

SMALL GROUP QUESTIONS

Bubbles, Part 1 – What is prayer?

June 21, 2009

Questions by Danah Davis, Small Group Director

(w/ excerpts from *Developing Your Secret Closet of Prayer* by Richard A. Burr)



MINISTRY PRAYER REQUESTS

- **Small Group Staff:** Please pray that the Lord provides with the candidates of His choosing as we build upon the Small Group Staff. Pray for wisdom and discernment for all those involved in the selection process.
- **Small Group Leaders:** Please pray for one another, for encouragement, strength, wisdom, discernment, affirmation and spiritual growth.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

- **Check out the new Small Group Leader blog** at <http://rocksmallgroupsrock.blogspot.com/>
- **Join a leadership team!** We have eight to choose from: Focus, Prayer, Office, S.G. Questions, **Fun, Growth, Library and Ministry Assistants**. Email danah.davis@therocksandiego.org if you'd like to participate on one of the teams!

MEMORY VERSE

“And when you pray, do not be like hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.” Matthew 6:5-6

GETTING STARTED

Have you ever wanted recognition for the good things you've done?

I remember a time shortly after I got saved that I helped a homeless at an In and Out Burger in an urban area of Los Angeles near Universal Studios. She was sitting by herself on the patio of the restaurant talking to herself; looking quite intimidating with a sort of angry grimace on her face. When I saw her sitting there, I felt this piercing in my heart that said “ask her if she wants some food. She is probably hungry and that's why she's sitting outside at this restaurant surrounding by a bunch of eating people.” I was so terrified to approach her! “What if she yelled at me or something,” I thought.

I could see people around me trying to avoid her or pretend she wasn't there. Anxiously, I threw up one of those quick, desperate prayers to God, asking if the piercing in my chest was from Him and for courage to approach her if it was His will. The burning was still there in my heart and I knew that I couldn't leave without trying to talk to this woman.

Nervous, I approached the stranger and asked her if she was hungry. She said, “yeah” and I offered to buy her a meal. I only had my bankcard so we’d have to go in together and I’d purchase her food. When we got to the counter I asked what she’d like to order, she sort of ignored me for a few seconds that felt like a lifetime and continued rambling to herself about something that I couldn’t make out. I gently asked her again, “What would you like to order?” She gave her order and then we waited for it to come up. She wouldn’t talk to me anymore. She eased into a corner near the ketchup and proceeded to mumble to herself looking suspiciously around the room while scratching as though she had mosquito bites all over her arms. People turned their noses up at us while trying not to stare too hard. The woman obviously hadn’t showered in a long time and there were odors of urine and must present.

Once her order was ready we parted. She went off by herself, her body language giving off signals of “leave me alone now.” I don’t remember her saying thank you but I wasn’t expecting it either. One man, did however, notice the entire exchange I guess and pulled up next to me as I walked to my car and told me how nice that was of me. Shyly, I said, “It was the right thing to do” and got in my car.

Once in my car, I let out this huge sigh of relief that the whole thing was over. It was quite an internally emotional ordeal for me. I remember experiencing feeling bouts of guilt and doubt that I didn’t share the gospel or pray with her, though I did pray for her there in my car. I kept asking myself, “I wonder what Miles would say I should have done differently?” I wasn’t sure if I did the Lord justice. I had only known Him for a couple of months and to even approach a stranger, let alone a homeless woman who appeared to be coming off some kind of narcotic was completely out of my character. I wanted to tell someone what had happened! I wanted affirmation! I knew enough of the Bible to know that I shouldn’t go boasting about the good that I did but deep down there were still parts of me that wondered if it was good enough. I needed to hear from someone, a pastor or accountability partner that that was okay. I wrestled with wanting to share with someone what I did for weeks. Finally, pride won over and I told the person who led me to the Lord and confessed that I was disappointed that I needed at least one Christian to give me praise and wasn’t patient enough to wait for my reward in heaven. He was very graceful with me.

My outlook on the situation now in hindsight is different then it was then. But the principal takeaway is still there. We shouldn’t do things for the praise and favor of men. At that infancy stage in my spiritual walk, I couldn’t discern the difference between *doing something* and *doing something with a selfish heart to gain good will with people*. Now I see that had I have seen the woman there and instead of wondering if she was hungry as I did, and thought rather, “look at how many people are here during this busy lunch hour! If they all see me help this lady, they’ll give me praises and think I’m sure a good person,” then, I would have been the epitome of what Jesus was warning us about in Matthew 6.

Matthew 6 opens with a yellow caution flag: “Be careful not to do your ‘acts of righteousness’ before men, to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven.” Jesus names three examples of “acts of righteousness,” which some call spiritual disciplines, that should be done in secret:

1. Giving to the needy (Without fanfare)
2. Praying (in your room, with the door shut)
3. Fasting (So it may not be obvious to others)

The point of it all? These spiritual disciplines are not to be done before an audience. Those who parade their piety forfeit their reward. Some people, especially the religious leaders called Pharisees, wanted to be seen as “holy” and public prayer and complaining about the effects of fasting was their way to get attention. Jesus saw through their self-righteous acts, however, and taught that the essence of prayer is not a public style but private communication with God. There is a place for public prayer, but to pray only where others will notice you indicates that your real audience is not God. (Burr p2, 2005)]

Getting Started

Before you get started with the questions, read Matthew 6:5-8 aloud carefully.

1. Do you enjoy praying? Why or why not?
2. Prayer is one of the most popular topics in Christian publishing; there are literally thousands of books published on the subject. Why do you think the Bubbles series is important? What do you hope to get out of it?

Digging Deeper

3. How did Miles define prayer in Sunday's sermon? How is this definition different from the concept you may be used to?
4. What makes prayer hypocritical? How can you avoid praying hypocritically?
5. What difficulties do you have with prayer?
6. Has God spoken to you in prayer about a specific issue in your life? Ask members of the group to share experiences of dialogue with God in prayer.
7. Do you agree or disagree with this statement, "one's spiritual life will never rise above one's prayer life"? Why?
8. Why is solitude with God so critical? What are its benefits?

Bringing It Home

9. Think about a place of solitude where you might be able to have your "prayer closet." What are some of the things you may want to keep there (e.g. Bible, notebook, concordance, etc.) Also think about your daily schedule, when you can set aside time for prayer?
10. As an exercise in making prayer a dialogue, break into pairs and spend some time in prayer asking God questions like the ones below. Wait quietly before the Lord for answers. Keep your journal nearby ready to write down any insight revealed to you by the Holy Spirit.
 - a. Father, what do You think of me as a follower of Your Son? With the Fruit of the Spirit in mind (see Galatians 5:22), how do I measure up?
 - b. How could I improve my prayer life, and in turn, my relationship with You?
 - c. What truth do You want me to learn this day?
 - d. Whom can I serve in Your name today? And how?