

This past week, I was asked to attend a luncheon, and I was asked to serve as a counterpoint to the speaker. The speaker came in and was telling everybody about how great it is to live in small communities, but accept the fact that we're going to run out of people. Eventually everybody's going to move away one way or another. They might keep the address, but they won't be too active. And my job to be there was to tell people this isn't true. Small communities can continue to thrive and exist, and eventually some people will move back. We won't get to the possibility of being a huge metropolis, but we have the opportunity that others will come back. And I thought it was interesting that I got asked to do this because the person that was speaking is an authority on this part. She's a professor at Iowa State. She's got multiple accolades, and I'm just some guy.

And we get in and we sit down. And people are kind of trickling in, and it's a very informal kind of luncheon. And the president of the group comes up to me and says, would you be so kind as to do the prayer after we do the Pledge of Allegiance? And I said, yeah, that's fine. But is it necessary? And he's, like, well, yes, we always say Grace, and bless the food, and bless our speaker. I'm like okay, thank you. I will. I'll be glad to. And I asked this because half the group was already done eating, so I thought it was kind of frivolous for me to bless the food after it's already gone. But some of us waited.

So, we do the Allegiance. I do the prayer. We're sitting there. We're eating. We're having small talk, and the speaker says, well, I didn't realize that you. were part of a Christian national organization. And the whole room just stopped. And the president said, we're not a Christian national organization, we're a Civic organization. It was the Rotary Club, is who I was talking to. Not a group of people that I would automatically assume to be Christian nationalists. And she said, well, you have a flag on your altar, and you start with a Pledge of Allegiance and a prayer. So you must be Christian nationalists.

I really thought we were gonna be done at that point because it really, it really upset a number of people, and it should have. It should have made them upset. That's why I asked her at what point did we pray to the flag? At what point did I say the word Jesus? In groups that I walk into that, I don't know, specifically, who is there. You know, I do a quick survey of the room and generally you can tell which people are very Christian and which people are not. Which people may be Jewish. Which people may be Muslim. Big groups you can usually tell.

So I make a point of when I pray. I pray to God. And I don't say Jesus Christ, because not everybody believes that he is our savior. But yet, we all still believe in God in one form or another, even the atheist. They'll tell you that they don't. They do. When things go bad, they're still praying.

So the conversation quickly changed and went off. And then afterwards I stopped her and I talked to her a little bit more. And I asked her when she stopped believing. When was it in her life that she stopped believing in God and she stopped believing in prayer? Because prayer is an important thing. It's a very important thing. Her response was, well, I grew up Jewish. We don't pray. I'm like, I got a book that says otherwise, She's like Christians, they, they do all the praying all the time. They pray for this, and they pray for that. And they pray, and they pray. And they pray. I'm like if that was a true statement, the world being such a better place right now, because I personally believe the opposite. I believe that we don't pray enough.

But I don't mean that we have to pray at every event. I don't mean that we have to make a big spectacle. This is one of the few chapters in the Bible that when people come up and talk to me, I tell them to read this one. Usually when somebody comes to me with an opportunity they'll ask for Bible scriptures. And I'll say, well, read this book, or read this part of the Gospel. Read John; read Genesis. Whatever we're talking about, I don't ever directly say you need to read Matthew 6, or Matthew 7, or Matthew 5, or John 1, or first John 4 because everybody reads the Bible differently.

As we could hear in today's translation, the translations aren't all the same either. The Lord's Prayer sounded very different today in that text than, if you read the King James version, the New Standard Revised, the NIV, any of those. Each one sounds a little different, and it's important to remember that difference.

Matthew is telling us at the beginning of this that God is not a spectator in our life. He's not sitting in the box seats watching to make sure that we pray. Watching to see how we pray, watching, and just letting a life go by. God is an active participant in our lives. God is there to hear us, to see us, to be a part of us, not to be just a witness. So, when we go and we make this big production about praying, who are we praying for?

When I go to certain group events I look, and I see who the prayer who is leading the prayer that day, and if it's certain people, I honestly don't come in until after they're done because I don't believe they're praying for all of us. I don't believe that they're praying for the betterment of individuals. I believe they're praying so they can be seen. Matthew tells us not to worry about being seen by others. God knows what's in our heart. They put it there. They put all the covenants there. They put all the names of our friends, of our family. They put their name there. They know the true prayers start there.. And if they come out, they don't always have to be out loud. They don't always even have to start with, Gracious and loving God. Most holy and precious God, Jesus Christ, Our Savior please hear me.

I was at one event and the prayer started with Hey, God, it's me. I used to do that as a kid. Oh, I always thought that there's so many people in the world. How does God have the understanding to hear who it is. So I would start Hey God, It's me, Bryce. I messed up today, Cuz we can do that. We know the God is going to forgive us for everything that we do. We just have to ask, right. God's going to forgive everybody for what they do. Praying, a big part of it, and recognizing those needs within you. We pray for people who are sick. It reminds us of what they mean to us. We pray that the wrongdoings in the world will end. It reminds us there are those who need help. It reminds us that there are opportunities that we can make the world a better place.

We pray for children. They haven't quite learned, in our minds, how to ask and speak to God. But they do. Children are so wonderful that they have that innocence that they can talk to God without feeling embarrassed, without feeling isolated, without feeling the world is watching them, judging them. They can simply be. Those are things that if we did more frequently by praying the world would be so much better because we would forget to judge. We would forget that there are evils in the world that we just sit back and watch on TV. They become a part of our daily lives and finding ways to help, finding ways to change. And we don't have to pray the same way.

The prayer I said earlier with my friend who said, hey, God, it's me. Got halfway through this prayer, and it stopped and said, God. I just messed up, so ignore what I just said. And I

started laughing, and I felt back because I'm laughing in the middle of this prayer. But he didn't care. All of us are human. We all mess up. We all make mistakes, and God knows that. God doesn't want the same thing recited to him time after time after time, because in repetition, sometimes you lose the genuineness of what the prayer is. We need to be reminded that prayers aren't just words, they're feelings. They're conversations. They're an opportunity to become closer with God and with your fellow neighbor. The opportunity to share love on a great scale.

Let us pray.