

Community Church of Issaquah

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## Three Ways to Pray

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A few months ago, I had a call from a minister friend from Colorado. We've been friends since we were both youth ministers in Oklahoma back in the early 70's. His call was very different than our "catch up" chats that we usually have, talking about our kids, our church work, and such. His voice was very serious and I asked, "What's wrong?" His response was a bit of a surprise to me. "I called to ask you to pray for me," he said. When I told him that I already prayed for him every time he came to mind, he told me that wasn't what he needed. He began his request by saying, "This is private and I want it to be just between you and me. I need you to pray with me about something, but I want it to be private."

Then he told me his request and we prayed together on the phone for a while. I have honored his request and kept the reason for his prayer and my prayers for him very confidential. But when I began to think about his request for a private prayer, it came to my mind that private prayers are just one way we engage in conversations with God. I realized there are likely three ways you and I employ as we talk to God in our prayer life. If I asked you what the ways you pray are, would you recognize the different ways we do pray? I had not thought about it until my friend called our prayer time "private." I began to think

and this is what I found in the Bible. I will call it the Three Ways We Pray, or actually, The Three Ps of Prayer.

The first way of praying that came to my mind is one I would call 'personal.' When Jesus is quoted in Matthew chapter six instructing his followers on how to pray, he told them, "When you pray, go into your room, close the door, and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret will reward you." We are taught to spend time in a personal relationship just between us and God. For most of us, this is the way we most often pray, and for a multitude of concerns in our life. It varies from, "Lord, please keep my car running longer," to "Please God, help me deal with this impossible situation. I need your help."

It is not only us who have personal prayer time. If you recall from the Scriptures, it was Jesus who withdrew from the those who followed him and all the demands that went with them, and He would go someplace to be alone and pray. Even on the night of his last day when he chose to leave the Passover Dinner with his disciples and go to Gethsemane, we see his need to have personal talks with His Father in private. As Matthew records Jesus' words, "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will."

Do you also remember that after Jesus had fed the five thousand, Matthew chapter 14 tells us this: "Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowd. After he had dismissed them, he went up on a mountain by

himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone.” Now, I doubt that any of us break away from life and go up on a mountain to have our prayer time with God. Yet, each of us does have a personal time with God in whatever location we might find ourselves. That is your own personal prayer time. Your living room, your bedroom, your car – wherever. This is your personal prayers alone.

There is a second type of prayer that I would call ‘private.’ Just as my minister friend called to ask me to have a prayer time between him and me, there are times in all our lives when we either reach out to someone privately asking for prayer or someone reaches out to us. This is perhaps the most difficult approach to prayer because it requires us to both trust the one we asked and the necessity to open our heart in a way that reveals our special needs. Would you be surprised if I told you that Jesus had done that? I told you earlier about Jesus going to Gethsemane after the Last Supper and had engaged in a personal time of prayer with His Father. There is more to that passage of scripture that I did not include earlier.

Let me share the entire passage from Matthew chapter 26. “Then Jesus went with his disciples to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to them, ‘Sit here while I go over there and pray.’ He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee along with him, and he began to be sorrowful and troubled. Then he said to them, ‘My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me.’ Going a little further, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed.” Not only did Jesus have a personal prayer, but he also revealed his heart-felt sorrow to the selected three.

After telling them of his feelings, he asked them to stay there and keep watch. We can and should interpret that plea to 'keep watch' as meaning that Jesus was asking them to stay and pray. Sadly, they didn't do that. They fell asleep.

For me, one of the most important aspects or blessings of my life is that I do have special people whom I can call on to pray with me privately. It isn't often that I need to call on someone to be that type of prayer partner for me, but when that need comes, I want to have someone there for me, and so do you. As a minister and pastor, I often have someone who will contact me with a private request. I will tell you what I tell them when they call. "You've come to confession. I'm not allowed to share anything I hear." They usually say some silly like, "Thank you, Father." That simply means that whatever someone tells me in private is locked into my heart and will not be shared with anyone else. My hope for each of you is that you too have people in your life whom you can reach out to and find a private prayer warrior. Private prayer is very important to all of us as we seek to live the life of Christ's disciple.

The third way to pray or the third prayer 'P' is what I would call Public Prayer. You and I engage in that type of praying each time we have our Prayers and Praise portion of our service and as we engage in openly shared prayers during our Adult Forum. This is an open opportunity to share with all those present the matters of joy or concern that we feel comfortable sharing in a public setting. For me, there is no portion of our worship service that I treasure more. It

offers me, as your pastor, an opportunity to know what we, your church family, can pray for you.

Being very much from the “old school” of note taking or ways of remembering important things, I choose to keep a Prayer Book. You’ve all seen me writing down the names and causes for prayer that you share with our congregation. With that book in hand, each morning I repeat the prayers we shared in the service. It would be easy to rely on memory to do that if my brain worked that well always, but it is important for me to always remember exactly what your prayer requests are and to life those to the Lord. So, I write them in my Prayer Book.

The Bible has a clear message about this method of prayer. We are all aware of the teaching that Jesus gave his disciples and followers about praying. We don’t often think about the words that Jesus used to give this message. I had not given a great deal of thought simply to the way Jesus chose to word his message of prayer. Be patient as I share this very familiar passage:

Matthew 6: 9 – 13 – “This, then, is how you should pray:

*Our Father in heaven,*

*Hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from the evil one.”*

I had not noticed until I was researching the Bible for the base of this message that every pronoun in this passage that refers to those praying is plural, not single. Jesus

never said, “**My** Father in Heaven” or “Give **me** my daily bread.” Instead, he addressed “**Our** Father in heaven” and asked God to give **us** our daily bread. That was an impactful awareness for me. It helped me to understand that there are times when we pray as a crowd or as a family, and this is a time of public prayer that we all can use to bring a collective voice to our times of prayer.

Three ways to pray: personal, private and public. Each time any of us pray, we are doing so in one of those modes. The amazing truth of all this is simple, no matter how we pray, God listens and answers our prayers. Is prayer only a one-time experience for us? No. Regardless of how we pray or the content of our prayers, we have some good advice from Paul to the church at Thessalonica. “Be joyful always and pray continually.” Well, I might not always be joyful, sorry to disappoint you, Paul. But as a Christian, I will continue to pray as often as I can or need. Whether that is just me in a quiet space having a conversation with God. Or if I am in a private prayer time with someone who is praying for me or for whom I am praying. Or if I am here in this church joining you in the prayers of our family. I’ll keep praying. That is truly a blessing, don’t you agree?