THIS WEEK'S MESSAGE

March 1 & 2 '08

"Reboot" Series

When its time to adjust the "default" settings...
Studies from the Sermon on the Mount

This Week's Message: **Was my prayer "good"?**
Pastor Mark Burch

I Thessalonians 5:16-18
Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

It almost sounds like a silly question – how do you determine if a prayer is "good" or not? Is it by the number of words (longer prayers are better) or by the particular words we choose (spiritual sounding prayers must be better), or is it the time or day or place that I choose to pray that makes my prayer "good"? Silly, huh!?

Yet how many of us have not asked those questions ourselves, or been asked them by others, or wondered about what it was in particular that made prayer powerful, effective, and meaningful.

We are a people who pray….there is no getting around the fact that in the good times and in the bad…there is something within us that calls us to "talk to God…" But prayer can be a discouraging and confusing venture….

Do you have questions about Jesus' teaching in the Sermon on the Mount? Send them to sermonquestions@willowparkchurch.com and then listen to future messages for the answers!

Home Group Study Questions

History (Making it Personal)

1. Talk for a moment about your earliest understanding of prayer. Where or when did you first see and hear prayer modeled?
2. Why do you think people struggle with prayer?
    a. Why do people hesitate to pray in front of others?
    b. What are the obstacles that keep us from taking everything to God in prayer?
    c. Why does much of "prayer" remain a mystery to us?
3. Share an experience where God answered your prayer in such a significant and real way that you KNEW that it was a direct answer to prayer….how did it affect your spiritual life?
4. Why do you think we are told to pray continually if God already knows what we need before we ask?

Digging Deeper (Looking to the Bible)

5. Read Matthew 6:5-15 together with Luke 11:2-4. Compare the two texts for their similarities and differences.
6. The final phrase "thine is the kingdom, power, and glory" does not appear in the earliest copies of the New Testament so many modern translations have left it out. What does this phrase add to the prayer if it is included?
7. Talk about the greater context of giving, praying, fasting, in order to be SEEN BY MEN? How do we balance the many calls to public prayer with this admonition to pray in secret?
8. How may we have adopted the practice of "many words" or of "vain repetition" in our prayers today? Do you think a ritual of bowing your head before every meal could fall into this concept of "meaningless repetition?"
9. How do you understand Paul's admonition in I Thessalonians 5:17 to "pray without ceasing"?
10. Talk about the elements of the Lord's prayer:
    a. Do we spend enough time in praise and adoration of who God is and what He has done for us?
    b. Do we reverence God enough in our prayers?
    c. Are we serious when we ask for His kingdom to come?
    d. Can we genuinely ask God to "rule" in world affairs if we are not letting Him rule in our own lives first?
    e. What about the prayer for daily bread? How do you understand this prayer?
    f. Forgiveness – how do you understand vv 14-15. Is it possible that we block God's grace in our own lives?
    g. What other passages talk to us about spiritual warfare and the battle we are to take up against the evil one? Have we fully understood this? Maybe take time to read the words to the old hymn "A Mighty Fortress" and talk about the implications for prayer

Taking It Home (Application)

11. Commit yourself to finding some quiet time this week – to spend alone with God in prayer. Try the model Jesus used. Begin with praise – then surrender, then needs, confession of sin and willingness to release those who have sinned against you and then bookend it with praise! Ask God to speak to you through your quiet time of devotion.