

**SERMON: "WILL YOU DEVOTE YOURSELF TO THE PRAYERS?"**

**TEXTS: NEW TESTAMENT PSALM 40:1-10  
NEW TESTAMENT MATTHEW 6:7-15**

**June 16, 2024  
Churchwide Confirmation Series**

**Dr. Dave Kivett**

## **INTRODUCTION**

It was and is their language first – English. But have you noticed how their English is different than ours? I'm a big football/soccer fan. Love Liverpool Football Club, so I hear a good bit of English English. I've read the words labor and color with an extra vowel. "Vanna, can I buy a U please?"

And I've heard it when they talk about someone's health.  
When someone has an accident or serious illness, they go to hospital,  
We say they are in *the* hospital. The English don't do that. They say,  
someone is in hospital. The leave out the 'the.' No 'the' for them.  
Guess they're making up for those unnecessary u's in color and labor.

Today we pick up our confirmation sermon series and the question,  
"will you devote yourself to the prayers?" Have we added a 'the'?  
The question is taken from Acts 2:42 and the description of the early church  
devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship,  
to the breaking of bread and the prayers.

There it is again. Is that just some grammatical issue in the original Greek  
or in the English translation ... or is it there for a good reason?  
I'd suggest that the answer is "yes" in a both / and kind of way  
Both a devotion to prayer in general and to *the* prayers  
meaning prayer in a structured way, like a memorized prayer.

Let me pause there for just a bit ... for a word from our sponsors.

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Our New Testament passage today is from Matthew, part of Jesus' teaching  
that we refer to as the 'sermon on the mount.' This is where he is teaching  
about prayer and gives his disciples the Lord's Prayer. We also have him  
doing so in Luke. It is a shorter version, but what Luke does add  
is the request ... **"Lord, teach us to pray as John taught his disciples."**

## SHARED PRAYER

People followed different leaders / teachers. And each of these had a prayer or statements that would be a way of identifying themselves – this is who we are, this is what we believe. It is an ancient practice that continues to this day think creeds and confessions in churches, slogans on the streets.

A shared prayer is just that – shared. Learning a prayer, making it *the* prayer or one of *the* prayers is communal. It brings us together, binds us together

The prayer Jesus teaches his disciples is a prayer we pray together  
Of course people often pray it on their own, but they also pray it together in corporate worship, out loud. You can literally hear that togetherness  
That togetherness is not only with the people in that space, that sanctuary or meeting room. It is togetherness across time ... across time.

I often use a prayer from The Book of Common Worship, the 1946 edition  
I use it at the graveside. I used as we committed my parents' ashes  
My dad asked me to pray this prayer specifically. He told me he liked the fact that it had been prayed so many times for so many people  
He joked with me and said, "I guess that means it works."

This is that shared prayer said so often for so many people over the years

*O Lord, support us all the day long, until the shadows lengthen and the evening comes, and the busy world is hushed and the fever of life is over, and our work is done. Then in Thy mercy grant us a safe lodging, and a holy rest, and peace at the last; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen*

As I let that shared prayer, one that means a lot to me and to my family, settle, let's pause for a word from our sponsors.

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The prayer passed down through the years, the most memorized of prayers is the prayer Jesus teaches his disciples then and his disciples now.  
It is the Lord's prayer. You know the prayer. Say it through in your mind and pay attention to the plurals, lots of plurals in the prayer

## PRAYERS IN THE PLURAL

The first plural is how it begins with God's will being done  
And where is to be done? On earth as in heaven.  
That is about as plural as it gets!

The plurals continue.  
Give *us* our daily bread. Forgive *us our* debts.  
Lead *us* not into temptation. Deliver *us* from evil.

This is prayers in the plural in a plurality of ways  
In that we say it together, pray it together  
And in that we say it with those who have gone before us,  
those around us and those who will come after us

It is prayers in the plural in that we pray for us ... and it's not an 'us versus them' us  
Translated from the original Greek, to English English, to American English  
then on to Southern (the sweetest sounding English) plural equals "all y'all"

Devoting ourselves to shared prayers like the Lord's Prayer  
And like many other prayers – the serenity prayer, the prayer of St. Francis,  
a prayer we pray together often on Wednesday nights (what a great prayer  
for our children to learn, 'Lord, make me an instrument of your peace ...'  
is a way of not only devoting ourselves to prayer but of  
devoting ourselves to one another

My focus this morning has been on shared prayer  
Guess you could say that the whole sermon is built around one word – "the"  
I do so because we are used to thinking of prayer as something intimate  
a conversation we have with God, a talk that often doesn't need words  
certainly doesn't have to have pretty public prose

Jesus speaks to that first thing in talking about prayer  
He criticizes those who like to be heard, prayer for show  
That criticism, however, is not a criticism of public prayer, or of shared prayer.  
Learning and praying some familiar prayers, some prayers from  
other people, other places, other times, other traditions is a good thing!

In these verses Jesus lifts up both the power of prayer in private  
(no need to make a show of it) AND gives us a prayer to share, the Lord's Prayer

My prayer for you is that your prayer life will be both / and  
Quiet conversation with God in your place and space  
and in shared prayers said both in private and in public together  
My prayer for your prayer life is that it be a good mix of  
Me - Thee and we, Thee – we and me. We – Thee and me

## **SUMMARY**

Seeking that mix of prayers is the reason this sermon  
has included commercials, a few words from our sponsors

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A mixture of private and public prayers*

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