

When We Pray

Mark 1:35-39
Becoming All Fire, 2

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Opening Prayer

Father, long ago, you spoke to our fathers by the prophets.
In these last days you have spoken to us by your Son,
whom you have appointed the heir of all things,
through whom you also created the world.
He is the radiance of your glory
and the exact imprint of your nature.
He upholds the universe by the word of his power.

Speak to us now through your Son
and uphold us by the word of his power
that we may radiate your glory.

In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

I. Becoming All Fire

Abba Joseph

In the fourth century of the Egyptian desert, Abba Lot had become quite accomplished in prayer and sought Abba Joseph for what more he needed to do. In response, Abba Joseph stood up and raised his hands in prayer. Flames erupted from each of his fingertips. He said to Abba Lot, "If you will, you can become all fire."

If you will, you can become all fire.

The soul is coal.
The Holy Spirit is fire.
Prayer is where the two ignite.

The first message established that prayer is communion with God.

St. John of Sinai (6th c. monk)

Prayer is by its essence communication and union of God and man.

Jonathan Edwards (18th c. American Puritan)

Prayer is the way to a life of communion with God.

The true spirit of prayer is not other than God's own Spirit dwelling in the hearts of the saints. And as this Spirit comes from God, so does it naturally tend to God in holy breathings and pantings. It naturally leads to God, to converse with Him by prayer.

Communion with God produces mutual indwelling with God:

- He is in me and I am in Him
- Like the burning bush, I am ablaze with the fire and presence of God without being burned or consumed by Him.

That's *why* we pray. Tonight we will look at *when* we pray.

II. When We Pray: At Set Times

Set times of prayer are moments we carve aside and consecrate to prayer. We do this both publicly and privately.

1. Sunday Services

The reason we gather on Sundays is to commune with God in prayer.

- Our prayer is a service of worship to God.
- We aren't coming to *our* service, but to *God's* service.
- Jesus said: "My house shall be called a house of prayer" (Matt. 21:13)
- About worship, Paul insisted on the offering of prayers (1 Tim. 2:1, 3)
- Historically, prayer was the heart of Christian worship:

Alan Kreider (recently deceased church historian)

Why did people come to worship services week after week? Many came because they couldn't live—couldn't survive—without prayer.

2. Daily Solitude

Morning Prayer: Direction (Mark 1:35-39)

Without prayer, we may be inclined to follow our desires for praise:

- Peter: “This is what you need to do; everyone is looking for you!” (v. 37)
- Jesus: “But this is what the Father showed me to do.” (v. 38)

Remember that in prayer, we hear from God all the adoration our hearts need: “This is my child, in whom I am well pleased.”

Evening Prayer: Illumination (Mark 6:45-52)

One important lesson from this passage for our time-management obsessed culture: *Never get into a boat when Jesus is on a mountain.*

But because the disciples try to make time and hurry on to what's next:

- They make progress painfully (v. 48)
- They fail to recognize Jesus in their midst (v. 49)
- They are confused and their hearts are hardened (v. 52)

Prayer is our greatest progress.

- Though the disciples had a head start
- Jesus surpassed them

Proverbs 3:5-7a. *Trust in the Lord with all your heart,
and do not lean on your own understanding.
In all your ways acknowledge him,
and he will make straight your paths.
Be not wise in your own eyes.*

Sunday and Solitude Sharpen Each Other

The Religionist prays only on Sunday.

The Spiritualist prays only in solitary.

But the one who communes with God prays both.

- Sunday prayer *encourages* solitary prayer.
- Solitary prayer *enhances* Sunday prayer.

III. When We Pray: Spontaneously

Pray spontaneously throughout the day.

- Pray what comes to your heart the moment you feel it.
- Pray whenever you begin a task
- This is practicing the presence of God

St. Theophan the Recluse (19th c. Russian monk).

One must ensure that the soul does not only make petition to God when standing in prayer, but during the whole day, as much as possible, one must unceasingly ascend to Him and remain with Him.

Arrow Prayers

I call these prayers “arrow prayers.”

Charles Spurgeon (19th c. English preacher)

Prayer which, as it were, hurls a dart and then is done. It [is] not the prayer which stands knocking at mercy’s door—knock, knock, knock; but it [is] the concentration of many knocks into one. It [is] begun and completed, as it were, with one stroke. This spontaneous prayer I desire to commend to you as among the very best forms of prayer.

These are short prayers of great power.

- *Nehemiah before the king*: “So I prayed to the God of heaven” (Neh. 2:4)

- *Peter when sinking*: “Lord, save me!” (Matt. 19:30)
- *Blind Bartimaeus*: “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” (Mk. 10:47)
- *The Two Blind Men*: “Have mercy on us, Son of David!” (Matt. 9:27)
- *The Father of the Boy with the Unclean Spirit*: “I believe, help my unbelief!” (Mk. 9:24)
- *The Tax Collector*: “O God, be merciful to me, a sinner.” (Lk. 18:13)
- *The Thief On the Cross*: “Jesus, remember me when You come into Your Kingdom.” (Lk. 23:42)

We can also pray lines from Psalms:

- Into Your hand I commend my spirit.
- Preserve me, O God, for in You I place my trust.
- O God make speed to save me; O Lord make haste to help me.
- Teach me to do Your will, for You are my God.
- Let Your good Spirit guide me on ground that is level.

Without arrow prayers:

- The fire of prayer fades.
- Our set prayers remain static and we do not grow.
- Our set prayers become boring and tedious.

St. Theophan the Recluse

We pray in the morning in and evening: there is a great distance between them.

*If we only turn to God at these times, then even if we pray whole-heartedly, during the day or night, everything will fall apart, and when it is time again to pray, the soul will feel **cold and empty as before**. One can pray again whole-heartedly, but if you become cold and fall apart again, what use is it? **This is just building and destroying, building and destroying; it is only labor**. If now we resolve not only to pray with attention and feeling in the morning and the evening, but also to spend every day in contemplation of God, doing all things to the glory of God, **and frequently calling to God from our hearts with short words of prayer**, then this long period between morning and evening prayers and from evening to morning prayers will be filled with frequent turnings to God and pure prayerful actions.*

In other words, arrow prayers:

- Not only keep the fire of prayer burning,
- But increase the fervency of our set times of prayer.

IV. The Need for Set Times of Prayer

We need set times of prayer:

1. To override our feelings.

- It is easier to do other things
- Prayer can feel futile
- It provides little sense of accomplishment and can be set aside without any really noticing.

2. To *make* time where we never *have* time to pray.

- Any open time gets filled in with demands.
- We must create calendars that say: I cannot do this right now, for I have an appointment with God.

3. To orient our lives (and frame our days) around communing with God.

Otherwise we orient our days around sleep, food, work, TV, sports, holidays, etc.

4. To fill our quiver with arrows.

Charles Spurgeon

Spontaneous prayers are like the sparks that fly from a soul that is filled with burning coals of love to Jesus Christ.

Set prayers fill our quiver with arrow prayers.

V. How to Establish Solid Times of Set Prayer

1. Choose a time and keep it.

- At least once a day at the same time.
- Morning is preferred.
- If you have time to eat or shower...

2. Find a desolate place.

- Jesus prayed where other people would not disturb Him.
- The place itself will begin to set your heart into a spirit of prayer.

3. Know what you are going to pray before you pray.

- We are far more likely to jump right in when we know what we are going to do.
- If you are tired or your feelings haven't caught up, a recited prayer helps get the heart going.
- Try: The Lord's Prayer or a Psalm.

4. Pray as you can, not as you want.

- Set up something simple. Something you can repeat.
- Don't be a January enthusiast.
- Allow your set prayer to grow with you.
- Better the set prayer you can stick with than the one you can't.

If you will, you can become all fire. So pray at Sunday services, pray in solitude, and pray with arrow prayers.

Lord, direct my will; teach me to pray; pray You Yourself in me. Amen.