

We began Wings on Tuesday reading a story entitled, “Willy the Wisher”. Willy, rather than picking up the toy he stepped on every morning as he got out of bed wished it would go away. Rather than putting the train tracks together so he could play with his toy train he wished someone would put the tracks together. Willy’s wishes went on and on - he was always late for school so he wished he would be on time! I thought about Willy and about prayer — as we begin this study of the prayer that Jesus taught his followers - is prayer more than wishing? How do we really view prayer? Hopefully some answers will come over the next few weeks.

Prayer should be a conversation with God (though I wonder how often we listen). What we call the Lord’s Prayer is found twice in the Gospels, once in Matthew and in Luke 11:1ff where the disciples have observed Jesus in prayer. There must have been something different in him when he returned from his time of prayer. They observed it and wanted to have the same experience. They ask, “*Lord, teach us how to pray.*” Teach us how to have a meaningful conversation with God. How do we share the joys and disappoints of our day. The ups and downs of our lives. The anger we sometimes feel. Share how we talk things out with God.

We know that talking things out often helps us to see things more clearly. Or, maybe asking ourselves, “Did I really say/pray that?” Jesus was comfortable talking with God - they wanted to be as comfortable. Jesus simply says, “When you pray, pray like this.” This is not a prayer to be repeated continuously, but a model of how one should pray. When you pray, pray in this manner.

The first thing I hope we notice about this prayer is that it is an unselfish prayer. There is not one personal pronoun found in it. It is our Father, our daily bread, forgive our sins, help us to stay away from temptation. I thought of Daniel’s prayer in Daniel 9. As Daniel realized that the end of their captivity may be near according to the words of Jeremiah he prays for the people. His prayer was also an unselfish prayer. We have sinned. We have not listened. We have rebelled. Could Daniel not have prayed “they” - he has been faithful. He is in the position he is in because he was faithful to God - but Daniel prays unselfishly for the people. They are in the boat together.

I was working on this sermon when I got word that Al was in the Emergency Room and was having difficulty breathing. I stopped working on it, sent out an email to you all and then prayed. But, as I prayed I was struck by the need not only to pray for Al, Elva and the family but for all of those who were at that moment in Emergency Rooms around the world. Not only for the patients but for the doctors, nurses, etc. who would be involved in the decisions of the moment. Yes, my focus was for Al and Elva but isn’t our God able to handle my prayer for them all?

This prayer should move us beyond our selfishness. God is the God of all creation. Read again those verses in Genesis. We are reminded that we are all made in the image of God - male and female. There is not just one person, group or nation but we are all created with the image of God in us. Genesis says that God was pleased with all that had been created, “*And God saw everything that was created and it was good*” (1:31). We all have the image of God stamped on our being. Now, it might be harder to see in some than others but it is there.

Our prayers should have the tone of unselfishness. As we look at this prayer we see how unselfish it really is. Yes, we pray for personal concerns and needs but also for concerns for the whole of creation. It focuses our attention on one another and the world. Our prayers should include all people, not just family, friends, or those of a particular stripe. God is not only our/my

God - God is the God of all. We are members of the family - sons and daughters. No one is a distant cousin or strange in-law - we are all created in the very image of God.

I wonder what would happen if we began to really understand in whose image we have all been created. If we saw everyone as valuable members of the family, as brothers and sisters. Yes, sin has distorted God's image in us. The lenses of our eyes have been blurred by sin. The world is out of focus. But that does not change the original plan of creation - we were created to carry the image of God. Is it time to clean the lens?

I thought of my grandmother. I am not sure she ever cleaned her glasses. Oh, she would sometimes take them off, rub them with her fingers and then put them back on. This only seemed to smudge them more. When I noticed them, I would take them off of her, give them a good cleaning and then put them back on her. She would seldom say anything (she never stopped me) but would smile and get on with what she was doing. I hope she was able to see things a little more clearly for a while!

Jesus says it is time to clean the lens and to begin to pray unselfishly.

He was introducing the incoming president of the American Baptist Churches of Maine. He had read much of his biography and his accomplishments. As he was ending his introduction he said something like, "You may call him Mr. President. You may call him Pastor. You may call him John. You may call him uncle, friend or whatever. But for me, I will always call him Dad."

Jesus said when you pray say, "Our Father..."

NIV, New International Bible Society, Zondervan, 1973, 1978, 1985
NRSV, Division of Christian Education, NCC, 1988