

'PRAYER, THE UPWARD CONNECTION'

This study is number 4 in our series 'Rhythms of Grace', and the inter-connectiveness of each study is becoming clear, which I suppose, should be no surprise as just about everything is dependent upon God's grace. We have looked at 'Fellowship, the Inward Community', at 'Rest, the Inward Life' and now Prayer, the Upward Connection'. I am constantly surprised by how difficult people, including myself, find this week's subject, when talking to our loving Father should be so easy and natural. I suspect we all believe our prayer life is poor and in need of improvement. Pete Greig, an accepted authority on prayer, opens his book 'How to Pray' with "Everyone prays. But no one finds it easy. We all need a little help".

Read Luke 5:12-16 Verses 15 and 16 are the focus for this study. Luke records that Jesus' ministry is starting to attract crowds, many were coming to hear him and many coming for healing. And yet he 'often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.'

What reasons might there be for Jesus to apparently choose to withdraw from the crowds rather than heal/teach more people? Is there a connection to our theme of 'rhythm'?

Luke states 'to lonely places.' Presumably his disciples did not accompany him. What might be so beneficial for prayer in lonely places? What could we learn from this?

Does this mean that praying with others is somehow a reduced communication? Alternatively, is it more effective?

Read Luke 11:1-13 As the passage opens, we learn that Jesus and his disciples have apparently been praying together. It would seem reasonable to assume that the disciples, hearing how Jesus prayed, were somewhat surprised because they ask, 'teach us to pray', and not ask, teach us what to pray. What follows is the prayer now so familiar to us. Although the words themselves are important, Jesus is actually responding to the question, 'teach us to pray'.

If Jesus is teaching us how to pray rather than what to say, should we be looking more closely at the structure of the prayer? What should we be learning?

How can you use what you have just discussed to help daily prayers?

From verses 5 onwards, Jesus is focusing his teaching on faith, trust and perseverance. Of course, words are important, but the integrity of prayer comes from faith and trust in the loving Father God. With such a relationship communication flows, producing harmony of purpose and outcomes.

Jesus makes a promise in verses 9 and 10. How relevant is this as we go about our daily ordinary lives? Should this give us confidence to pray 'constantly'?

It says on the Alpha tapes – "the best advice I can give about how to pray is - keep it simple - keep it real - and keep it up."

Prayer: *Thank you, Father God, that you want to hear from me. Thank you that you are interested in all I do. Help me to invite you into more and more of all that I do, so that your light shines into every corner of my being. Amen*