

*We exist to make disciples who delight in God and make Him known  
by proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ.*

## ***Brethren, Let Us Excel in Prayer!***

Selected Passages

**Keywords:** Prayer, Name of Jesus

**PowerPoint Presentation included:** NONE

**SermonAudio Blurb:** Prayer is something that all Christians are called to do but often it goes neglected. Why? This is the purpose of the sermon, to understand how prayer works and why too often we find no results in our prayers. The hope is that our eyes are opened to the way God works in our prayers that we might be a people who mature in our prayers.

## Dismiss

### I. Introduction.

- A. In a mature church there should be mature prayer.
  - 1. This cannot exist throughout the church if it is healthy, for there are new Christians and growing Christians.
  - 2. But the model for the church should be prayers that reflect depth and maturity in the Christian faith.
- B. So far I have challenged us to never forget the importance of prayer.
- C. Last week I then preached on how prayer works, for if we don't understand this then we are doomed to merely wander and hope that we are praying effectively.
- D. Today I want to finish this subject with a challenge for us to excel in our prayer.
  - 1. If you are a Christian you pray. It is a natural process for one who has been made alive by God's Spirit
  - 2. But it is something that also needs to be strengthened and improved. You don't naturally pray well.

### II. What is the great hindrance to excellent prayers?

- A. There are various ways to approach this, but I think that the primary one that I have observed both in my life and others is that of a love of comfort.
  - 1. By comfort I mean safety, health, rest, money, lack of need, leisure, amusement, and such.

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2. I do not mean that there is anything intrinsically wrong in any of these things.
  3. But I do believe that these motivate too much of how we live and how we pray.
- B. When we have at the forefront of our life our comfort we betray it in our prayer life.
1. When we pursue comfort as a need, when we pursue safety and health as our priority, it affects us in radical ways.
  2. Our first concern stops being “hallowed be your Name”
  3. Our mind goes from “Thy kingdom come, thy will be done” to this world’s desires now.
- C. Proverbs 30:7-9 (read).
1. Explain and make necessary commentary.
  2. Have you ever prayed this prayer?
  3. Have you ever prayed it with a sincere desire that it would be true in your life?
  4. Such a dangerous prayer for an American to pray.
- D. Hosea 13:4-9.
1. I have been the LORD your God Since the land of Egypt; And you were not to know any god except Me, For there is no savior besides Me. I cared for you in the wilderness, In the land of drought. As they had their pasture, they became satisfied, And being satisfied, their heart became proud; Therefore, they forgot Me. So I will be like a lion to them; Like a leopard I will lie in wait by the wayside. I will encounter them like a bear robbed of her cubs, And I will tear open their chests; There I will also devour them like a lioness, As a wild beast would tear them. It is your destruction, O Israel, That you are against Me, against your help. (Hosea 13:4-9)
  2. Make necessary commentary.
- E. When we do not bless God in the times of when His providential will is painful we sin.

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1. Think Job.
  2. Think Jesus in the garden.
- F. If this is you, the pathway to excelling in prayer is to repent. Until your heart is beating in time with the Lord's you will wander and struggle to pray well.
- G. Take a simple quiz that only you and the Lord knows. If given the chance to ask of God three things and they would be given, what would you ask (not what you know you should ask)? Honestly. Remember what you thought.

### III. Why and How to Excel in Prayer.

- A. What is the primary purpose to prayer?
1. It is not to get things.
  2. It is your words of worship, honor, love and hope in God. That is the essence of prayer.
  3. Even in our requests these should drive our prayer if they are excellent prayers.
- B. A necessary caution.
1. This sermon is not intended to cause you to not pray, but to pray better.
  2. Never forget that God is your Father. Peter reminds you to “casting all your anxiety upon Him, because He cares for you” (1 Peter 5:7).
  3. If you are burdened over anything, take it to the Lord.
  4. But as you bring you burdens and cares don't end there. Let your mind grow to pray about your burdens better and more excellent.
- C. Examples of prayers in the bible to direct our hearts properly.
1. Psalm 67.
    - a. The prayer starts out with a call for blessing (1).
      - (1) This is a not some vague blessing or feeling of being blessed.
      - (2) It is one in which he wants God to bless the nation of Israel in a very clear and broad manner. He wants to see the face of God shining upon them—His favor and blessing.

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- b. But note that it is not for them, this is where his prayer is unlike many of our prayers perhaps. (2)
  - (1) The desire for a blessing from God is other oriented in an astonishing manner—for the sake of the Gentiles.
  - (2) As God blesses them they in turn can bless the nations.
- c. Note how we see the passion of God in this passage.
  - (1) God desires the nations, all the nations to know Him (2b).
    - (a) There is a burden here that is two-fold.
    - (b) The first is that people do not know YHWH. And that is not good for the psalmist. He is convinced there are no other gods, therefore there is no hope or life anywhere else.
    - (c) The second is that he is convinced that to God is man's highest purpose.
    - (d) How would your prayers changed if this was the burden and delight of your heart?
  - (2) God desires that He be praised by the nations (3).
    - (a) To know God is to praise Him. To give words of thanksgiving and boasting in His mercies toward you.
    - (b) To know that He alone is God, and that you know Him, is to realize all that you have is from His hand, He is sufficient.
    - (c) If we do not believe this then our prayers will reflect it. Our burdens will not be that there are millions perishing having never heard of the grace of God in Jesus Christ.
    - (d) But if we see and believe rightly that YHWH alone is God, He shares His glory with no other, then to pray this way is the only honest way to pray.

Jn 6

you alone possess  
words of life

Acts

no other name

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- (e) So if this is not how you pray, the request you need to make is that God might increase your vision of His glory until it drives you to pray this way.
  - (3) God desires that the nations find their ultimate joy in Him (4).
  - (4) God desires that the nations fear Him, for He is the judge of the living and the dead (4b).
    - (a) There is a sense of joy in this idea of God's justice, for He will make all things right.
    - (b) There is also the burden of the psalmist that if the nations do not find their delight in YHWH they only have the hope of His judgment upon them.
    - (c) It is a good thing to be on the watching side of His justice and not the receiving side.
  - d. Then the prayer turns back to joyful, hope-filled pleading that the nations might praise Him.
  - e. Then thanksgiving for the blessings already from His hand.
  - f. And a restatement of why God has blessed them.
  - g. In all of this is a burden that the Kingdom of God be realized.
2. Psalm 131.
- a. Note the two things for which he gives thanks (1).
    - (1) He has made a conscious effort to search his heart for pride. He is confident that he is coming in humility.
    - (2) He has made a conscious effort to reject those things that do not belong to him to know. (Think Deut. 29.29).
      - (a) He expresses this in the sense of contentment.
      - (b) Notice that he uses the name YHWH here. I would say that for David, to know YHWH and to know his responsibilities before Him was sufficient.

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- (3) He describes himself like a weaned child. Not a restless infant wiggling and wanting, but a child content to be with mother.
    - (a) When you wean your child it is a time of restlessness and fretting by the child. Though you know it is good and right for the little one to move from the milk to the solid food, in his infancy he does not.
    - (b) But once the baby is weaned there is a contentment to be with mother not as a means to food, but simply because she is mother.
    - (c) His soul is not filled with angst due to things not received, things not understood. It is sufficient to be with God and he says so.
  - (4) And then he makes his supplication, his request. That Israel as a nation might hope in YHWH too.
  - (5) As I worked through this little Psalm it became my prayer last night as well. And it became a balm to my weary heart.
  - (6) I was reminded in prayer that I am not God, but the True God knows me, has saved me and adopted me. I do not know all that I want, but it is enough to be known by God.
  - (7) It became a prayer of thanksgiving and praise.
3. 2 Thessalonians 1:11-12.
- a. Technically not a prayer but rather Paul telling them what he prayed for regarding them. Keep that in mind, for each of these elements would have been enlarged by Paul in his prayers.
  - b. Compare this to your prayers for we are given another glimpse into the prayers of a man of God.
  - c. Remember thinking of three things for what you could ask God and they would be given? Compare this with Paul's list.
  - d. Three requests:
    - (1) . . . God will count you worthy of your calling.

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- (a) This is not speaking of merit.
  - (b) Paul is speaking of that which is proper, appropriate or fitting.
  - (c) His prayer is that God would work in such a way that their lives to which they have been called by God through the gospel would be lived in a worthy, proper manner.
  - (d) “. . .you know how we were exhorting and encouraging and imploring each one of you as a father would his own children, so that you may walk in a manner worthy of the God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory.” (1Thessalonians 2:11-12)
  - (e) Paul calls us to walk in a manner worthy of our calling and then turns around and pleads that very thing to God. A glimpse into how we take the commands we are given and pray them back to God.
- (2) . . . fulfill every desire for goodness.
- (a) Here we must remember that this is connected to the first request, to walk worthy.
  - (b) Goodness here does not mean good things like an new car or good health. It speaks of uprightness, that which is morally good and excellent.
  - (c) Paul assumes that they have desires in this way. That their hearts yearn to see uprightness in their lives and in the lives of those they love.
  - (d) Paul simply turns that to a prayer, for he knows that this is consistent with the Person of God who is infinitely upright and excellent.
  - (e) Not merely some of those desires, but to fulfill/to make full or complete.
- (3) . . . fulfill . . . the work of faith with power.

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- (a) Again, to make full every work you do that is 'of faith.'
  - (b) What is meant by this? It is closely tied to the desire of goodness, they share the same verb.
  - (c) the work of faith is simply those choices you make that are counter-cultural. They are 'salmon actions' if you will where you are swimming against the current of this age.
  - (d) These are those actions, both in mind and body, that reflect your faith in what God promises.
  - (e) A simple example is in money. A work of faith is seen when your giving and investing of money is toward the Kingdom of God and eternity rather than here.
  - (f) When you train your children in the gospel, in the fear and admonition of the Lord. Where you pray over them, and discipline them in faith that God desires them to know Christ.
  - (g) When you work a job that is dead end and unfulfilling and you do it faithfully because you are by faith working for Jesus and not some corporation.
  - (h) Paul prays that in God's power both your desires of goodness and your works of faith would be made full and complete.
- e. Why does he pray this way?
- (1) That Jesus would be glorified in them.
    - (a) What he is praying for on their behalf is intrinsically Christ-centered.
    - (b) The things he wants God to work deeply in their lives are those things that the Holy Spirit has brought into their desires.



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- (c) A worthy walk is a Christ honoring walk.
  - (d) A desire for uprightness in one's life is one that desires to live like their Lord.
  - (e) A desire for works of faith is because they believe *they are saved and they have a savior to whom they serve.*
- (2) Secondly that these people would be glorified in Jesus.
- (a) As we, by God's grace, walk in a manner worthy of our calling.
  - (b) As we find our true, proper desires and works of faith fulfilled in every way.
  - (c) As we see that this all comes through Jesus, for Jesus, we are *glorified in Him*. Not on our own, but because we are in Jesus.
- D. Here then are different ways that people prayed, under the inspiration of the Spirit of God. These are examples of what excellent prayer looks like.
1. They are God-oriented.
  2. They are gospel-motivated.
  3. They are premised off of God's character.
  4. They are looking to the new heaven's and earth.
  5. They are grace-filled and missions-oriented.

## IV. Conclusion.

- A. How do you know if you are not praying well?
1. Record yourself.
    - a. Ask yourself how much repetition of words and phrases were done?
    - b. How did your words sound? Was there depth and truth in them? If so, was it explicit or vague? How much of it was God-focused?
  2. Pick an attribute of God and pray about it.

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- a. How easy was this?
- b. For many it is easy to declare, “you are holy Father.” But it is hard to then develop that idea of holiness in the rest of the prayer.
3. Pray without a single request, at all.
  - a. How quickly you run out of thoughts related to the holiness of God, or the love of God, etc gives you an indication.
- B. What does it mean to pray well?
  1. Practical matter, the value of writing out prayers vs extemporaneous prayers.
  2. When I was growing up in the church there was a strong mandate to pray ‘from your heart.’ It was viewed as more spiritual.
  3. I would recommend to anyone who does not pray well to consider writing out some prayers, perhaps one a day for a while. Do it with an open bible.

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## Community Group Questions

- Simply work through the conclusion together and practice prayer some more. Choose new passages to pray through.