

Seven Steps to New Life

Week 4: *Practice the Presence* | January 29, 2012

Scripture

1 Thessalonians 5:12-23

But we appeal to you, brothers and sisters, to respect those who labor among you, and have charge of you in the Lord and admonish you; esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Be at peace among yourselves. And we urge you, beloved, to admonish the idlers, encourage the faint hearted, help the weak, be patient with all of them. See that none of you repays evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to all.

Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise the words of prophets, but test everything; hold fast to what is good; abstain from every form of evil.

May the God of peace himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Matthew 6:5-8

“And whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, so that they may be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. But whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you. “When you are praying, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do; for they think that they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

Questions

1. Thích Nhất Hạnh, the Buddhist monk who authored "Living Buddha, Living Christ", was asked about running through bombs in his native Vietnam. He said that he didn't do it so much out of panic but out of mindfulness. Though we don't live in a warzone, increased economic tensions can trigger our panic buttons. What are some deep things we are afraid of? Is fear and panic the same thing? Can we be mindful and fearful at the same time?
2. In the Matthew passage, Jesus says that true prayer is done in private. It moves beyond words. Why does Jesus urge prayer being done in secret? Is prayer related to the Buddhist concept of mindfulness?
3. What is the purpose of prayer? Is prayer for the self, for others, or for God?
4. Pastor Sandy says that to pray without ceasing really means to pray constantly. Paul means to ALWAYS pray. How is this even possible? Would prayer (without words) be possible while having coffee with a friend? Would it be possible in our sleep?
5. Sandy gave the example of churches praying against him due to a particular opinion while he was on the Lake Washington school board. Is it possible to pray for others into repentance? Or is praying against other people? Is praying against other people even possible?
6. John Wesley helped start the trajectory of Methodists having a holistic orientation of prayer. "Whether we think of; or speak to, God, whether we act or suffer for him, all is prayer, when we have no other object than his love, and the desire of pleasing Him." Wesley echoes the earlier theologian Brother Lawrence's idea of "Practicing the Presence of God". What keeps us from being aware of God's presence in the mundane? How might lack of awareness of God's presence affect our attitudes?

Prayer: *Prayer of St. Francis*

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.

Where there is hatred, let me sow love.

Where there is injury, pardon.

Where there is doubt, faith.

Where there is despair, hope.

Where there is darkness, light.

Where there is sadness, joy.

O Divine Master,

grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled, as to console;

to be understood, as to understand;

to be loved, as to love.

For it is in giving that we receive.

It is in pardoning that we are pardoned,

and it is in dying that we are born to Eternal Life.

Amen.