

“The Disciple’s Prayer”

Genesis 18:20-32

Psalm 138

Colossians 2:6-19

Luke 11:1-13

The Lord’s Prayer is the framework for being a disciple and making disciples. The Lord’s Prayer is the prayer we share with all Christians. It unites us as a community. The Lord’s Prayer is about relationships. Christians have a relationship with God and one another. Henri J.M. Nouwen in his book *Reaching Out* writes, “The paradox of prayer is that it asks for a serious effort while it can only be received as a gift. We cannot plan, organize, or manipulate God; but without a careful discipline, we cannot receive him either.”<sup>1</sup> Prayer is our mechanism to converse with the One who knows us the best and loves us the most. Disciples have a personal relationship with God. And when we prayer together we model the community of faith as opposed to an individualistic one.

We are wired by God for relationships. The biblical word “community” describes this phenomenon as “a group with common interests.”<sup>2</sup> Community then, for Christians, is a group of people with the common interest of demonstrating the love of Jesus Christ by loving others. In his book *Flourishing: Why We Need Religion In A Globalized World*, Miroslav Volf notes, “...world religions are.... —culture-shaping forces with distinctive accounts of what they deem to be universal human values.”<sup>3</sup> Christians are truly culture

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<sup>1</sup>Henri J.M. Nouwen, *Reaching Out* (New York City, New York: An Image Book, 1975),

<sup>2</sup>Donald K. McKim, *Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 55.

<sup>3</sup>Miroslav Volf, *Flourishing: Why We Need Religion In A Globalized World* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2015), 39.

shaping when we lead with the biblical values of inclusion, accessibility, love, and “championing the least of these.”

As Christians, the culture-shaping value is love. The unique culture-shaping idea is the message of salvation in Jesus Christ, salvation for eternal life and abundant life today. In Colossians 2:13-14 Paul writes, “And when you were dead in trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive together with him, when he forgave us all our trespasses, erasing the record that stood against us with its legal demands. He set this aside, nailing it to the cross.” Paul contends that there is a fundamental disjunction, between the wisdom of this world and the wisdom of God. Paul is not categorically rejecting the validity of human wisdom; he is not anti-intellectual or anti-education.

Personal transformation is given to us in Christ. In our baptism, we have been made members of the household of God. Through faith in Jesus Christ we have, in our baptism, been cut off from the old life of the flesh. This is the disarming power of the gospel, unconditional love. As we are rooted, built up and established in the faith, we choose the truth of Christ over everything that competes against it.

The challenges of a global humanity that face the world’s religions are interconnectedness gives some people a head start and leaves others scrambling just to get to the starting line; unprecedented economic growth for some, but not everyone; the spread of the rule of law that clashes with contexts that exalt criminal networks; and individuals who are preoccupied with their own personal pleasures and pains while at the

same time not engaging effectively with the world's sufferings.<sup>4</sup> Humans are interconnected and interdependent. The "we" is greater than the "me."

God is for every human being. We, then, as Christians, are to be for others, "the stranger," and "the other" in our living the salvation message, in word and deed. We, then, are for the common good. Claiming the power of God's covenantal faithfulness, we invite others to say "Yes" to God's unconditional love for them in and through Jesus Christ. And then demonstrate that love in action by walking with others to support them getting to the starting line and beyond.

In Genesis 18:20-32, we learn a profound lesson about prayer and justice. Abraham was concerned that God would destroy both the righteous and wicked in Sodom and Gomorrah because of the gravity of their sin. Abraham conversed with God about the number of righteous who would need to be present for forgiveness to occur for the two communities not to be destroyed. God started with fifty righteous and then Abraham began the negotiation. And this is how the negotiation ended in Genesis 18:32. It reads, "Then he [Abraham] said, 'Oh do not let the Lord be angry if I speak just once more. Suppose ten are found there.' He [the Lord] answered, 'For the sake of ten, I will not destroy it.'" This prayer between Abraham and God demonstrates mercy and inclusion.

In Psalm 138, we learn that prayer increases one's strength of soul. Prayers for mercy offer a challenge to independence and self-sufficiency. Psalm 138:1-3 reads, "I give thanks, O LORD, with my whole heart...I bow down toward your holy temple and give thanks to your name for your steadfast love and your faithfulness...On the day I

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<sup>4</sup>These challenges adapted from Miroslav Volf, *Flourishing: Why We Need Religion In A Globalized World*, 36.

called, you answered me, you increased my strength of soul.” We experience mercy by resting in God’s steadfast love and faithfulness. God’s love and faithfulness are steadfast even in our brokenness. Mercy orients us to our need for interconnectedness and interdependence. Prayer increases our strength of soul as disciples.

In Colossians 2:6-19, we learn that a simple faith is all we ever need, because of the profound mystery of our baptism. A simple faith believes God is with us in our asking and seeking God in our remembering, telling, and living the way of Jesus by being just, kind, and humble. Colossians 2:18-19 reads, “Do not let anyone disqualify you, insisting on self-abasement and worship of angels, dwelling on visions, puffed up without cause by a human way of thinking, and not holding fast to the head, from whom the whole body, nourished and held together by its ligaments and sinews, grows with a growth that is from God.” As Christian our identity is in Christ. “In” is an important preposition. For example, fruit is in the jello salad. Not as “a side,” but in the jello. By faith in Jesus, we live in him. We are not outside of Jesus.

In Luke 11:1-13, Jesus taught his disciples to pray as he prayed. Praying as Jesus prayed recognizes God as God; acknowledges God as holy; asks God’s kingdom to come now; asks God for daily food; asks God for forgiveness; asks God not to lead us into temptation; and demonstrates the human spirit’s yearning for reconciliation with God. Jesus also tells the parable of a man who went to a friend, at a very inconvenient time, and asked him to lend some bread because he had none. The man’s friend was initially annoyed because he was already in bed. But because of the man’s persistence, he would give whatever he needed. Luke 11:9 reads, “So I say to you, Ask, and it will be given you;

search, and you will find; knock and the door will be opened for you.”<sup>5</sup> Prayer keeps us asking and seeking our Creator. God supplies resources to human need.

There is always enough no matter how great the need. The resources we have are not to be privatized. No one is to miss out. Resources are for the community...the interconnected human community. The Lord’s Prayer demonstrates a simple faith. With Luke, let us learn the power of dependence on the One who promises to provide in all ways for the human family. Provision comes through the interconnectedness and interdependence with others in the human family.

Humans are created to be “meaning makers.”<sup>6</sup> All people are on a quest for meaning and the world religions each have an outcome for the quest. Proclaiming the good news of Jesus Christ in word and deed is our unique voice in the plurality of religious voices within the global human. Prayer, modeled after the Lord’s Prayer, is an act of simple faith. And it leads us to participate in the needs of others in the global family. It’s what disciples of Jesus do. Our lives and the lives of others benefit. Amen.

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<sup>6</sup>This idea taken from Rodger Y. Nishioka in David L. Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor, editors, *Feasting on the Word, Year C, Volume 3*, 280.