

Daily Devotions

Devotions – March 13-19, 2022

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Sunday, March 13, 2022

We began our Lenten journey on Ash Wednesday. One of the scriptures commonly used comes from Matthew Chapter 6. It is from Jesus' Sermon on the Mount where the practice of almsgiving, prayer, and fasting has become the three main disciplines of Lent. This week of March 13-19 will be devoted to prayer.

The book, *I Heard God Laugh*, was written by New York Times bestselling author, Matthew Kelly. It is a practical guide to the daily habit of prayer. He speaks of "The Prayer Process". He outlines seven steps to follow in the course of your prayer time each day. I will be addressing one of these steps each day of the week. Albeit, they are all meant to be followed as a prayer format each time you pray. "The Prayer Process" is from Matthew Kelly. The explication of each step is a personal devotion to you.

Matthew Kelly's "Prayer Process"

1. **Gratitude:** Begin your prayer by thanking God in a personal dialogue for whatever you are most grateful for today.

"But I, O Lord, cry out to you; in the morning, my prayer comes before you."

Psalm 88:13

Today I was thankful to wake up without an alarm clock at 4:30 a.m. One might ask, "Who in their right mind would be grateful to get out of bed so early?" Typically, not me, especially when the night before was restless and full of anxiety. I have had a lot on my mind lately and sometimes it is difficult to quiet it. Rather than toss and turn waiting for my alarm to go off at 7:00 (which is what I would typically do), I jumped out of bed and said, "That's it! I've had it with this mind of mine running 100 miles a minute! I'm getting up to pray!"

I did not pray for God to take away the anxiety. I did not pray for peace. I did not pray for God to deal with the situations I was struggling with. I simply spoke to God about the sorry state I found myself in... making mountains out of molehills. It did not matter how long I poured out my discontent, why would it? I had all morning! Perhaps that was part of the release. Taking the time to pray. It allowed my mind to slow down with the opportunity to open my heart to hear God rather than the squeaky wheels running rampant in my head.

Yes, today I am most grateful for getting up at 4:30 a.m.

Prayer: *Gracious God, thank you for your peace, which surpasses all understanding, keeping my heart and mind in Christ Jesus. Amen*



Monday, March 14, 2022

Matthew Kelly's "Prayer Process" (See introduction of Day One, March 13)

2. **Awareness:** Revisit the times in the past twenty-four hours when you were not the-best-version-of-yourself. Talk to God about these situations and what you learned from them.

¹⁴ We know that the Law is spiritual, but I'm made of flesh and blood, and I'm sold as a slave to sin. ¹⁵ I don't know what I'm doing, because I don't do what I want to do. Instead, I do the thing that I hate. ¹⁶ But if I'm doing the thing that I don't want to do, I'm agreeing that the Law is right. ¹⁷ But now I'm not the one doing it anymore. Instead, it's sin that lives in me. ¹⁸ I know that good doesn't live in me—that is, in my body. The desire to do good is inside of me, but I can't do it. ¹⁹ I don't do the good that I want to do, but I do the evil that I don't want to do. ²⁰ But if I do the very thing that I don't want to do, then I'm not the one doing it anymore. Instead, it is sin that lives in me that is doing it.

²¹ So I find that, as a rule, when I want to do what is good, evil is right there with me. ²² I gladly agree with the Law on the inside, ²³ but I see a different law at work in my body. It wages a war against the law of my mind and takes me prisoner with the law of sin that is in my body. ²⁴ I'm a miserable human being. Who will deliver me from this dead corpse? ²⁵ Thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord!

Romans 7:14-25

It was Saturday morning. My husband and I were drinking coffee sharing a quiet time as we watched the birds eating at the feeders. He breaks the silence by talking about all the things that need to be done today at our rental house before new tenants can move in. I didn't like this interruption but listened. I responded in a curt tone, "Well, you go ahead. I've got work I need to get done here!" He got up from his chair, gathered up his things, and told me he'd see me later. We parted nicely, but clearly there was tension in the air.

After he left, I was not pleased with myself. I know I should not have acted towards my husband as I did. As the Apostle Paul stated, "The desire to do good is inside of me, but I can't do it." I was not the best-version-of-myself, so I had a little conversation with God. What I learned was that I felt guilty not helping out with the place on Maple Street. It is just as much my responsibility as his. I was also feeling pressure from deadlines that were close at hand making me anxious. I reacted.

So, I sent him a text acknowledging that I did not respond in a good way and why. He apologized for being ‘snippy’ and simply said, “I have time this morning and you don’t. It’s okay.”

Our Lutheran Study Bible defines the above Roman passage as “The Inner Conflict”. I found it extremely helpful to talk to God about that which I knew was right to do but found myself not doing it. Also, as the Apostle Paul reminds us – Thank God for Christ! I gladly agree with the law inside of me that keeps me in check. But I am not a slave to sin! The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus sets me free of the guilt and condemnation I heave upon myself when I don’t measure up. It is very freeing to live in forgiveness... with God and my husband!

Prayer: *Gracious God, thank you for understanding our humanity. Thank you for your plan of action to set us free from the law of sin and death. I appreciate these moments, even if tense, to grow in faith and learn from you. Amen*



Tuesday, March 15, 2022

Matthew Kelly's "Prayer Process" (See introduction of Day One, March 13)

3. **Significant Moments:** Identify something you experienced today and explore what God might be trying to say to you through that event (or person).

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God— not the result of works, so that no one may boast.

Ephesians 2:8-9

I received a phone call today from a woman who is a very hard worker. Her work ethic would put you and me to shame. Her current situation put her on restrictions. She called for help. As she spoke of her situation, she offered the insight she was learning about herself. How difficult it is to ask for help, but she must ask. And how she is receiving a teaching on humility through this situation. Her words made me think how uncomfortable it is to be in a vulnerable space. To receive the good graces of someone else is humbling. *Accepting* help from others is indeed a difficult thing to do.

I recalled a similar situation I faced several years ago. My husband was out of town for a week during the winter months. I kept the driveway cleared with a snow blower. I managed just fine, until a significant snowstorm occurred and the pin to the snow blower broke. I had to get out of the driveway, and I had to ask my neighbor for help. Our neighbor was a kind man. I knew he wouldn't even blink an eye at my request, yet I found myself struggling to ask.

This woman's phone call helped me realize – I too, struggle to ask for help. Is it my pride? My strong independent nature that sees myself invincible?

I realized that something happens when receiving the good graces of someone else. I am humbled to know I am not superwoman. That I am not God. That there comes a time when I cannot save myself. It is interesting that I think I can more readily accept God's grace than that of another person. And do we not learn something of God and of ourselves through the words and hands of others? I have much more to learn about receiving God's grace in my life. I'll keep this thought for further exploration.

Prayer: Gracious God, I am humbled by your gift of grace. Help me to see that it is a gift that keeps on giving. Open my mind and heart to receive the many opportunities you give to learn of your grace. May these opportunities be glimmers of understanding the depth, width, and height of your redeeming grace through the cross of Christ. Amen



Wednesday, March 16, 2022

Matthew Kelly's "Prayer Process" (See introduction of Day One, March 13)

4. **Peace:** Ask God to forgive you for any wrong you have committed (against yourself, another person, or God) and to fill you with a deep and abiding peace.

Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my thoughts. See if there is any wicked (Heb-hurtful) way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.

Psalms 139:23-24

I struggle in my relationship with my sister-in-law. The thirty years she has been married to my brother have provided many opportunities to dislike her. Her behaviors are selfish – like turning down the heat at my parent's house, without asking, because she likes it cold. She sleeps till two in the afternoon, leaving my mom and me to do all cooking for holiday meals. She does not work, while my brother works an eighty-hour week. Yet, he is relied upon to do household chores. There is much more I can say. Granted, she is on medication for high anxiety, but I feel she is far too accommodated for. We get along okay, in fact, she can be great fun when we play family games together. But, at times I resent her. My thoughts, from time to time, are not very nice...at all. I confess, my dislike turned to resentment.

I claim to be a loving being, believing in the Apostle Paul's definition of love. Love is patient and kind. It is not irritable or resentful. I could no longer live in duality. I could no longer hold the poison I willingly kept.

I left the woods with a deep and abiding peace. I cannot change my sister-in-law, but I can change me...through the grace of God's loving forgiveness.

prayer

Matthew Kelly's "Prayer Process" (See introduction of Day One, March 13)

¹¹ Surely, this commandment that I am commanding you today is not too hard for you, nor is it too far away. ¹² It is not in heaven, that you should say, “Who will go up to heaven for us, and get it for us so that we may hear it and observe it?” ¹³ Neither is it beyond the sea, that you should say, “Who will cross to the other side of the sea for us, and get it for us so that we may hear it and observe it?” ¹⁴ No, the word is very near to you; it is in your mouth and in your heart for you to observe.

This passage in Deuteronomy comes after God has offered blessings to the Israelites if they observe the commandments set before them. God also speaks of warnings if they do not observe the commandments set before them. Many of these commandments refer to how to live properly with other people. God is a god of healthy relationships. When right and just ways of living with each other are violated, relationships suffer and ill-effects take place.

I am free to choose blessing or adversity in any situation or relationship I encounter. My life changes when I am conscious of this fact. I experience the freedom to be

Today, I feel called upon to pray for, give thanks for, the congregations in the NGLS. Each congregation has their collective gifts and ministry in their community. When I think of my own congregation, knowing it is not unlike others, I am so grateful for their strength, courage and faithfulness during these ongoing challenges of the pandemic. All of you remain steadfast. All of you continue in the work Christ has called you to do. You have not given up nor given in. Indeed, I give thanks to God for all of you and mention you in my prayers, constantly remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.

prayer

Matthew Kelly's "Prayer Process" (See introduction of Day One, March 13)

prayer