grief of being widowed at a young age, and then she cared for Naomi, her aging widowed mother-in-law. Jacob experienced big problems with his in-laws when Laban, his father-in-law changed Jacob's wages multiple times. Sarah, the wife of Abraham, suffered with the pain of infertility for decades. Abraham struggled with lying and that struggle was passed down as a generational sin to his son and grandchildren. Hosea struggled with a wife who committed serial adultery. Moreover, David gave in to adultery that destroyed the marriage of another. Timothy had a mom who was a Christian and whose dad was an unbeliever. Joseph was a part of a blended family with off-the-chart dysfunction and sibling rivalry. Family struggles of all shapes and sizes are described in the Word of God. Family struggles are some of the most painful struggles in life. It is no wonder that Jesus invites us to bring the weary weight of those burdens to Him to find rest in Him and with Him.

(1 Peter 5:6-7) "Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. Cast all your cares on him for he cares for you."

This Kodak-moment has a caption that reads...When we are tired, let's learn to rest, and not to quit.

In looking at a photo album, a picture may stand out to us more than the rest. When it comes to these SIX albums, does one of the Kodak-moments from the life of Jesus (priority, relationship, ask, yield, enemy, rest) stir you and me? In Acts 2:42, we read a description of how Christians lived in the first church: "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer." Devoted is a word in the present tense, meaning that the Christians continued in prayer, gave constant attention to prayer, persevered in prayer. If they can be devoted to prayer, so can we.

Grace (forgiveness, mercy) and prayer help us as families reach our desired destination of being home with the Lord --- and when that happens someday, there will be no greater joy!