

Part 3, Paper 91, The Evolutio... of Prayer, Chief of Midwayers

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evolution of prayer, collective prayers, ethical prayer, materialistic focus, ancestor worship, psychological impact, spiritual connection, prayer limitations, personal growth, community survival, higher consciousness, instinctive prayers, role models, prayer evolution, strength in adversity

SPEAKERS

John, Sarah



John 00:00

You know, I always thought of prayer as this fixed thing, like, it's been the same for centuries, you know, but digging into excerpts from the Urantia Book, specifically paper 91 really got me thinking differently. It's like this deep dive into how prayer, I mean, this really universal thing, right? Talking to something bigger, how it's actually evolved over time.



Sarah 00:21

And what's really fascinating is that this whole talking to something bigger thing, well, it might actually predate, like even having a defined something bigger to talk to, wait



John 00:29

You saying prayer like came before Gods. Yeah, that's kind of wild when you think about it.



Sarah 00:35

It is, and that's exactly what the text suggests. Think about it like wishing on a star or crossing your fingers for luck, even. Or what is it? Knocking on wood, these are all like instinctive expressions of hope, this desire to influence the unknown. And the book actually calls these very early forms of prayer, almost like Wish me luck kind of thing, except it wasn't just, you know, individual wishes early humans would often involve their whole families and tribes. So



John 00:59

less Dear God, more like a collective everyone send good vibes, exactly

S

Sarah 01:05

and and here's where it gets really interesting. I think these early prayers, they weren't like solely focused on personal wants, either. The text mentions the toda tribe as an example, and they still pray in this, like collective, less defined way, but it's actually considered a step backward, not some pure ideal form of prayer, you know? Okay,

J

John 01:23

I gotta ask a step backward, why it sounds like they're, I don't know, keeping it real, sticking to the basics, yeah,

S

Sarah 01:29

yeah. Well, the text, it argues that it's a regression, because it's missing a key element. There's no connection to ethics, to like, the well being of the entire community. See see early prayers, they were often super intertwined with, you know, things vital to the tribe's survival, a good harvest, a successful hunt, things like that. Praying for things that would benefit everyone, right?

J

John 01:51

Praying for rain wasn't about you being thirsty. It was about the whole community surviving the collective good, as much as anything individual, exactly.

S

Sarah 01:58

And this is actually where we see that next stage in how prayer evolved, because as humans started to develop, you know, more complex beliefs, imagining spirits honoring their ancestors. Well, those figures, they become the ones they're praying to.

J

John 02:11

So it's like our minds invented the other line on the phone call, so to speak. Instead of just hoping out into the void, we created someone to direct those hopes towards

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Sarah 02:22

Exactly. And that's where prayer, it takes on this whole new level of power, I think, because instead of just like hoping for luck from random forces, now there's a standard, there's an ideal, something to try and live up to. even if it starts with iust. you know. ancestor worship. it sets

kind of bar that's so

J John 02:39

true. Think about it, even today, the people we admire role models, right? A historical figure, maybe your parents even like a fictional character. We look at them and try to, I don't know, embody those best parts. Yeah,

S Sarah 02:50

it's the same concept at play. You see this alter ego idea in prayer? It's not what we focus on, who we believe in. It ends up shaping who we become.

J John 02:59

So we've gone from, I don't know, wishing on good luck, to, like, inventing the big divine hotline, right? But it makes you wonder, like, what were people even praying for back then? Was it all, you know, harps and clowns, or was it something a little more practical, you think,

S Sarah 03:16

haha, that's a great question, and it's actually where this whole evolution of prayer. Thing gets really interesting. See, the text is very clear. Early prayer super rooted in the material world. Okay,

J John 03:27

so, like, what kind of things are we talking here? Oh, we're

S Sarah 03:29

talking good harvests, plentiful hunts, protection from, you know, storms and stuff. They're the things that were really directly tied to their day to day survival.

J John 03:39

Okay, well, that's relatable, right? Yeah? Who doesn't want the good stuff? Yeah, it does seem a little different from how we, I don't know, we tend to think about prayer now, like it's this path to higher consciousness. You know,

S Sarah 03:49

absolutely, yeah, you're right. But here's the thing, this is where it gets kind of nuanced. Because the text actually argues that this whole materialistic focus, it actually served a purpose, like, even if their idea of the Divine was still kind of basic, it encouraged them to actually work for the things they were praying for. So

J John 04:07

wait, you're saying, even if the prayer itself was about, like wanting stuff, it still had this positive ripple effect. I'm curious how so think

S Sarah 04:16

of it like this, if you believe that a good harvest, it all depends on, you know, the favor of some god, some spirit, well, you're probably gonna put in a lot of effort to actually plant, tend, harvest those crops really carefully, right, right? Even if you know, deep down, you're like, Please, God, just make the crops grow. It still gets you moving, right? It's driving action, even if the thinking behind it is maybe a little off, okay, I'm

J John 04:39

starting to see what you mean. So, like, the motivation might come from wanting more stuff, but, but the result is still positive for everyone. It makes people try harder. It pushes them toward a common goal, exactly.

S Sarah 04:50

And it all ties back to this idea of evolution. It's a process, right? We go from like, gimme, gimme to, you know, make me better or guide me. But it takes time. Um, prayer. It seems like it kind of evolves along with us, with, like, human consciousness in general. It's like, I

J John 05:06

don't know, graduating from just wishing for that giant pile of candy to being like, okay, but also give me the wisdom to make healthier choices. Uh huh, exactly. And

S Sarah 05:15

this, this is where the text really highlights this crucial turning point. It's moving towards what it calls ethical prayer. Ethical

J John 05:21

prayer so, like, it's not enough to just pray for your own stuff anymore. There's a bigger picture

prayer so, like, it's not enough to just pray for your own stuff anymore. There's a bigger picture now, exactly.

S

Sarah 05:26

It's about, you know, moving beyond just your personal wish list and, like, really recognizing the needs of others. The text really makes a point of this, that true ethical prayer, it means accepting that we're all connected. You know, it's less about what about me, and more, like, what about us, less

J

John 05:43

my problems fix 'em, and more about, I don't know, stepping up, taking responsibility, right? For the whole human thing?

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Sarah 05:50

Yeah, exactly. And they give this really, like, relatable example. Think about a friend going through a rough time, right? Saying a prayer for them. That's awesome, obviously, but it can't just be that, right? Like, you gotta actually be there for them to offer support, show up, you know, do the practical stuff too. So

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John 06:07

it's this idea that your actions have to, like, line up with your prayers, put those good intentions into practice, really make it real,

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Sarah 06:14

exactly. It's about understanding that prayer. It's not, you know, it's not some magic wand to just, like, erase all your problems. It's about finding the strength and the guidance to go out there and actually do something good, make a change, which

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John 06:27

I think is fascinating, because it really pushes back on that idea of prayer being passive, you know, like this is about actively using that connection to something bigger to actually do good, right?

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Sarah 06:39

And that's actually where the text gets, I think, really insightful. It really tackles this head on. It even talks about the limitations of prayer,

J John 06:47

limitations that you can get, like, it can't just magically fix everything, all of it. Sometimes part of me still kind of wants to believe in that

S Sarah 06:54

quick fix. Well, yeah, and I get that. But the text, it's saying that prayer can't defy reality, right? You can't just, like, pray away a hurricane or, I don't know, win the lottery magically or something, and actually holding on to that idea. It can really backfire. It can lead to, like, feeling let down hopeless, even when those prayers, well, they don't get answered the way we expect. So

J John 07:17

if it's not about getting a free pass or special treatment, yeah, then what's the point? What can prayer really do for us when things are tough? So if prayer isn't about getting a free pass or, you know, bending the rules of the universe, then what's the point? Like, what can it really do for us when things are tough? Well, the text,

S Sarah 07:33

it really emphasizes the like, psychological, even spiritual, impact that prayer can have, even if it doesn't actually, you know, change what's happening around you. It's more about, I think, tapping into something deeper within ourselves, right, connecting with this sense that there's something bigger than just us, you know. And I think finding the strength to, like, actually deal with whatever life throws our way.

J John 07:54

So less about asking for an easy life, and more about, I don't know, finding that inner strength to just get through it all, yeah,

S Sarah 08:00

exactly. And that alone, like just that shift in perspective, it can be really powerful. Because instead of just focusing on, you know, what's going wrong around you, prayer can help us kind of look inward, you know, and it helps us cultivate things like compassion, understanding, forgiveness, the things that actually help us become like, stronger, more resilient versions of ourselves. Yeah, that's

J John 08:20

interesting, because I think, you know, a lot of times we think of prayer as something we do when things are bad, right? Like a last resort kind of thing, but what you're talking about is something I don't know, almost more fundamental, like something that can impact how we live every day, absolutely.

S

Sarah 08:34

And I think it's about making a conscious effort to, like, nurture that connection, you know, to something bigger, and that's something it doesn't even have to be, you know, some specific deity or anything. It could be a higher power, sure, but it could also be like our own, you know, wisdom, our intuition, even just, you know, a sense of shared humanity. I think it's the act of connecting that really matters, like

J

John 08:57

tapping into this universal human need, right for meaning, for a sense of purpose, however that looks in our own lives and and it makes me think back to something you mentioned earlier about the limitations of prayer. Can we, um, I don't. Can we go back to that for a sec?

S

Sarah 09:12

Yeah, absolutely. I think one of the things the text really emphasizes is that while prayer can be a really powerful tool, it's not magic, right? Like it can't change break the laws of reality, like you can't get out of that speeding ticket just by praying, you know, and you can't just, like, wish away sickness or hardship or whatever. It doesn't quite work like

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John 09:33

that. So it's about accepting that. Yeah, prayer is powerful, but it's not a magic wand, right? It's more about, I don't know how we find strength within those challenging how we keep things in perspective

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Sarah 09:44

Exactly. And the text, it actually puts this in a really, I think, a really interesting way. It says that, and I quote, prayer is not a technique of escape from conflict, but rather a stimulus to growth in the very face of conflict.

J

John 09:57

Wow. Yeah, that, um. Yeah, that really kind of hits home, I think so. It's not about wishing the hard stuff away. It's about finding the strength, the I don't know, even the wisdom, yeah, to get through it and then and then we grow from it on the other side,

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Sarah 10:11

exactly, exactly. It's about facing those challenges head on, using them, really, as opportunities to learn and grow, you know, to become more resilient, more understanding, more compassionate, ultimately, to become well, more fully ourselves. You know, it

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John 10:25

was a journey, right? It's not something that just happens overnight, and it makes this whole conversation about the evolution of prayer even more, I don't know, more relevant somehow, like prayer itself evolves with us, right?

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Sarah 10:35

I think so, yeah. And honestly, I think that's what makes this whole exploration so fascinating, because as we change and evolve as humans, so does our understanding of prayer and the role it can play in our lives. Absolutely

J

John 10:46

Well, I think, as we wrap up this deep dive into well, I guess you could call it the surprising evolution of prayer, we're left with a pretty big question, what if, instead of just this last resort, you know, what if we thought about prayer as a source of strength, something we used to grow to connect with, something bigger than ourselves, something to think about, right? Yeah.