

# Daily View

*“But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called ‘today’” Hebrews 3:13*

April 25, 2020



Somewhere in Vermont

## When the Cliché Well Runs Dry...

*“Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples” Luke 11:1*

I’ve previously confessed that I sometimes find prayer difficult. Right after Christie and I were married we were living in Hawaii, and I was asked to serve on the Lord’s table. I was pegged to lead the prayer for the bread. I was shy by nature, not fond of doing public things, but this was a piece of cake. I got up to pray, as I had done many times before, and said “Dear Heavenly Father...” as I had done many times before. Then... not even crickets. Dead silence. I could not remember what to say next. My brain was like an airport shuttle that had come to a full and complete stop — and I desperately wanted to get off!

I decided to start over: “Dear heavenly Father...” (I had that part down pat), but then, again, *nothing*. Christie — my bride of just few weeks — was sitting in the pew wondering “who is this guy to whom I said, ‘I do’? Do I know him?” (I know she thought that because she told me). I don’t need to tell you that it was one of the most embarrassing moments in my life.

Eventually — it seemed like half an hour but was probably just a minute or two — I was able to find some words and get it over with. What made it doubly embarrassing was that after the “prayer” — such as it was — I had to walk down the aisle, plate in hand, one line of pews after another, serving the bread. People did a good job of averting their eyes, thankfully.

This is what can happen when you rely on habitual prayers. When your platitudes don’t come to mind, you are lost. Sometimes, we don’t know what to say, but the solution is not found in the cliché file. When Jesus talks about “empty phrases” in Matthew 6:7 he is referring to the habitual prayers that Gentiles utilized to try to curry favor from the gods. Jesus says, “don’t be like them” (v. 8). It’s not about repeating some phrases, per se; that’s OK, as long as your brain and your heart are engaged. Just talk to God.

Many of us learned the **ACTS** method of praying, a method especially helpful for men who are just learning to lead public prayer.

**ACTS** is an acronym that stands for **A**doration, **C**onfession, **T**hanksgiving and **S**upplication (petition). It’s fine for private prayer as well because it helps you think through your prayer.

We have to admit that there is an advantage in repeating the same basic prayer over and over; it’s mindless but at least you can check off that “box” and get on with your day (I’m being facetious, of course). But, as I found out, that approach can backfire and lead to some embarrassing moments.

A.W. Tozer has a good commentary on this in a short article he entitled, **“Prayer: The File Card Mentality.”**

*As the deer pants for the water brooks, so pants my soul for You, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and appear before God? (Psalm 42:1-2)*

When religion loses its sovereign character and becomes mere form this spontaneity is lost also, and in its place come precedent, propriety, system—and the file-card mentality. The slave to the file card soon finds that his prayers lose their freedom and become less spontaneous, less effective. He finds himself concerned over matters that should give him no concern whatever—how much time he spent in prayer yesterday, whether he did or did not cover his prayer list for the day, whether he gets up as early as he used to or stays up in prayer as late at night. Inevitably the calendar crowds out the Spirit and the face of the clock hides the face of God. Prayer ceases to be the free breath of a ransomed soul and becomes a duty to be fulfilled. And even if under such circumstances he succeeds in making his prayer amount to something, still he is suffering tragic losses and binding upon his soul a yoke from which Christ died to set him free.

—*Of God and Men*, pp. 79,81