

Covenant UMC Bible Study Notes—January 8, 2018

for the Scripture reading for January 14, 2018

Matthew 6:6-15

Do you pray for the church? For one another? For yourself? One of the ways we live into our baptismal vows is to pray. Consider the scripture reading in terms of your commitment to prayer.

Matthew 6:6-15

In the coming weeks, we will have a series on the promises we make as United Methodists to live into our baptismal vows: to support the church by our prayers, our presence, our gifts, our service, and our witness. “Witness” was added by the 2004 General Conference. During Lent, we will look at the story of the woman at the well, focusing on witnessing.

This Sunday, we will focus on prayer. What is prayer? Jesus gave us a model.

v.7: Don’t use “vain repetitions.”

Can we repeat the words without repeating the prayer? (Can the same words take on different meanings at different times?)

Are we nagging God?

It is like a drill bit, digging down deeper. Dig deep.

We sometimes get whiney with God. We get out of that as we get older.

It can become a habit. We must rebuke that in ourselves.

The spirit of infirmity—rescue us from the evil one, and the temptation to dwell in darkness.

The Lord’s Prayer is sophisticated. It is a prayer you have to live into.

The ACTS framework for prayer:

- 1 Adoration—praise.
- 2 Confession—recognizing your need of forgiveness.
- 3 Thanksgiving.
- 4 Supplication—praying for others.

Where does forgiving fit into that framework? In confession.

To “tarry” at the altar—is this a Methodist term?

In a Baptist church we attended it was the practice to come to the altar at prayer time.

I have felt the entire congregation living the word in this Methodist Church. It felt like being baptized anew.

Covenant United Methodist Church is about the people.

It is a covenant Jesus made.

It’s not just certain people.

The vitality of the church is the local church, not the hierarchy.

“Baptism might just get you wet. Or it might just change your life.”

John the Baptist told people to show the fruit of repentance. He gave advice to soldiers

and tax collectors.

In the Roman Catholic Church before Vatican II, a person could not receive communion without first going to confession. When I was a child, some of the other girls picked on me and I fought back. The priest found me crying. He asked if I was crying because the other girls picked on me, or because I fought back. I told him it was because I fought back. He told me to light a candle and “tell Jesus you’re sorry.”

We pray more than we know. It becomes part of your being: forgiving, offering grace. Once we’ve drilled down, it starts happening naturally.

We need to learn how to cultivate it.

It takes effort.

In Revelation, it says that our prayers are God’s incense. Make it sweet-smelling.

Use all of our senses, honoring each one. There is potency in incense.

Light a candle. Enter into it.

A candle is visual.

Some churches are very involved in prayer. There is an unexplainable, mysterious aspect to it.

You might feel a burden to pray for a missionary.

You start thinking about somebody. God is saying they need prayer. Pray so long as the burden lasts, it could be a couple of days, it could be six weeks. Ask God to fill up what is lacking in their life.

Someone prays for “all they need, and more.”

As you meet more people throughout your life, many of whom you lose contact with, there are more people who might be praying for you, or for whom you might pray.

It is not surprising that we are beginning the next five weeks with prayer. It is our first response to conflict and tragedy. Turn over the prayers too tender to speak. It is a matter of the heart, not an intellectual thing, it showing how smart you are.

Pray in the morning and at night, then spontaneously throughout the day.

Prayer becomes shallow if there are not times of focus.

Is the liturgy of the hours a Methodist practice?

It’s more of an Anglican thing.

It was Roman Catholic before it was Anglican.

v. 6—Prayer in secret. Adult Jewish males were expected to pray morning and evening, before and after meals, etc. It was deliberate, intentional prayer. So prayer at regular intervals goes back to the Jewish heritage.

In an African church, someone in the congregation would pray after the pastor gave the sermon.

People can use touch in prayer—rosaries, as an example.

Rosaries were meant to help people in the fields focus on gospel passages. There are three mysteries: joyful, sorrowful, and glorious.

Someone has asked, can it count as worship if we do not say the Lord’s Prayer?

A pastor praying with open hands can draw people in.

v. 7: Don’t heap up empty phrases “as the Gentiles do.” What is this referring to? Pagans? Mystery religions?

“Gentiles” as those outside the faith: Should we encourage prayer by people for whom it may not mean much, for example, before football games or public meetings?

A priest praying with a football team can have a psychological effect.

Taking the knee at a football game is prayer.

Everybody prays one way or another. Why not in a public setting?

Does this suggest a church within the church, as well as those outside? Three layers?

In Baptism, the church vows to help the person learn the value of prayer.

We need to bring our faith to prayer. Jesus heals today, but you have to show up. Bring your faith to it. Why should it be surprising to see the healing power of the Lord?

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Next week we will focus on Presence, and the scripture reading will be the walk to Emmaus. Where is Jesus present and we don't see it?