

# **Spiritual Disciplines of the Christian Faith (CM2)**

**\*Lecture 3 – Prayer & Journaling**

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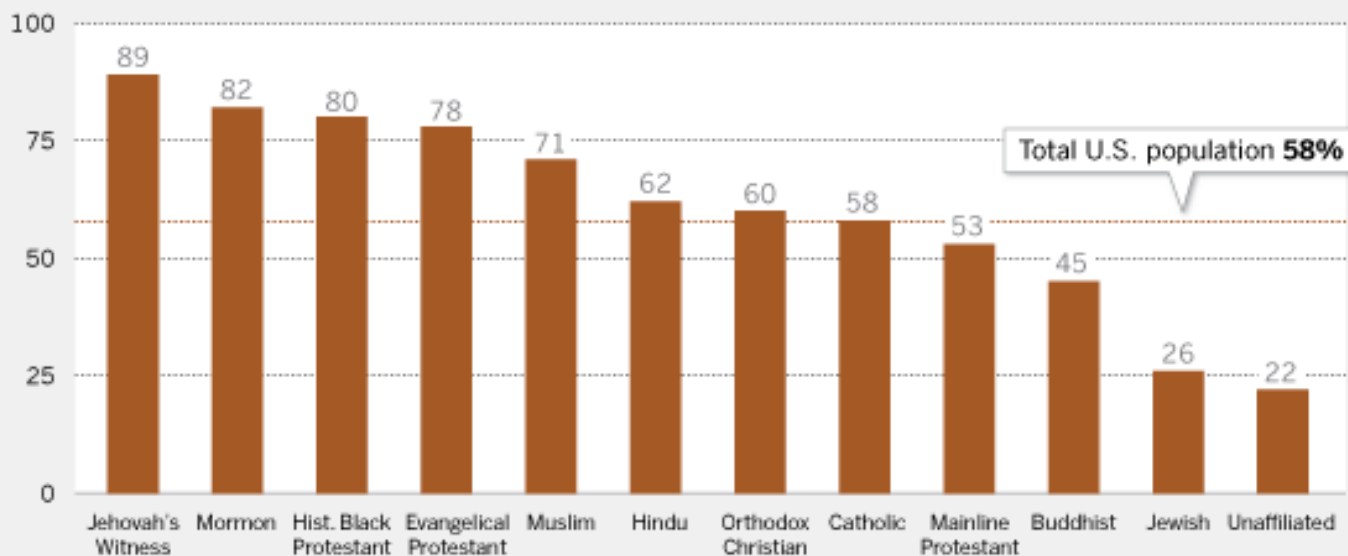
# Let's start by recognizing that prayer is important.

- According to a 1992 Newsweek survey
  - 78% of Americans pray at least once per week.
  - 57% of all Americans pray every day.
  - 20% of people who claim to be atheists or agnostics say they still pray daily.
  - On any day, more people will pray than will go to work, exercise or have sex.

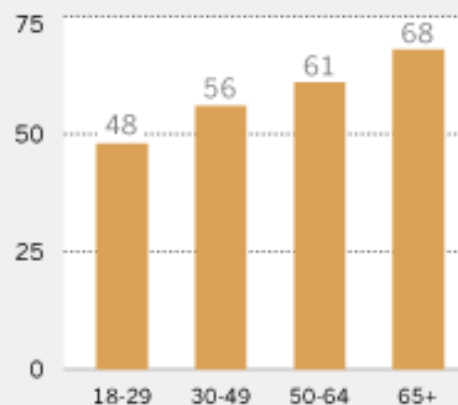
# Prayer in the U.S.

% who pray at least once a day, by...

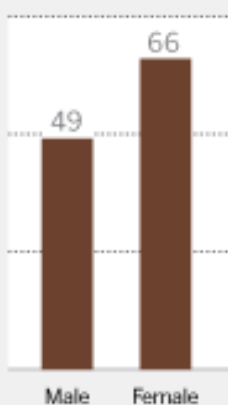
## RELIGIOUS TRADITION



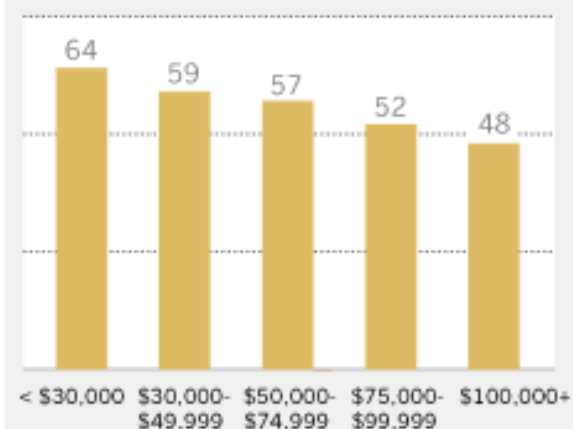
## AGE



## GENDER



## INCOME



Data from the Pew Forum U.S. Religious Landscape Survey, conducted May 8 to Aug. 13, 2007, among more than 35,000 Americans age 18 and older; released in 2008.

# So what is “prayer.”

- Webster’s: “An address, as a petition, to God or a god in word or thought.”

This definition captures what most people think prayer is – but is it correct?

# What does the Bible tell us?

- Several Greek works in the New Testament are translated as “prayer.”
- 1. ***aiteo*** – to *officially* request or demand, usually for oneself.

“Again, I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for (*aiteo*), it will be done for you by my Father in heaven.”

Matthew 18:19-20

**NOTE: Sometimes *aiteo* requests are negative, and are demanding.**

# What does the Bible tell us?

- Several Greek works in the New Testament are translated as “prayer.”
- 2. *deomai* – to request something to address a need or lack, but to do so courteously or even warmly.

“Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you as wheat. <sup>32</sup> But I have prayed (*deomai*) for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers.”

Luke 22:31-32

# What does the Bible tell us?

- Several Greek works in the New Testament are translated as “prayer.”

3. ***erotao*** – an intimate or personal request or question.

“And I will ask (*erotao*) the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever—<sup>17</sup> the Spirit of truth.”  
John 14:16-17

# What does the Bible tell us?

- Several Greek works in the New Testament are translated as “prayer.”
4. *proseuchomai* – to earnestly desire to be near to God.
- from *pros*, meaning “nearness to;” and *euchomai*, meaning “to earnestly desire.”



A man in the crowd answered, "Teacher, I brought you my son, who is possessed by a spirit that has robbed him of speech. <sup>18</sup> Whenever it seizes him, it throws him to the ground. He foams at the mouth, gnashes his teeth and becomes rigid. I asked your disciples to drive out the spirit, but they could not."

<sup>19</sup> "O unbelieving generation," Jesus replied, "how long shall I stay with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring the boy to me."

<sup>20</sup> So they brought him. When the spirit saw Jesus, it immediately threw the boy into a convulsion. He fell to the ground and rolled around, foaming at the mouth.

<sup>21</sup> Jesus asked the boy's father, "How long has he been like this?"

"From childhood," he answered. <sup>22</sup> "It has often thrown him into fire or water to kill him. But if you can do anything, take pity on us and help us."

<sup>23</sup> "'If you can'?" said Jesus. "Everything is possible for him who believes."

<sup>24</sup> Immediately the boy's father exclaimed, "I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!"

<sup>25</sup> When Jesus saw that a crowd was running to the scene, he rebuked the evil spirit. "You deaf and mute spirit," he said, "I command you, come out of him and never enter him again."

<sup>26</sup> The spirit shrieked, convulsed him violently and came out. The boy looked so much like a corpse that many said, "He's dead." <sup>27</sup> But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him to his feet, and he stood up.

<sup>28</sup> After Jesus had gone indoors, his disciples asked him privately, "Why couldn't we drive it out?"

<sup>29</sup> He replied, "This kind can come out only by prayer (*proseuchomai*)."

# In Summary: Biblical Words for Prayer

- There are several words for “prayer” in the Bible: *aiteo*, *deomai*, *erotao*...
- These suggest varying levels of intimacy – from demanding, to formally requesting, to requesting in a personal way.
- But the most common and strongest word is *proseuchomai*, which literally means “to earnestly desire for God to come near.”

*After Jesus had gone indoors, his disciples asked him privately, "Why couldn't we drive it out?" 29 He replied, "This kind can come out only by prayer (proseuchomai)."*

*Mark 9:28-29*

# WHY do we pray?

1. Because we NEED to.

People pray because they have an inherent sense of need for God and for communion with God.

2. Because Scripture command it.

Of the 73 NT references to prayer, almost all are instructions or admonitions to pray (“*And when you pray...*”)

3. Because it is our strongest weapon against evil and the Devil.

*“Satan laughs at our toils, mocks at our wisdom, but he trembles when we pray.”* Samuel Chadwick

# WHY does prayer seem so HARD?

1. Because we don't know what we're looking for.
2. Because prayer can be hard work, and we don't like hard work.
3. Because there may be something frustrating our efforts to have a prayer life:
  - lack of faith, unconfessed sin, bad relationships, selfishness/lack of giving.

# The Essence of True Prayer

- Prayer is relationship; it is intimacy with God.
- When prayer is relationship with God, everything about our prayer changes:
  - We know more what God wants, so we know what we can and should ask for.
  - We have more confidence God will answer.
  - We have more grace to accept God's answers, even if they are not the answers we wanted.
- Prayer is, first and foremost, to climb as a child into the lap of God, to relax and enjoy the intimacy of His presence with us.

# Prayer as Relationship

- **When we practice prayer as relationship, TWO things happen:**
  1. **We get to know better the mind of God.**
    - **C.S Lewis: “Prayer does not change God; prayer changes me.”**
    - ***Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is — his good, pleasing and perfect will.*** Romans 12:2
    - ***“For who has known the mind of the Lord that he may instruct him?” But we have the mind of Christ.*** 1 Corinthians 2:16
    - **Luther: “Love God and do as you please.”**

# Prayer as Relationship

- **When we practice prayer as relationship, TWO things happen:**
  1. **We get to know better the mind of God.**
  2. **We learn to come to God in HUMILITY.**
    - **By definition, faith requires humility: you can't put your faith in God until you've taken your faith off yourself.**
    - *But he gives us more grace. That is why Scripture says: "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."*

James 4:6
    - *"If you can?" said Jesus. "Everything is possible for him who believes." <sup>24</sup> Immediately the boy's father exclaimed, "I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!"*

Mark 9:23-24
    - **Faith and humility are TWINS.**

# What Does It Look Like to Pray Humbly?

- **We come to God admitting we don't know for sure what is best.**
- **We say to God that we know He loves us and wants the best for us.**
- **We tell God that – within our confessed limitations – there still are desires in our heart, and specifically what they are.**
- **We are willing to accept what and how He answers.**
- **We do not become angry at God if He does not give us what we ask for – this is ANTI-FAITH!**



# The Gethsemane Prayer (Mark 14:32-42)

1. Jesus bases the prayer in his intimate relationship with the Father: *“Abba; Dear Father...”*
2. Jesus acknowledges the power and authority of the Father: *“everything is possible for you.”*
3. Jesus tells the Father very directly what he wants: *“Take this cup from me.”*
4. But he acknowledges that the Father’s knows best, and confesses his willingness to accept the Father’s will: *“Yet not what I will, but what you will.”*
5. He was persistent: *“Returning the third time...”*
6. Once the Father’s will was revealed, Jesus accepts it and moves on in strength, even though it was not what he wanted: *“Rise! Let us go! Here comes my betrayer!”*

"I am the vine; you are the branches. ***If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.*** <sup>6</sup> If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. <sup>7</sup> ***If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you.*** <sup>8</sup> This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

<sup>9</sup> "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. <sup>10</sup> If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love. <sup>11</sup> I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. <sup>12</sup> My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. <sup>13</sup> Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. <sup>14</sup> You are my friends if you do what I command. <sup>15</sup> I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. <sup>16</sup> ***You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit — fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name.*** <sup>17</sup> This is my command: Love each other.

John 15:5-17

# Obstacles to Prayer

## ➤ **Our need to be productive.**

- We derive our value based on what we do and what we produce, rather than who we are in relation to God and each other.
  - ❖ To know God means to be ourselves in His presence, without the need for productivity.

## ➤ **Our need to stay busy.**

- If we can just stay busy we don't have to deal with our own emptiness, failing and guilt.
  - ❖ To know God requires space for God in our busy lives – “vacare deo.”

# Obstacles to Prayer

- **Our need to be productive.**
- **Our need to stay busy.**
- **Our own impatience.**
  - We want everything yesterday, but God does not work that way.
    - ❖ Getting to know God takes time.
- **Our need for a technique.**
  - We are hyper-rational, and think all we need to succeed at anything is the right training or technique. (This is NOT magic.)
    - ❖ Augustine: “We come to God by love; not by navigation.”

# Obstacles to Prayer

- **Our need to be productive.**
- **Our need to stay busy.**
- **Our own impatience.**
- **Our need for a technique.**

# Preparing to Pray

Take your time... slow down... be patient... humbly give God control of your time, yourself, and your relationship with Him.

# Preparing to Pray

1. Recognize that God loves you and wants to be in relationship with you; and that prayer is a gift, a privilege, a responsibility, and a tender mercy.
2. Confess that you don't know how to pray.  
*(“Lord, teach us to pray...” Luke 11:1)*
3. Set aside the time for prayer – “*vacare deo.*”
4. Be practical – treat your prayer life like your job.  
*Keep a prayer notebook; don't try to pray when you're asleep; position your body appropriately; talk to God in your regular voice; if your mind wanders, try praying out loud; try writing your prayers.*
5. Try praying by reading Scriptures (especially Psalms), or try using a prayer book.
6. Stick with it.

## Beginning to Pray

*O God, you are my God, earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you, my body longs for you, in a dry and weary land where there is no water.*

*<sup>2</sup> I have seen you in the sanctuary and beheld your power and your glory. <sup>3</sup> Because your love is better than life, my lips will glorify you.*

*<sup>4</sup> I will praise you as long as I live*

Psalm 63:1-4



# Beginning to Pray – the ACTS Prayer

1. **Adoration** – to honor, to revere, to show committed love.

*You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being.*

Revelation 4:11

2. **Confession** – to acknowledge sin and guilt.

*If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. <sup>9</sup> If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.*

1 John 1:8-9

# Beginning to Pray – the ACTS Prayer

3. **Thanksgiving** – to say thank-you for gifts and benefits.

*I will give thanks to the Lord because of his righteousness and will sing praise to the name of the Lord Most High.*

Psalm 7:17

4. **Supplication** – to humbly ask for your needs and the needs of others to be met.

*Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.*

Philippians 4:6

# Beginning to Pray – the ACTS Prayer

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