

NOTES

**ROOTED LESSON 1
PRAYER
MATTHEW 6:5-13**

INTRO: We live in a world where a lot of changes happen every day. List five things that were created or that have changed in your lifetime.

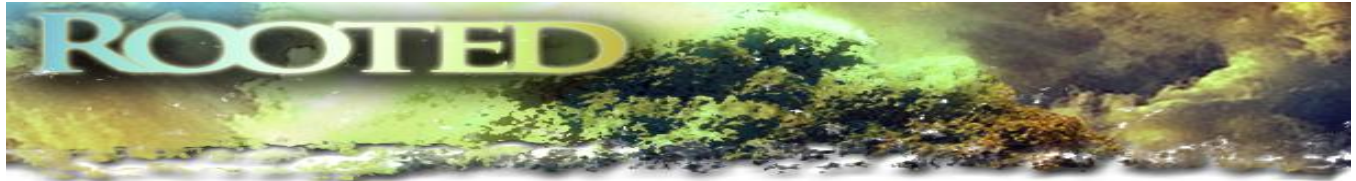
1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

These are a lot of changes. This is nowhere near the entire list. Change can be a good thing, and often is. Usually the idea is, "Let's come up with something new that will make our lives better." We come up with new vaccines that keep people from getting sick, we come up with new ways for us to connect and communicate with others more frequently and easily, we find safer ways to do things - the list goes on and on.

Christianity and our churches are not immune to change either. What are some ways your church has changed?

We often like change, but change is not always a good thing. We can think of all sorts of changes in the world that have been bad and the reasons why. As usual, Christianity tends to experience the same thing. Many times, changes in Christianity and our churches are not good things, especially if they hurt others and distract us from our true purpose.

Like I said before, we often like changes. We like the new songs in the church. We enjoy bands and the new media elements. We appreciate the work people are doing to find new ways to attract non-Christians. But sometimes, with all the change and newness, we get distracted from our true purpose. We turn our eyes away from the things God has taught us to do that help us grow in our faith and be successful from day to day.



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Illustration: Think of some things that have roots, such as trees and grass. What do roots do? They help trees, grass and other plants get the nutrients they need, they help them stand against storms, and they also help them come back healthy and strong from season to season.

We have roots too. We have earthly roots - the place we are from, the things our family taught us, the things that help us to shape who we are, and the way we tend to do things.

We also have spiritual roots, certain disciplines that have stood the test of time; those things that we must do if we are going to live out the Christian life the way God intends for us to.

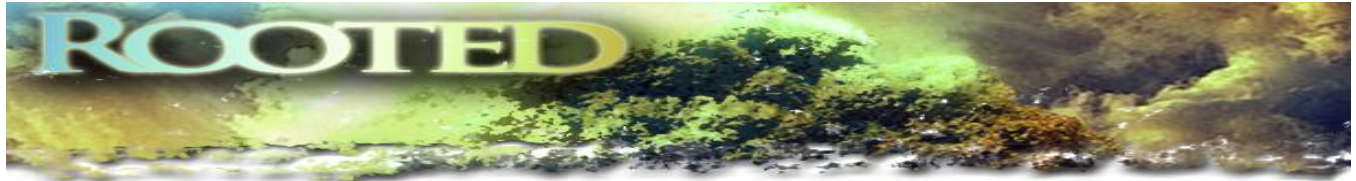
One thing is for sure - no matter how many changes come about in our lifetime, roots are not going away. Trees and grass will need roots to grow. We will have earthly roots that shape us in ways we may never fully escape - and there are certain things we must do spiritually in order to grow and be deeply rooted in our faith.

That is what this study is going to be about; peeling away all the changes and frills that have developed and getting back to the roots of our faith. By the end of this study we will hopefully be deeply rooted in the disciplines we need in order to live the Christian life as God intends. So let's dig in.

Illustration: If I am in a relationship with someone, what should I do in order to have a successful relationship? Talk to them. For example, if I am married and do not talk to my wife, we are not going to have a very healthy relationship. In fact, we may end up not having any relationship at all.

If we are Christians, we have a relationship with God. Our relationship has the exact same dynamic as the other type of relationship we just talked about. In order for us to have a healthy relationship with God, we must talk to Him. How do we do this? Prayer.

PRAYER IS COMMUNICATION WITH GOD. You need to understand that prayer is that simple; it is simply us communicating with God. Some of us get this idea that prayer is complicated; maybe it is because of the words we hear others use, maybe it is because of the rules we are taught, or maybe it is because important people are usually the ones who are asked to pray. Whatever it is, you need to put all that out of your mind and celebrate the fact that prayer is simply communicating with God. If you take nothing else from this lesson, remember that. Here is a



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working definition of prayer that you can work through - and hopefully it will allow you to strengthen your prayer life:

DEFINITION: PRAYER IS THE PRIVILEGE WE GET OF HAVING A NEVER-ENDING, TWO-WAY CONVERSATION WITH GOD.

If you get overwhelmed at any point, just remember prayer is simply communicating with God. This statement will help guide you as you develop your prayer life.

1. PRAYER IS A PRIVILEGE. (READ EPHESIANS 2:11-12)

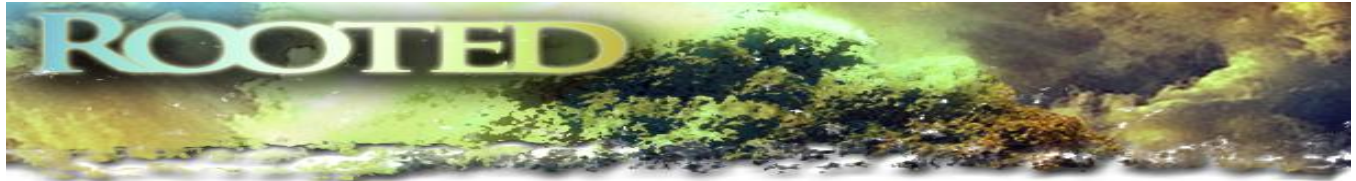
In Old Testament times, a priest would have to go and approach God in the tabernacle in order to ask forgiveness for the sins of the people and to worship God. He had to go through all sorts of rituals just to make sure he was clean. He would then have a rope tied around his waist and would walk through a thick veil into God's presence on the other side. This reason for the rope was that if he was not clean he would drop dead in an instant. If this happened, someone would have to drag him out with the rope because they too would die if they went in after him.

If this does not seem like enough hoops to jump through in order to be able to approach God, then listen to this: This process of approaching God could only be done once a year, and was only for the Jews. If you were not Jewish, you were considered a Gentile, which is what most of us would have been. You really had no hope and were considered unclean. That is what these verses are talking about - our lack of hope. (Now Read Ephesians 2:13)

Woohoo!!! We had no hope, but because of what Christ did for us we are able to approach God whenever we choose. See how prayer is an incredible privilege. People have said that Abraham and Moses are even jealous of the kind of access we have to God. Does that make you want to pray a little more often; to take advantage of the incredible privilege you have that people for thousands of years did not?

2. PRAYER SHOULD BE NEVER-ENDING. (1 THESSALONIANS 5:17) That is about as clear a scripture verse, as you will ever come across. We should be praying nonstop.

This is not easy at first for many people. It takes a little practice. It takes us learning to do more than one thing at a time. It takes us learning how to be still and enjoy the quiet sometimes. It takes us learning some patience and perseverance so that we can stick to the task at hand. But whatever it takes, we must do it.



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DISCUSSION: How many of you were taught to pray with your heads bowed and eyes closed? How can we do this if we are to pray all of the time?

The heads bowed and eyes closed posture really is a great thing. It teaches us to show reverence to and respect for God. It does still have its time and place, but it is not practical if we are going to pray all the time. It also may get a little awkward if we are praying out loud all of the time. So what are we going to do?

PRAYING WITHOUT CEASING IS MORE OF AN ATTITUDE OF THE HEART. In your heart, you are always saying silent prayers for those around you and the situations you and they face. You are always giving thanks to God for the little blessings you see all around God's creation.

For example, if you are stressed about a test, throw up a silent prayer for peace. If you feel you are about to get in a fight with a parent or guardian, pray silently for patience. If you fear you are going to make a poor choice and give into peer pressure, say a quick prayer and ask God for wisdom and strength.

Now, you do need to use the common sense that God gave you. There will be times when you need to pray out loud. There will be times when you need to pray for someone in the moment and let them know you are praying for them. There are times when we pray and we are literally yelling at God out of anger or frustration or things we do not understand. We need to take time to sense what posture or volume we need to use in each situation of prayer.

3. OUR PRAYER IS A TWO-WAY CONVERSATION.

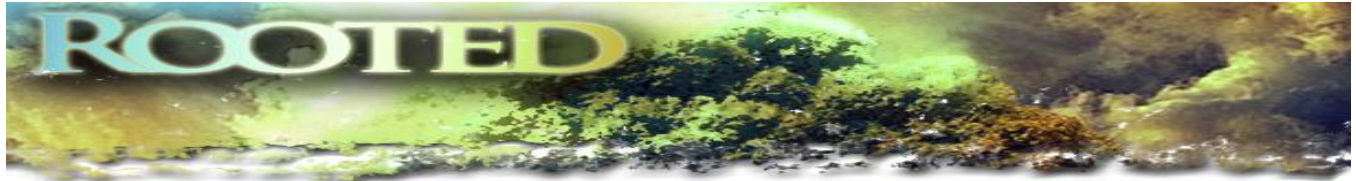
This may be a tough one for some of you talkers out there. So I'll give you the easy part first:

A. WE TALK TO GOD.

Usually we have no struggle with this part. This is the part of prayer in which we are most often taught and trained. Later on we'll get into the things we talk about when we talk to God, but right now we'll just leave it at the point that we do talk.

B. WE LISTEN TO GOD.

This part is difficult. This is partly because we do not often like to be still and quiet. With iPods and phones that play music, video, and even broadcast T.V. stations at times, we have forgotten how to be quiet and enjoy the silence. Also, most people are only taught the talking portion of prayer and listening gets left out; not to mention that listening to God may seem weird to us. When we listen and hear God, He does not speak to us in an audible voice. It is more of a stirring in our spirits. We just get a sense that it is God, and it becomes easier to discern when it is Him over time.



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Both parts of prayer - the listening and the speaking - are vital. In the speaking, we get our thoughts, praises, and requests out to God and He hears them. We wrestle with Him and hope He answers us quickly and wisely. In the listening, God helps us to mull over our requests and decide which ones are right and which ones are selfish. He uses these times to mold us and shape us into who He wants us to be. He teaches us more about who He is and how He works in the world.

So now we have a good working definition of prayer. Hopefully things are clear and simple for you, but you may still have this one nagging question: Exactly how do we pray, and what do we pray about?

This is a great question. There are no set rules. Technically you can pray however you want and about whatever you want. But we do find some great guidelines in the words of Jesus.

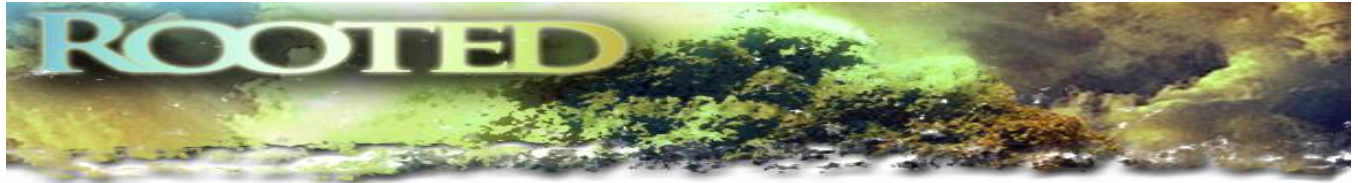
READ MATTHEW 6:6-13

This passage is the Lord's Prayer. In it Jesus lays out a great example for His followers at the time, and His followers in the future, of how we should pray.

1. WE SHOULD BE HUMBLE WHEN WE PRAY. (V. 6-8)

In Jesus' day, there were people who would go out in the streets with bells and fancy clothes when they prayed to make sure people heard them. They would speak loudly and draw attention to themselves. We probably know people like this in our families and churches - people who use fancy words or are long-winded in their prayers. I'm not saying these people are bad; many of them are sincere and are just praying the way prayer was modeled to them. But we need to make sure that we do not pray for show or to be seen. Yes, we will have to pray corporately, with others. In fact, there is nothing like praying with other Christians. But we need to have a motive to see God move and not to be seen as more holy in other people's eyes.

WE ALSO NEED TO HAVE A TIME WHEN WE PRAY ALONE. In the midst of us praying without ceasing, we need to find a time where we get alone with God, maybe in our room, and pray. There's no time limit. Five minutes is a good start, you will find that many times five minutes turns into an hour.



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2. WE SHOULD PRAISE GOD WHEN WE PRAY. (V. 9)

We serve a great God and He loves and deserves our praises, so as we pray we should praise Him for how great He is and all of the great things He has done. This is so important because often in prayer we have a, "give me, give me," attitude. By starting our prayers this with praise, we are reminded that our prayers are not about us but instead are about God. He is in control and everything we have comes from Him. He is so great that even if He never gave us anything or did anything for us, He would still be worthy of our praise.

Jesus uses the word "Father." This word draws us close to our God. It reminds us that yes He is great, but He also cares enough about us that when we pray we can curl up in His lap and call Him "Daddy."

3. WE SHOULD BELIEVE GOD CAN CHANGE THINGS WHEN WE PRAY. (V.10)

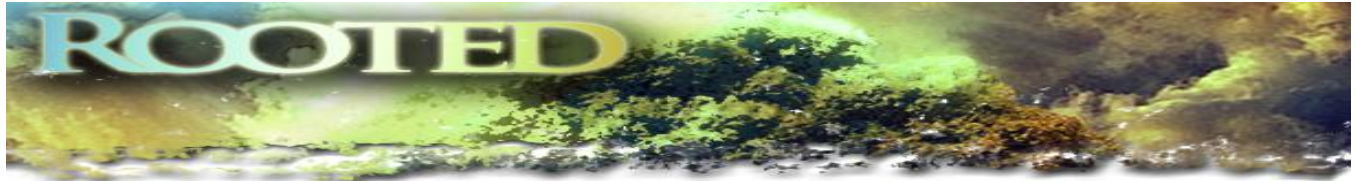
In these verses, Jesus is asking God to do the same things He does in Heaven on Earth. He is praying that God would do a mighty work that would make Earth more like Heaven. This is so encouraging; many people believe that things are going to continually get worse and worse and there is nothing we can do about it. There is some truth to this; because of sin, bad things will continue to happen, and if we do not do anything about it things will get worse.

But in these words of Christ we have hope. God is still in the business of working on earth. If we pray and believe things can improve, and put the work in through God's power, they will. We can get tastes of Heaven on Earth. People can change, mighty moves of God can happen, situations can improve, relationships can be restored, etc. All of this is true if we pray and pray with power. Whatever God's will is, He will do it if we ask and believe that it can happen on Earth.

4. WE SHOULD ASK GOD TO MEET OUR NEEDS WHEN WE PRAY. (V. 11)

In case you were worried, it is ok to ask for stuff when we pray. We all have needs and God knows what those needs are even before we ask. But He does want us to ask. He also promises that if we ask with right motives He will answer our prayers. Do not let your prayers be dominated by your wants or selfish desires, but it is ok to ask for stuff, for you and for others.

The Bible mentions over and over again that we are to lay our burdens at God's feet and make our requests known to God. This is normal and something God wants us to do. So let the requests fly!



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5. WE SHOULD ASK FOR FORGIVENESS WHEN WE PRAY. (V. 12)

None of us are perfect. We all make mistakes, we all sin. But God promises to forgive us if we ask Him. So part of your prayer time everyday should be about asking and receiving forgiveness and making things right with God again. This is very important to ensure that we have clear communication with God. And remember, you can never have enough forgiveness, and God never dries up on grace.

Do not skip out on the last part, though. God will forgive us if we forgive others. If we do not forgive others, God will not forgive us. You can wrestle with that on your own, but we are just sharing what God's word says.

6. WE SHOULD ASK FOR PROTECTION WHEN WE PRAY. (V. 13)

God is our Protector, so we need to call Him into battle with us every day. We need to ask Him to protect us when situations arise, but more importantly we need to have His protection around us before the situation comes. We need a steady hedge of protection from God all day, every day. Two things we need protection from:

A. DANGER

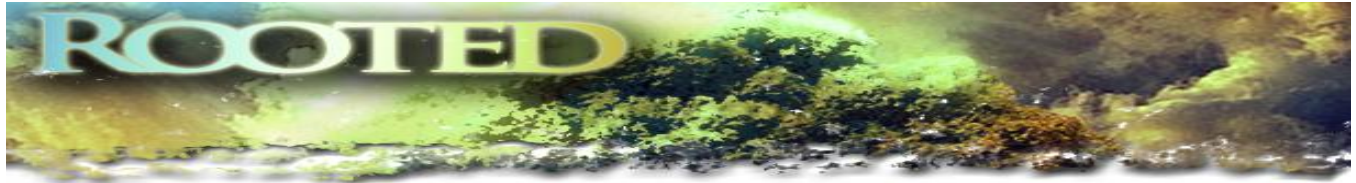
Don't kid yourselves. We live in a world with dangerous situations all around us. I don't have to tell you the scary stories or the frightening statistics. God is our greatest and only protection, so we need to ask Him to be with us. And because He is such a great protection, we do not have to live in fear.

B. TEMPTATION/SIN

Sin hinders our relationship and communication with God. We need to work every day to sin less and less. God can help us to discern when temptation is coming, give us a way out when it does come, or help us avoid it altogether. Do not underestimate the power and value of this protection.

This is a whole lot of information, but it only scratches the surface on all that prayer means to us in our relationship with God. It is the first and foremost thing that keeps us rooted in the Christian life, and it is one of those things that you really only learn and develop by doing it.

We would be remiss if we had a lesson on prayer without actually praying. So let's spend a little time discussing what we have learned, and listing requests and praises we may have, then let's apply it all and pray.



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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How do you feel about the fact that prayer is a privilege?
2. How often are we supposed to pray?
3. What are some ways you can pray without ceasing?
4. Have you ever listened to God? What was that like? What does listening to God mean to you?
5. Of all the things Jesus laid out for us to do when we pray, what do you struggle with or leave out the most?
6. List some praises you can pray about as a group.
7. List some prayer requests your group has.

Spend some time praying together.