**St Martins C3 - November 13, 2022**

**Knowing God – Personal Experience**

**Sermon Summary:**

How come God reveals Himself big time when you are not expecting it and seems distant when you are truly seeking Him? – I don’t know the answer to that question. It seems that there is an element of mystery to how and when we experience God in dramatic ways. However, we do know that God is seeking those whose hearts are fully committed to Him. (2 Chron 16:9)

Whether we have dramatic experiences of God or not, doesn’t change the fact that he is God, and we can put our trust in who He is and what He has said. However, hopefully we want to experience more of Him. We also see in scripture that God wants to deepen His relationship with us. (John 15) So, how do we develop a relationship with God, where we are likely to experience Him more?

**Read: Matthew 6:5-8**

Jesus is very clear here, that connecting with God doesn’t come from demonstrative religious acts, but heartfelt personal prayers. What Jesus is teaching here is that prayer is simply POSITIONING ourselves in a place where we ABIDE with Him. Positioning ourselves in a space where it is more LIKELY that we will experience God. The first thing we can do to position ourselves to experience God more is to give God our TIME. When we give God an uncluttered meeting space, we are well positioned to experience God’s presence and guidance in our lives.

It is in this uncluttered time with God that we become more AWARE of ourselves and more aware of how He is engaging with us. This growing awareness helps us identify what God is doing in and around our lives. It is an awareness that can guide us in our interactions with others.

Jesus’ teaching on prayer in this passage reveals that we need to give God time, but it also implies that we ought to give God our FOCUSSED ATTENTION. How you maintain a focus on the Lord during your prayer time will depend on what works for you. Some have found worship music in the background helps. Others use journaling their thoughts, or short readings that they ponder on help. Whatever works for you, use it. However, keep in mind that what you do isn’t what you should be focused on. Who you are there to meet with is your focus.

Jesus taught and modelled to us a lifestyle where withdrawing from the busyness of everyday life and spending focussed time with God was essential. It positions us to experience God more. We become more aware of what God is doing in us and around us.

Another thing we observe in Jesus’ interactions with His Father is the clarity of purpose and partnership. (Jn 5:19-20) Relating to God is about spending time with God and taking that awareness of God into our everyday lives. Over time your relationship with God becomes less about what God is doing IN you and more about what He is doing THROUGH you.

***Are you willing to ask God how much time He wants to spend with you? Has God got your time and attention?***

**Suggested discussion questions:**

*Have you experienced God in an unexpected way in your life? If so, what happened and how do you know it was God?*

*Do you agree with the statement that there is an element of mystery to how and when we experience God?*

*What does Matthew 6:5-8 tell us about positioning ourselves well to experience God?*

*What time of the day works well for you to connect with God?*

*What helps you stay focussed in your prayer time?*

*What helps you develop a greater awareness of God either in your prayer time or in your everyday life?*

**Monday’s Devotion – Worship**

*“Our Father in heaven, hallowed by your name”*

Following Jesus’ teaching on prayer which we looked at on Sunday, Jesus gives us a model prayer to pray. Often referred to as “The Lord’s Prayer.” This week we are going to look at five different things that Jesus emphasizes in this prayer.

Jesus encourages us to start with worship. This is where we honour God for who He is. There are a couple of reasons why this is important:

1. It’s true – When we align our hearts and minds with the truth of who God is and who we are in relationship with Him, we position ourselves appropriately in God’s presence. We acknowledge God’s Sovereignty over our lives.
2. It helps our focus – When we worship God for who He is it engaging our focus and attention. Much like when you meet up with someone for coffee and get past the first greeting, the next thing you hopefully do is engage with them. You ask them how they are going etc. This focus or engagement with the person you are with is the critical thing that builds relationship. Likewise, our relationship with God. Worship comes first, because it engages us personally in our relationship with our Father.

How about trying this out this week. Spend the first few minutes of your time with God honouring Him for who He is. Maybe put a good worship song on and sing along with it. Let the lyrics be a prayer that you direct towards God.

**Tuesday’s Devotion – Purpose**

*“Your Kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”*

God’s primary purpose is to re-establish His good Kingdom on earth. His Kingdom is the only real hope for our world. Not only that, but it is an important part of God’s overall plan to bring history to a righteous conclusion.

So, if this is God’s plan and He is going to do it anyway, why do we need to pray this sort of prayer? My theory on this is that God wants us to pray this prayer to get us on board with what He is doing.

God is looking for mission partners. People who will co-labour with Him. Our relationship is a working relationship, so our prayers ought to reflect that aspect of the relationship. We are joining with God in the greatest purpose of all and that frames how we relate with Him.

“Your Kingdom come, your will be done,” is one of the most common prayers I pray. It helps me focus on the importance of Christ’s mission in my everyday life. It leads me to ponder on what would bringing Christ’s Kingdom to this person right now look like. That may be as simple as showing God’s love to them or serving them in some way. Jesus is encouraging us here to develop this continued focus of extending His will and purposes in every situation we can. So, let it be a continual prayer you pray. You may be surprised at what God will do.

**Wednesday’s Devotion – Provision.**

*“Give us today our daily bread.”*

This may seem like an odd thing to ask for, given that Jesus, just a few verses before said, “your Father knows what you need before you ask him.” So, what’s the point asking then?

I think this is similar situation to yesterday, in that God needs us to pray like this for our benefit, not his benefit. We ought not assume that God will provide for us. We ought to ask because it reveals our dependency on Him. It is acknowledging that God is the one who supplies our needs, not our employer.

There are certainly times in my life where I pray more fervently for God’s provision than others. It is usually those times where finances are running a bit tight for whatever reason. I use those times to remind myself that I need to rely on God’s provision ALL the time, not just some of the time.

It is also important to notice here that Jesus encourages us to pray for our DAILY bread. God may not give us all the worldly riches we can imagine, but we can depend on Him to meet our daily needs. God is very aware that always seeking more will distract us from what is truly important.

So, how often do you pray for God’s provision? Are you truly relying on God for your daily bread?

**Thursday’s Devotion – A clean slate**

*“Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.”*

We ALL need God’s forgiveness and we need it on a regular basis. It may be easy for us to slip into assuming on God’s grace and not bother with confession and repentance, but this will damage our relationship with God. We need to look to God to wipe the slate clean every day.

Regular repentance and asking for forgiveness keeps us humbly seeking God’s Holiness in our lives. Why would we let sin contaminate us when we don’t need to? Why would we try and manage our way out of our sin, when God has freely made available a way for us to be free of sin and live in His righteousness? Let us keep up the habit of asking for God’s forgiveness, so that we keep a clean heart before our Holy God.

The other important point that Jesus slips in here is our need to pass on this same grace to those around us. Releasing God’s grace extends God’s Kingdom. Withholding grace that ought to be extended reveals that we haven’t fully internalised the extent of the forgiveness that has been extended to us.

Jesus includes forgiveness in this prayer to remind us that our whole relationship with Him is based on grace. It’s a grace we need to constantly remind ourselves of and model to the world around us.

**Friday – Deliverance**

*“And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.”*

We have a very real spiritual enemy, and his agenda is not God’s agenda. It is the very opposite. Satan is seeking to hinder not build God’s Kingdom in our lives and the lives of those around us. Why Jesus encourages us to include this line in our prayers, is because we need God’s help in defeating Satan. We will not beat him on our own.

The first step in this spiritual battle is to ask for God’s help to not fall for Satan’s schemes. We need to resist the temptation that is coming our way. It will be real, and it will be strong, but God will give us the strength to overcome it.

The next step is to be aware of what Satan is trying to do in the lives of those around us. At first this may seem hard to discern, but when we think about it, it is anything we observe or perceive that is NOT extending God’s Kingdom in their lives.

Let us keep in mind that God is our deliverer. He is the only one who can defeat Satan, so we need to be clear on who’s side we are on and pray regularly for God’s discernment so that we see where the attacks are coming from and head them off in time.

So, how has this journey this week shaped your approach to prayer? What might you incorporate into your time with God that you haven’t previously?