

KT Norris Lectures 2020 – Dr. Les Hardin

Tuesday AM - Praying Like Jesus: The Shema

Discussion Questions:

On Prayer

1. How were you taught to pray? Were you taught to pray in standardized prayers? Or in free-flow, “prayer of the heart” fashion?
2. How important was The Shema (or The Great Commandment) in your religious upbringing? What place (if any) did it have?
3. What kinds of prayers were/are prominent for you?
4. Were any of you taught to say the Lord’s Prayer as a part of your religious upbringing?
5. What would it mean to “bind these symbols on your head and on your hands?” What do you think God means by that?
6. What would it mean to “write these commands on your gates and the doorframes of your homes?” What do you think God meant by that?
7. What would it mean to “talk about these things while you’re walking along the road, while you sit and when you rise?”
8. Consider the following texts:
 - a. Deut. 11:1
 - b. Deut. 11:13-14a
 - c. Deut. 11:22-23
 - d. Deut. 19:8-9

What is the connection in these texts between loving God and obeying the commandments?

How does that connection (between “loving and doing”) comply with Paul’s teachings that we are saved by grace and not by works (Eph. 2:8-10; Rom. 3:28)?
9. What NT texts show the same pattern of “love God by keeping the commandments?”
10. Compare the following texts and consider the problems, omissions, apparent discrepancies, and rewordings between them:
 - a. Deut. 6:4-6 // Mark 12:28-30
 - b. Matt. 22:37-40 // Mark 12:28-30 // Luke 10:27
11. What is the connection between obeying the commands and having good life? What that a command only for ancient Israel? Or does that same promise apply to us today? And if so, how?
12. Is the recitation of The Shema (or The Great Commandment) only for Jews? What place might it have for Christians in the modern world?

13. What benefit might learning and reciting The Shema (or The Great Commandment) regularly have for those who are Christians?
14. What are the drawbacks to reciting The Shema (or The Great Commandment) regularly for those who are Christians?
15. What dangers or obstacles are there in praying a fixed prayer repeatedly?
16. What blessings are there in praying a fixed prayer repeatedly?
17. What kinds of modern, religious ideas does a recitation of The Shema (or The Great Commandment) keep us from? (I'm thinking primarily pagan, non-Christian ideas here.)
18. What aspects of our modern *Christian* experience does a recitation of The Shema (or The Great Commandment) correct? In what ways do we *need* to do this?
19. In what ways has our worship become individualistic and self-centered? How does reciting The Shema (or The Great Commandment) begin to correct this?
20. In what ways are your own prayers too individualistic and self-focused? Describe.

On Spirituality and Power

1. What is "spirituality?" How do you define it?
2. What is spiritual power? How do you define that? What does it look like in practical expression?
3. Think of the most spiritual person you've ever known. What was it that made that person spiritual? What do you think were the processes that helped that person become spiritual?
4. How does one become "spiritual?"
5. Is becoming spiritual a matter of God's doing/initiative, or a matter of ours? What role would spiritual disciplines have in that process?
6. How is prayer connected to spiritual power? Or is it connected at all?
7. How tightly in your mind is spirituality (or spiritual power) connected to the serious study of Scripture?
8. React to this statement: "We don't need to give them Scripture, we just need to give them Jesus."

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Wednesday AM - Praying Like Paul: The Gospel

Discussion Questions:

On the Study of Prayer:

1. Is it appropriate to study prayer at a deep or even “academic” level? Why or why not?
2. Is your view and practice of prayer formed more by *study* of prayer, or by *piety* (how prayer makes you feel and speaks to your heart)? Why do you think that is?
3. Prayer has traditionally been off-limits as a topic for serious historical and textual investigation. Why do you think that is?
4. Do you consider academic study of prayer to be unspiritual? Why or why not? In places where it is, why do you think that is so?
5. How is a serious study of prayer connected to The Shema (or The Great Commandment)?

On Paul and Prayer:

1. What do you think were the similarities between Paul’s prayer life as a Jew and Pharisee and his prayer life as a believer in Jesus?
2. What do you think were the differences?
3. How does it make you feel to know that in the ancient world prayer was done aloud, and that silent prayer was typically indicative of placing a curse on someone? Does that offend our modern practices?
4. Paul has as much vocabulary for prayer as some of his more prominent themes like “grace” and “in Christ.” Why do you think that’s a little-known fact? And what do you think that says about Paul and his practice of his faith?
5. Paul has several words for prayer, all with various nuance:
 - a. “prayer” (proseuchē) – a generic term
 - b. “petition” (dehysiV)
 - c. “request” (ejnteuxiV) – addressed to a king
 - d. “plead” or “exhort” (parakalew)
 - e. “challenge” (aijtevw)
 - f. “wish-type” prayers (optative mood verbs)
 - g. “thanksgiving” (eujcaristiva)
 - h. “confidence” (pepoihsiviV) – 16 times in Paul
 - i. “boldness” (parrhsiva)

Noting the differences between them, what are the various words for “prayer” in our vocabulary? Are they similar or different? What does that (modern) vocabulary list tell us about our prayer habits and beliefs?

6. "Thanksgiving" is the most prominent term related to prayer in Paul's letters. What does that fact alone tell us about Paul's practice of prayer? What does it tell us about his character and personality?
7. Think about your own prayer life: is it characterized more with requests and demands, or with thanksgivings? Why do you think that is?
8. What role does thanksgiving have in your prayer life? Is it something that has prominent place? Or is it something that you say at the beginning to curry God's favor hoping he will grant your requests? Reflect on that.
9. Does prayer have a special vocabulary? Before you say "No," think about the question this way: "Are there certain words that are off limits in prayer, and other words that are more appropriate?" What are the criteria for making that determination?
10. How does your practice of prayer match/differ from Paul's experience?
11. When we pray, how can we envelop our prayers in the Gospel?
12. When we pray *for others*, how can we envelop our prayers in the Gospel?
13. When we pray *for ourselves*, how can we envelop our prayers in the Gospel?
14. List something you're praying for right now. Describe how you are (or should) begin to pray for that thing in ways that advance the Gospel. Perhaps the group can help you think about how to do that.
(Or, now that you're thinking about it, should that prayer be abandoned?)
15. Paul says that prayer is a "struggle" (Rom. 15:30-32; Col. 4:12). Why? What could he mean by this? And in what ways do you experience that?

On Praying the Gospel:

1. What is the ONE THING Paul prays for? What does Dr. Hardin mean by that?
2. In what ways is Paul's praying for the Gospel and Gospel-related things similar or different than Jesus' prayers for Kingdom-related things? What texts are you thinking of that support your view?
 - a. John 17
 - b. Matt. 11:25-26
3. Below are several texts in which Paul mentions his praying. Demonstrate how each of them is connected to Paul's praying of The Gospel:

a. 1 Thess. 3:10	g. Eph. 1:17-19
b. 2 Thess. 1:11-12	h. Col. 1:9
c. Colossians 1:10-13	i. 2 Thess. 3:1
d. Eph. 3:16-17	j. Col. 4:3-4
e. 2 Cor. 13:9	k. Eph. 6:19-20
f. Phm. 6	l. Phil. 1:20

4. Consider this quote:

“Paul’s prayer (or more correctly, the prayerful attitude of Paul as evidenced by his language—for we do not really know how he said his prayers) is normative for the church. We are not Paul, nor are we apostles as he was an apostle. He had seen the Lord in a way that we have not (1 Cor. 9:1). Nor is our world his world. But we can learn from him, be inspired by him, pray with his language.” –Krister Stendahl, “Paul at Prayer,” 159.

Do you think Paul’s ecstatic experiences were for all believers to experience? Or were they unique to him as an Apostle specially chosen by the Lord Jesus? Why? Be sure to justify your thoughts biblically.

5. Below is a list of texts that recount some of Paul’s visionary experiences with the Lord Jesus. Describe how, in each case, the Gospel is in view.
- Acts 9:1-15 / Acts 22:6-21 / Acts 26:9-23
 - Acts 13:2
 - Acts 16:6-10
 - Acts 18:10
 - Acts 23:11

Paul and Vision:

1. What is “speaking in tongues” (lalw:n ejn eJterai:V glw:ssaiV) in the NT? (Try to describe it without using the words “speaking in tongues.”) How does Paul connect this to the preaching of the Gospel?
2. How is Paul’s description of “a man” (probably himself) who was caught up into the third heavens (2 Cor. 12) connected to the Gospel?
3. Is it right to pray to the Spirit? Why or why not? Describe the NT evidence for your view.
4. A theologian once described the Holy Spirit as having a “shy personality.”
 - a. Do you think that’s true? Why or why not?
 - b. Does it bother you to think of the members of the Trinity having personalities? Why or why not?
5. What does “Abba” mean?
6. If I say that the term “Abba” doesn’t mean “Daddy,” what is your reaction to that?
7. What is the balance in prayer between being friends/familiar with God and being respectful/fearful of God?

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Thursday AM – From Egypt to Ephesus: A Brief History of Prayer

Discussion Questions:

1. What is the connection between biblical studies and spirituality? (Or is there one?) In what ways does that connections help or hinder?
2. Would you characterize your prayers as leaning more in the fixed, liturgical tradition or more free-flowing and spontaneous?
3. How does the idea of praying in fixed, liturgical ways make you feel about your own spirituality?
4. The lecture noted how the gods of the ANE had to be cajoled into listening, in a variety of ways. What are some of the things people do today that attempt to garner God's attention?
5. The lecture also noted how those praying to the gods of the ANE often used props (objects, omens, oracles, etc.). In what ways do Christians pray in similar kinds of ways? What kinds of "props" do Christians use as either gateways or substitutes for prayer?
6. Why does YHWH privilege the spoken word over those objects/props as a means of communication and interaction with him?
7. If *words* are important to YHWH, then what place does the Scripture have in our communication with him?
8. Read Psalm 136. What "acts" is God praised for in this Psalm? Why do you think the author considered those acts to be praiseworthy?
9. On the balance-beam of God's attributes and God's acts, which side would you say your prayers tilt toward? Why is that?
 - a. List 5 of God's attributes that are meaningful to you.
 - b. List 5 of God's actions in your life (things verifiable by others) that He's done for you.
10. Would you describe your praying as *conversational*? What does that mean?
11. What is "simple prayer?" Define it.
12. Believers tend to complicate prayer (simple as it is) with intricate vocabulary? Why do you think that is? What kinds of vocabulary do we use that only appears in prayer (i.e. technical prayer words that we don't use anywhere else)?

13. Chair exercise: Put an empty chair in front of you, imagine Jesus is sitting there. Now have a conversation with him.
14. Do you ever write out your prayers (as in a journal)? How do your prayers become more articulate, more formal when you do so?
15. Think of some prayers that may have started out as heartfelt expressions that have now become standardized.
16. The Hebrews were afraid of YHWH and asked for an intercessor. Do you think that was good or bad? Explain.
17. What is the role of an intercessor? Is the use of an intercessor good or bad? Explain.
18. In what ways do we, in our prayer practices or our teaching on prayer, give greater access to some and less to others? Or, how do we naturally communicate that idea?
19. Read Numbers 14:1-25. How does Moses' interaction with YHWH strike you? Kind? Aggressive? Confrontational? How did Moses get that kind of freedom/relationship?
20. Do you think the prophets were specialists at prayer? What does that mean? If so, how would that change your view of them and their ministries/writings?
21. The Temple architecture layered access to God. In what ways does modern church architecture do the same? Or does it remedy that problem? If so, how can we teach people of their own access to God in prayer?
22. The standard liturgy in the synagogue was primarily composed of prayer. Prayer was the main component of their worship. Is that true for us? What seems to be the main component of the service that you regularly attend? Think "Sunday morning service," not "midweek classroom."
23. Were you taught the Lord's Prayer as a liturgical, rote prayer? If so, what benefits did that have? What weaknesses were in doing so?
24. Why do you think the Lord's Prayer has fallen out of use as a liturgical prayer in the church?
25. Dr. Hardin says that liturgical or fixed prayers are a "pedagogue" (Gal. 3:24). What does he mean by that?
26. How can liturgical prayer teach us? What does it have to offer that spontaneous prayer doesn't?
27. How can spontaneous prayer teach us? What does it have to offer that liturgical prayer doesn't?

28. Dr. Hardin says, “standardized prayers can be helpful if used in the right ways and in the right contexts.” What are the right ways and contexts for this?
29. Dr. Hardin mentioned the idea of “pestering God until you get what you ask for.” Have you been taught that idea? If so, describe where (biblically) that might come from.
30. In what ways is the idea of “pestering God until you get what you want” similar to the way those in the ANE prayed to their gods?
31. With the NT comes the idea of praying “in the name of Jesus.” What does that mean? (Remember that name is tied to reputation and character in the classical world.)
32. In what ways has the presence of the Holy Spirit democratized access to God in prayer? What are the benefits of the Spirit’s presence? In what ways has that been misunderstood and abused?
33. If prayer is dialogue, and if both parties get a chance to speak, in what ways do you give God space to speak in your life? And how do you test that to know that it’s him (which is the discipline called “discernment”)?
34. What is the connection between reading Scripture and praying well.
35. Dr. Hardin says, “We have the ability to move the Father when we pray. It is only right that he have the ability to move us.” What do you think he means by that? And how would that work?

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Friday AM – Prayer in our Worship: A Theology of Hymns of Revelation

Discussion Questions:

1. What songs were popular (or memorable) in your experience of Christian faith?
2. What theological concepts do you owe to those songs?
3. What is your conception of the book of Revelation? End-times prophecy? Rapture? Church victorious? Church vs. State? A book of Worship?
4. Do you think the worship scenes in Revelation portray the way we should worship on earth? Or should our worship be something different? Why or why not?
5. List your top 5 favorite (or most meaningful) worship songs.
6. Now think of the lyrics of those songs. Do they conform to the pattern of being:
 - a. Directed toward the throne of God?
 - b. Kerygmatic/Gospel-centered?
 - c. Biblical?
 - d. Inclusive?
7. To what extent are the songs that you regularly sing in worship conforming to that pattern?
8. The worship songs you sing regularly in worship: are they sung *to* God or *about* God? Why do you think that is? Is it something that should be changed or not?
9. Ralph Martin says that the hymnody of the classical world is largely self-centered and the devotee's range of interest does not step outside the circle of egocentricity ... New Testament examples of hymnic prayer are quite different as they focus on "objective" realities which are at the same time intimately related to the believer's experience in the Christian community: the coming of God's kingdom, the progress of the gospel in the world, and the upbuilding of the church. – "Reflections on NT Hymns," 43.

Do you think this is true of our modern worship songs? What are the similarities? What are the differences?
10. How are the songs of Revelation reflective of the same salvation/deliverance themes in OT history?
11. In the hymns of Revelation, God is praised for his *attributes*. What attributes is he praised for? To what extent do modern worship songs praise him for those attributes? What attributes of God do modern worship songs tend to focus on? What do they tend to exclude?
12. In the hymns of Revelation, God is praise for his *acts*. What acts is he praised for? To what extent do modern worship songs praise him for those acts? What acts of God do modern worship songs tend to focus on? What do they tend to exclude?

13. The hymns of Revelation each tell a *story*. What story do they tell?
14. Earlier you mentioned your top 5 worship songs. What “story” do those songs tell?
15. Was there ever a time when you were excluded from worship? Describe that experience.
16. Tell the story of me and Micah at House of Blues.
17. The hymns of Revelation are “counter-imperial.” They cut against the grain of Rome’s worship of the emperor and the devotion to the state imperial system. In what ways does our own worship RESEMBLE those patriotic elements in Rome’s hymnody? In what ways does our worship DEPART FROM those patriotic elements?
18. If you had any advice to give to modern song writers and worship leaders (based on what we’ve discovered here), what would it be?