

Mad City Church Men's Retreat

Prayer Workshop

Men and Prayer - Let's Be Honest

Welcome and Introduction

I want each of you to take the card in front of you and write a one sentence answer to each of these 2 questions. Why are you here? And why don't you pray? You've got one minute.

This workshop is called Men and Prayer -Let's Be Honest. So let me set the stage for honesty.

First, every one of you can be a man of prayer but it's going to cost you your life. Being a man of prayer is not about learning a trick or a technique or a formula because prayer is not magic, it's not a sport and it's not a project.

Second, I'm not here to impress you with what I know about prayer. But I ***have*** learned some things about God and about people and about prayer that I think might help you to become a man of prayer. So, the best I can do in this short time together is give you a few tips and hope you'll pay attention. But if you really pay attention you may pick up a tip that might change your life.

Finally, this hour is going to be over sooner than you think.

Here are two key scriptures and 4 books on prayer

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 *Rejoice always; pray without ceasing; in everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.*

Psalm 139 23 *Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. 24 See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.*

If I could have only 4 books on prayer these would be the books.

Intercessory Prayer by Dutch Sheets (written 12 years ago)

Spiritual Warfare by Timothy Warner (written 17 years ago)

Celebration of Discipline by Richard Foster (written 30 years ago)

With Christ in the School of Prayer by Andrew Murray (written in 1895) If I could have only one book on prayer this would be it.

The simplest definition of Prayer - a meeting with God.

What have you prayed about in the past month?

How many of you have taken time to sit for at least 5 minutes in the past month to pray -

- for the upcoming election?
- for our politicians to handle the current economic crisis well?
- for the welfare of another nation?
- to be more godly?
- for someone's salvation?

Some thoughts about prayer -

1. We all pray and yet we're often not praying when we pray. We are often just meeting with ourselves with no sense that God is leaning over us, inclining his ear to our every word. Sometimes we're talking to our worries and anxieties or to our bosses or wives, trying to work things out, but not meeting with God.
2. Prayer is essentially a religious activity yet non-religious people pray.
3. You can share a problem with your best friend and he'll say "I'll pray for you" and he won't. Yet some people pray passionately for people they've never met.
4. Some people have stories of amazing ways God has answered their prayers and at times those same people will wonder if God even hears their prayers.
5. And finally, prayer doesn't work, but **God works** in answer to prayer.

Men struggle to pray because prayer is about Dependency and Intimacy.

Men like to know they can "git er dun". Men want to fix things. Men like to take care of business.

We don't live as though our lives are really in God's hands. We live as though God is a tool in our pocket. We don't depend on God for everything. Only for emergencies. God is plan B not plan A.

Do we trust our wits, our wisdom, our strength, our good looks or any of our stuff? Are we going to do life on our own and when something goes south reach into our pocket and get our little God idol out and ask him to clean up the mess? Or are we going to trust God with absolutely everything about our life? That's a choice we all have to make. It's a choice we can make once and for all. And it's a choice we make every day and even several times a day.

Utter dependence upon God - that's an area of struggle for us.

Men are also not good at relationships based on intimacy. Someone once said this about boys and girls. Girls play at sex in order to get love. Boys play at love in order to get sex. And that carries over into our prayer life, too. We play at having an intimate relationship with God and see what we can get. Sometimes we fear getting to know God better, but we're also afraid of getting to know ourselves too much.

We all have people who like us for who we pretend to be, not for who we really are, because we hide from people. Many of us think that if we're as open and honest with our wives about how we're feeling or what we're thinking as they are with us, that we'd be living on the street. Too often that's how we think about God, too.

We'll talk about these things in a bit but I want to read a scripture and ask you a question.

Philippians 4:5-7 *Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

Look at this verse and tell me three benefits of learning to trust God and learning to take all things to him in prayer?

Gentleness of spirit. Thankfulness. Peace in your heart. Peace of mind.

So, what is it going to take for you to become a man of prayer? I've come with just 2 suggestions.

NO. 1 DETERMINE IN YOUR HEART TO SURRENDER YOUR LIFE TOTALLY TO YOUR CREATOR, FATHER GOD.

You'll never develop a vital prayer life by hanging around God or by hanging around people you think are Godly, or by giving yourself half-heartedly to God. But you can develop a vital prayer life if you will finally totally surrender your life and all you have and all you hope for to God.

We men are very good at coming to God in a half-hearted way. We give ourselves wholeheartedly to lots of things but we hedge our bets when it comes to giving ourselves over completely to God.

I think we've got too many bad ideas about what it means to surrender. Too many cops and cowboys and war images about coming out with your hands above your head. Surrender too often means bad news, bad result, bad idea.

But with God, total surrender leads to total freedom. That's the upside down kingdom.

When we became Christians some things changed -

- We changed our address. We were transferred from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of light.
- We also became new creatures - the old you went and the new you came into being.
- And we also became someone else's children. Our lives are no longer our own.

The problem is that we just don't act like it much of the time. Some of us still need to repent or change our minds about who we are and who we belong to.

And you belong to God your creator and your father.

When you pray you are speaking to the God who created you. And he created you to pray. You were made for prayer. Prayer is your life-line to God. We are all hard-wired for prayer. It is meant to be as natural for us as breathing.

Here's something funny about prayer. We are to come to God in prayer with a broken and contrite heart - aware of our weakness and emptiness.

But because we are hard-wired to pray by our Creator God, when we pray we are actually doing something that is complete, and whole, and full - and we can do it in complete confidence.

Heb. 5: 7 says *During the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission.*

There will be times when you pray with loud cries and tears but I doubt that will be often. There will be times even when you pray to be saved from death but I don't think that will be the norm either. But if you want to be confident that your prayers will be heard you must get to a place in your life where you know you have reverently submitted your life and all things to your Creator God.

Pray as though your life really belonged to God, that he can do whatever he wants to with it, believing that God's will for you is always good, pleasing and perfect.

This is why Jesus challenges us to learn to approach God as little children. Children know they're helpless. We think we're not. They know that God knows best. We tend to think that

we know better. So this is really no more than unlearning the lies we've come to believe about God and ourselves as we've grown up.

Also, Jesus came to reveal God as our Father. How many in this room have a father or at least had a father at one time who had a role in making you? (That's everybody!)

When Moses asked God to reveal his glory God responded by speaking. And here's what he said, *"The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness,*

My family and I once lived in England. We lived in London for 5 years and attended a church in south London during that time. The pastor of our church was once invited to a major university to speak about Christianity to a group of Muslim students.

After he presented the case for Christianity a Muslim student stood up and said, "You say that Jesus said he is the only way to God but we don't believe that." And our pastor said, "No, I didn't say that." This student was a bit shocked, so he said again, "Yes you did. You said that Jesus said that he is the only way to God." And our pastor said again, "No, I didn't say that."

Then our pastor said this, "Muslims have 99 words for God but Father is not one of them. What I am here to tell you is that Jesus said that the only way to the Father is through Him. If you want to know God as he really is, as your heavenly Father, you must go through Jesus."

When Jesus came to reveal God as Father he wasn't trying to scare us but to reassure us and comfort us. Kids get it. We often don't.

You see, the God who created us is our heavenly Father. Jesus, His Son, came to make a way for us to have our relationship with the Father restored after it was ruined by sin. Jesus came to show us by *his* life - that's Jesus' life - just how wonderful and loving and approachable this *Father God is* and how *eager* God the Father is to have relationship with us.

I would encourage you to ask God to reveal His Father's heart toward you.

NO. 2 KNOW AND BELIEVE THAT YOU ARE DEARLY LOVED ALL THE TIME.

Eph. 5: 1 and 2 says, "Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

This verse does not say we are to be imitators of God in order to be dearly loved children, but to be imitators of God as dearly loved children.

Thinking only that "God knows I'm no good" is going to ruin your prayer life. But knowing that God knows all about you and that he dearly loves you will be a great help to your prayer life.

Hebrews 10: 14 says, *by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy.*

If you are in Christ you have already been made perfect forever. And you can't improve upon perfect and nothing lasts longer than forever.

Remember, every one of us, the good, the bad and the ugly, all approach God on the basis of the finished work of Christ on the Cross, not on the basis of our performance.

Heb. 4: 16 says, "Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need."

We go to God to receive mercy and grace not to receive a reward for being good.

Eph. 3:12 *In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence.*

God sees everything and isn't surprised by anything. Remember, God deals with the real you not the pretend you. And he dearly loves the real you.

F.B. Meyer wrote this about how our Father loves us and responds to us even in our inability to please him perfectly. He wrote,

"He has borne with you so lovingly. He has filled your life with mercy even when compelled to correct. He has returned your rebuffs and slights with meekness and forbearance. He has never wearied of you."

He has never wearied of you. Put that in your pipe and smoke it.

So we struggle to pray. We struggle with dependence and intimacy. We struggle to believe in prayer. We wonder if we're good enough to pray or skilled enough to pray. Or we believe other lies about us or about God that keep us from praying.

So we come to a men's retreat called an advance and hope to learn a trick about prayer. But remember I said there are no tricks. Well, here's the closest you'll get to a trick.

If you were to put this into practice - as you learn to surrender your life wholeheartedly to God, and as you dare to believe that He loves you as a dearly loved child all the time, I guarantee you'll begin to see a change in your prayer life.

Every man knows how to use the universal remote. I want to encourage you to learn how to use two buttons. Pause and Mute. When you encounter a situation or event that you would naturally respond to in the flesh, just Pause for moment and ask God, "What should I do?" When you face a situation or encounter during the day that you would naturally have a fleshly response to, just press Mute for a moment and ask God, "What should I say?" If you did this every day and even several times a day you'll be meeting with God in prayer and you'll spend less time saying, "Why did I do that?" or "Why did I say that?"

The basis for this "trick" comes from James 1: 19 *My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry,*

Any Questions?

Let's pray.