

From the Pulpit of the Japanese Baptist Church of North Texas
September 9, 2018

My God, My God
Psalm 22:1-5

22:1 My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, from the words of my groaning?
22:2 O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer, and by night, but I find no rest.
22:3 Yet you are holy, enthroned on the praises of Israel.
22:4 In you our fathers trusted; they trusted, and you delivered them.
22:5 To you they cried and were rescued; in you they trusted and were not put to shame.

1. Discipleship Training

When I was invited to this church, a committee member told me to disciple people. And I've kept doing this for a long time. Discipleship training is not like studying in a class and going out and learning it as you go. It is what you learn as we live faithfully every day. Jesus' disciples were always with Jesus, and learned from Jesus through observing what Jesus was saying and doing every day. Timothy, a disciple of Paul, also worked with Paul, learned from Paul, understood Paul's vision, and took over Paul's mission.

Knowledge is necessary, but we can't proclaim the Good News to others if all we have is knowledge. In addition to knowledge, we need power and authority. When Jesus sent His disciples, he gave them the power and authority over all demons and to cure diseases (Luke 9:1).

When Jesus gave them the great commission, Jesus said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.” (Matthew 28:18) Jesus showed His authority in order that the disciples could carry at His commission. Jesus commanded His disciples to make disciples of all nations. But, making disciples is not something that humans can accomplish by themselves. Because of it, Jesus said, “And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high.” (Luke 24:49) and the disciples were promised to receive the Holy Spirit who gives us the power.

Acts Chapters 3 and 4 describes that Peter and John were interrogated by Jewish Leaders while they were teaching in the temple. When the Jewish leaders asked, “By what authority, and whose name did you do this?”, Peter replied, “by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead.” (Acts 4:10) What a bold answer. Jewish leaders were puzzled by the fact that they were able to speak boldly even though they were just uneducated and common men (Acts 4:13). Even so, they came to acknowledge that they were with Jesus. He was with Jesus. Here is the secret of Discipleship Training. The education and authority of Jesus was the secret to their boldness.

So, discipleship training is not a mere method of “how-to-do.” Nowadays, the importance of spiritual training is reassessed, and all healthy growing churches has been focusing on the spiritual training of members. The Dallas Theological Seminary has a course called “Spiritual Formation” It is about how to be “one with Jesus” and how the authority of the Lord Jesus and the Power of the Holy Spirit work

in our lives and our mission. It is the mandatory course that all students must take.

We also would like to receive some of these spiritual discipline and decided to start eight spiritual practices that Dr. Chuck Swindle, former president of Dallas Theological Seminary gives. The eight spiritual discipline are “intimacy,” “simplicity,” “silence,” “solitude,” “surrender,” “prayer,” “humility,” “self-control” and “sacrifice.” Also, one of the leaders in the field of spiritual discipline, Richard Foster gives “fasting,” “study,” “service,” “confession,” “worship,” “guidance” and “celebration.”

2. Training for Prayer

In worship services of this year, I have talked about the spiritual disciplines, “surrender,” mentioned by Dr. Swindle, so today I would like to proceed to “prayer.”

People often think that “prayers naturally spring up from our hearts, so that you do not need to learn or have training?” But is prayer something that “naturally springs up?” Is it not necessary to “learn?” No, it is not.

Prayer is a dialogue with God. More precisely, it is our response to God. God first speaks to us and then we answer. Therefore, prayer is born and grows by listening to the Word of God. The Psalms in the Old Testament are the words of prayers from man to God, but they are written in the Bible as the “Word of God.” I wonder why. That is because the words of prayer by Psalmists are responses to the Word of God and we can hear from God to people in the words of prayers.

Also, the “Lord's prayer” was given in response to the disciples’

request, Luke 11:1 “Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples.” Prayer can be taught. No, it must be taught. No matter how well we can pray, no, who can pray more often, moreover, want to pray to reach God’s mind and wish to offer prayers from the bottom of their heart. The wish of “Please teach me prayers” is a common wish for a true Christian. In everything, the Lord will please us when we ask Him, saying “Lord, please teach us” in anything. The Lord will answer us with rich blessings.

Prayer can only be learned by praying. Let's have a training of praying alone, praying in a group, and praying as a whole at the “Prayer Retreat.” Let's use what you will learn in your prayers and among your group. Let's gather together for prayer. Let's pray whenever you gather together. In anywhere we can pray. If you do so, you can experience how great the power of prayer is, and prayer will become a great joy for you.

3. True Prayer

Today, I have chosen the prayer of Psalm 22 for talking about the “Training for Prayer.” Psalm 22 was the prayer that Lord Jesus prayed on the cross. So, many of you might think why this is related to the “Training for Prayer.” Ryunosuke Akutagawa used Psalm 22 in his novel, “Oshino.” Shino said “coward word with resentment” about the word of the Psalm. Many people misunderstand the prayer, but I dare to choose it because we can see the characteristics of “true prayer” in this prayer.

Firstly, the true prayer comes from the heart. I have read a story, and it was probably Russian folk tale. In a village, there was an old

lady who prayed day and night. She believed that God was really happy because she prayed a lot. In a certain night, she realized a noise when she was praying. She stopped her prayer and opened her eyes. There was a thief. She screamed “God, please help me!” The thief was really surprised at her big voice so, he run away without her possessions immediately. Once she calmed down, God spoke to her, “That was your first true prayer.” Up to this point, her prayer was not coming from the bottom of her heart. She had just been repeating her words over and over.

When our health and daily life has been protected, our prayer tend to be template prayer without true heart. The prayer before meals or before and after gatherings would become just signal of event. However, when we really suffer, this is different. When we can not help ourselves, our prayers will become true ones. When we overcome the suffering or are in peace, we shall remember our sinfulness and lack of faithfulness as we prayed in our suffering. We shall remember God’s grace for sinners and appreciate Him from our bottom of our heart.

Secondly, the true prayer is that you look up to God. You don’t look at your powerlessness and suffering and complain about them. In verse 3, “Yet you are holy, enthroned on the praises of Israel.” The psalmist look up the holy God and remember God’s grace. He said, “In you our fathers trusted; they trusted, and you delivered them. To you they cried and were rescued; in you they trusted and were not put to shame.” He had never forgotten God’s holiness and grace. This prayer is not a “resentful” prayer, like Shino thought in Akutagawa’s novel. Even though in the bottom of suffering, he believed that God is

holy and merciful. This is the prayer of trust and confidence.

Thirdly, the true prayer is the “never-give-up prayer.” In Psalm 22:10, “On you was I cast from my birth, and from my mother's womb you have been my God.” The psalmist called God “My God.” This is “Eli” in Hebrew, and the same word is used in verse 1, “My God, My God ...,” When we hear “Eli, Eli...”, we remember the one of the Jesus’ words on the cross, and we might think that this is a moan. However, this is actually the words of trusting in God. Jesus, on the cross which was probably one of the most painful moments, trusted in God the Father.

Our prayer is supported by the confidence that God is “Our God” It is supported by the fact that God chose us and became “Our God,” even though we didn’t choose God. Therefore, the psalmist could call God “My God” when he was in the bottom of suffering. He kept praying even when his prayer seemed not to reach God and he was abandoned. He kept praying, saying, “But you, O LORD, do not be far off! O you my help, come quickly to my aid!” (Psalm 22:19)

God the Father abandoned Jesus on the cross in order that we would never be abandoned. The cross was surrounded by darkness; however, Jesus had never stopped his prayer to His Father. We may stop our prayer when our prayer is not answered. This is not true prayer. The true prayer begins with failure. We should call God with louder voice even from where we are in deadlock.

The prayer of Psalm 22 becomes the praise and thanksgiving after verse 22. In Psalm 22:22-23, “I will tell of your name to my brothers; in the midst of the congregation I will praise you: You who fear the LORD, praise him! All you offspring of Jacob, glorify him, and stand

in awe of him, all you offspring of Israel!” Where did this praise come from? In verse 24, “For he has not despised or scorned the suffering of the afflicted one; he has not hidden his face from him but has listened to his cry for help.” The Lord will hear us and turn His face to us; therefore, we shall look up the holy God and call Him “My God.” Thus we receive the “training for prayer” and learn “prayer.”

(Prayer)

Dear God, the Father, through Jesus Christ, you became the God of the believers and the Father of the believers. We appreciate the happiness that we can call you “My God” and “Our Father.” Please help us understand the huge grace you put in this happiness and help us to continue praying in any case. “Lord, teach us to pray,” In the name of Lord Jesus, Amen.