

Sermon **An Introduction to Prayer Part 5: Having Rhythm in our Prayer Life by observing Morning and Evening Prayer**

Today is the 5th and final part of the sermon series *An Introduction to Prayer*. All the other parts have been leading up to this one, and here in Part 5 we will put all the other parts together to create a rhythm or pattern for prayer using the tried and true practice of Morning and Evening prayer.

Morning and Evening prayer provide that constant and stable daily renewal we all need in our lives today. Full, organized lives are based on recurring patterns and rhythm. Many people have surgical procedures, take medicine, have pacemakers, and six-month check-ups with their cardiologist to keep their hearts beating properly. An irregular heartbeat can lead to poor health, and no heartbeat means death. I wonder how many times an irregular prayer life or a prayer life with no heartbeat – one with little or no prayer - leads to spiritual death. I fear it happens many times. Moment by moment, hour by hour, day by day, week, and year, our lives are built on and depend upon proper rhythm and cycles. It is logical that the same holds true for our lives of prayer. Morning and Evening prayer were established for this purpose.

Our tradition today began at a very distinct point in history. It flows directly out of the worship cycle God established for Israel after their exodus from Egypt, around 1400 BC. It is interesting that the rhythm for this worship cycle was imbedded into creation by God from the very beginning;

Then God said, “Let there be light”; and there was light. And God saw the light, that it was good; and God divided the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness He called Night. So the evening and the morning were the first day. Genesis 1:3-5

Here on the first day of creation God as creator built in the rhythm of day and night, evening and morning. This rhythm that began on Day One still directs most of life on the earth in our rising and sleeping, working and resting, our meals and the way we arrange the rest of each day’s activities, and for the disciple of Jesus – prayer.

The first rhythm God built into creation – evening and morning – is also the cycle he established for our life of prayer. We learn this in the Old Testament book of Exodus where God established the worship life of his people Israel;

“Now this is what you shall offer on the altar: two lambs of the first year, day by day continually. One lamb you shall offer in the morning, and the other lamb you shall offer at twilight ... This shall be a continual burnt offering throughout your generations at the door of the tabernacle of meeting before the Lord, where I will meet you to speak with you. Exodus 29:38; 42

The Lord connected these two sacrifices with the daily rising and setting of the sun – with the rhythm he first built into creation. Along with these morning and evening sacrifices, God added a second ritual at the Altar of Incense to be observed each day at the same time as the sacrifices;

Aaron shall burn on it sweet incense every morning; when he tends the lamps, he shall burn incense on it. And when Aaron lights the lamps at twilight, he shall burn incense on it, a perpetual incense before the Lord throughout your generations. Exodus 30:7-8

There were two parts to this daily order at the tabernacle of the Lord. The first was the animal sacrifices. The second was the offering of incense. *These twice-daily rituals at the tabernacle are the historical foundation upon which the Church's order of Morning and Evening prayer are built.* The psalmist helps us make the connection;

Let my prayer rise before you as incense; and the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice. Psalm 141:2

Jesus Christ brought his people out of the Old Testament and into the New. Many things changed in that transition, including the sacrifices of animals and incense. Today, instead of making an offering on the Altar of Incense, we offer our prayers. Instead of sacrificing animals, we offer the sacrifices of our praise. Here's a passage that teaches about the connection between the incense and our prayers;

And when he had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each holding a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. Revelation 5:8

Again, in the New Testament book of Hebrews, we learn the connection between the previous daily animal sacrifices and the praises we offer to God;

Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise—the fruit of lips that openly profess his name. Hebrews 13:15

In the Old Testament, God instructed Israel to make an animal sacrifice and offer incense every morning and evening. In the New Testament, we continue in the same tradition and rhythm when we spend time with the Lord in morning and evening prayer. Now way back then it was the priests who were commanded and authorized to make the offerings of animals and incense. We have none of that kind of priest today. Yet remember that part of the passage we read from Exodus where God said the animal and incense offerings at the tabernacle each morning and evening were to continue, "throughout your generations." How can this be? Well, in the New Testament that too has changed. Peter brings this up in an oft recited passage;

Like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. 1 Peter 2:5

At our baptism into Jesus, we were made one with Jesus who is the Great High Priest. We, too, then, take on a priestly role in the kingdom of God. We are now authorized to make holy sacrifices to God. It is our duty as God's priests to be faithful in making the sacrifices God has established. Do not these especially include the sacrifices of prayer and praise offered every morning and every evening? This is the heart of what Paul means when he writes that famous line to the church in Thessalonica;

Pray without ceasing ... 1 Thessalonians 5:17

When Paul says, "Pray without ceasing" or, "Pray continually," he makes a direct connection between our prayers and the morning and evening rituals at the tabernacle;

This shall be a continual burnt offering throughout your generations ..." Exodus 29:42

“... a perpetual incense before the Lord throughout your generations.” Exodus 30:8

Here in Exodus God says the animal sacrifices and the offering of incense in the morning and in the evening were to be continual. Paul instructs his hearers to “pray without ceasing,” or “pray continually.” Paul intends that we, as the priests of God, offer up our prayers and praises to him at least every morning and every evening, and in so doing, continue this ancient practice until the end of time.

How do we do this? We take everything from Parts 1 through 4 of this series and put it all together into a continual, unceasing practice of prayer at least every morning and night. God has adopted us as his children, so we approach him with the confidence a child has when coming to a loving father. Prayer draws upon the unlimited power of God, so we pray expecting the results he promises. We order our words so that we can have the best chance to cover everything we know we are to pray for, including other people, the mission of the church, people in government and even our enemies. And we use all the forms of prayer available to us including prayers without words, conversational prayers, memorized prayers, collects, and litanies. Most of the work has already been done for us by those who have come before. This has been going on for countless generations and the faithful have left behind much of what they have learned and found to stand the test of time. They have left these things for us in the various orders of morning and evening prayer.

If you have a hymnal at home, you will probably find some of these orders in it. Page v of our pew hymnal lists several forms of prayer. Orders for individuals and families begin on page 295. More complete forms, called Offices (like Matins), begin on page 219. We use some of these for our Advent and Lenten midweek services. Our publishing house, CPH, has a book called *A Treasury of Prayer* which can work well for Morning Prayer. They also sell a prayer app called *Pray Now* which has much of the same content. Free apps and websites for the Daily Offices abound. If you are interested in my top recommendations, let me know and I'll point you to them.

This brings us to the conclusion of this series on prayer. I hope you have found something that will make your prayer life more meaningful, vibrant, and a blessing to you, the church, and the world. The peace of God guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus as you believe and trust in him. Amen.

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