

PRAYER: What Difference Does It Make?

The Priority of Prayer

January 15, 2023

INTRO.: Welcome to the second part of our 4-part series **PRAYER: What Difference Does It Make**. As I mentioned last week, I believe the enemy does not want these messages preached. He doesn't stand a chance when God's people pray. We began by looking at **The Purpose of Prayer:** To Bring Glory to God (an opportunity for the greatness of God to be on display); To Get to Know God Better (we looked at the account when Jesus visited Mary & Martha. Martha was running all around doing the preparations and she asked Jesus to intervene and tell Mary to help because Mary was just sitting at the feet of Jesus listening to Him. Jesus' response: "Martha, Martha, you are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her."); and To Develop Dependency on God (God wants us to come as little children. Was anybody reminded of this by looking at a Play-Do container?) This morning we're going to look at **The Priority of Prayer**.

Work, work, from morning until late at night. In fact, I have so much to do that I shall have to spend the first three hours in prayer. — *Martin Luther*

In what ways is prayer a priority in the life of the believer? What is there in the Bible that communicates that it should be a priority? To help answer these questions we are going to look at 3 things: **Character of God**, **Christ's Example**; and **Commands of Scripture**

CHARACTER OF GOD

What do we know about God that would inform us as to the priority of prayer? We will also contrast this with what the Bible has to say about us.

*God is perfect, totally without sin

Hebrews 6:16–18 Men swear by someone greater than themselves, and the oath confirms what is said and puts an end to all argument. **17** Because God wanted to make the unchanging nature of his purpose very clear to the heirs of what was promised, he confirmed it with an oath. **18** God did this so that, by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled to take hold of the hope offered to us may be greatly encouraged.

It is impossible for God to lie, to be wrong, to fail. Look at what we read about Jesus in the same book of the Bible.

Hebrews 4:15 For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin.

Elihu, one of Job's so-called friends who came to comfort Job, although he didn't do a very good job of it, does say some accurate things. Like this:

Job 34:12 It is unthinkable that God would do wrong, that the Almighty would pervert justice.

Contrast that with us and you will see why we should be those who come to Him.

Jeremiah 17:9 The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?

Even when we do the right thing, we can do it with impure motives. The Bible clearly communicates that we are all sinners in desperate need of the Savior. Left to ourselves, our go-to is SIN!!!

*God knows everything, He is outside of time for He is eternal. We can only see what is in front of us. It is a good thing that we can't see into the future. I don't think we could really handle it. God is not limited by location. Let's read the following passage together.

Psalms 139:1–12 O LORD, you have searched me and you know me. You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways. Before a word is on my tongue you know it completely, O LORD. You hem me in—behind and before; you have laid your hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too lofty for me to attain. Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will

hold me fast. If I say, “Surely the darkness will hide me and the light become night around me,” even the darkness will not be dark to you; the night will shine like the day, for darkness is as light to you.

*God is all powerful

The word “impossible” is not in God’s vocabulary! We just came through the advent season and what was Mary’s question when the angel of the Lord told her that she was going to have a baby.

Luke 1:34 “How will this be,” Mary asked the angel, “since I am a virgin?”

Luke 1:35 The angel answered, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God.

Luke 1:37 For nothing is impossible with God.”

One of the reasons to be a student of the Bible is because this records so many of the amazing things that God did. We serve that very same God. The One who:

*Created everything in 6 days

*had a 100 year-old man and 90 year-old woman have a child well beyond child-bearing years

*Had a big fish swallow a man and then spit him back out

*Parted the Red Sea and people went across on dry ground

*Rained food from the sky

*Made the sun stand still

*Caused Israel to win a battle when they were outnumbered 450 to 1

*Protected three men when they were thrown into a fiery furnace hot enough

*Shut the mouths of lions

*Raised a man who had been dead 4 days

I feel like the Apostle Peter when Jesus, after many so-called followers had deserted Him, Jesus asked the disciples, “You do not want to leave too, do you?”

John 6:68–69 Simon Peter answered him, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. **69** We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God.”

The priority of prayer is tied to the character of God. Do we know God like we need to, and do we believe what the Bible has to say about God? Secondly, let’s look at:

CHRIST’S EXAMPLE

What was Jesus’ relationship with prayer? Earlier we spoke of how He was totally perfect, God, the Son.

*He taught about prayer

Matthew 6:5–13 “And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. **6** But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. **7** And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. **8** Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. **9** “This, then, is how you should pray: “ ‘Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, **10** your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. **11** Give us today our daily bread. **12** Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. **13** And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.’

*He prayed

Feeding of 5,000

Matthew 14:16–21 Jesus replied, “They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat.” **17** “We have here only five loaves of bread and two fish,” they answered. **18** “Bring them here to me,” he said. **19** And he directed the people to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then he gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the people. **20** They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over. **21** The number of those who ate was about five thousand men, besides women and children.

Feeding of 4,000

Matthew 15:34–38 “How many loaves do you have?” Jesus asked. “Seven,” they replied, “and a few small fish.” **35** He told the crowd to sit down on the ground. **36** Then he took the seven loaves and the fish, and when he had given thanks, he broke them and gave them to the disciples, and they in turn to the people. **37** They all ate and were satisfied. Afterward the disciples picked up seven basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over. **38** The number of those who ate was four thousand, besides women and children.

Choosing the disciples

Luke 6:12–16 One of those days Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray, and spent the night praying to God. **13** When morning came, he called his disciples to him and chose twelve of them, whom he also designated apostles: **14** Simon (whom he named Peter), his brother Andrew, James, John, Philip, Bartholomew, **15** Matthew, Thomas, James son of Alphaeus, Simon who was called the Zealot, **16** Judas son of James, and Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor.

Getting away to pray

Mark 1:35–39 Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed. **36** Simon and his companions went to look for him, **37** and when they found him, they exclaimed: “Everyone is looking for you!” **38** Jesus replied, “Let us go somewhere else—to the nearby villages—so I can preach there also. That is why I have come.” **39** So he traveled throughout Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and driving out demons.

Raising of Lazarus

John 11:38–44 Jesus, once more deeply moved, came to the tomb. It was a cave with a stone laid across the entrance. **39** “Take away the stone,” he said. “But, Lord,” said Martha, the sister of the dead man, “by this time there is a bad odor, for he has been there four days.” **40** Then Jesus said, “Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?” **41** So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, “Father, I thank you that you have heard me. **42** I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me.” **43** When he had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out!” **44** The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face. Jesus said to them, “Take off the grave clothes and let him go.”

Jesus praying for His followers

John 17

Garden of Gethsemane

Matthew 26:36–42 Then Jesus went with his disciples to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to them, “Sit here while I go over there and pray.” **37** He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee along with him, and he began to be sorrowful and troubled. **38** Then he said to them, “My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me.” **39** Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, “My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will.” **40** Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. “Could you men not keep watch with me for one hour?” he asked Peter. **41** “Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak.” **42** He went away a second time and prayed, “My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done.”

On the cross

Luke 23:34 Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.” And they divided up his clothes by casting lots.

Matthew 27:46 About the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice, “Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?”—which means, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

Luke 23:46 Jesus called out with a loud voice, “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.” When he had said this, he breathed his last.

Why the priority of prayer? The character of God, Christ’s example and thirdly:

COMMANDS AND TEACHING OF THE BIBLE

1 Thessalonians 5:16–18 (NIV84) — **16** Be joyful always; **17** pray continually; **18** give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.

Three present tense commands in these verses:

*Be joyful always

- *Pray constantly, continually
- *Give thanks in all circumstances

FOR

This is God's will for you!!

In **Luke 18** when Jesus spoke a parable to His disciples concerning prayer, He wanted to show them this one point: "That they should always pray and not give up." All the verbs are present tense:

"should:" it is necessary, must

"pray:" ongoing action in the life of a follower of Jesus

"not give up:" to be discouraged, to lose heart

There is an interesting word that is often mentioned in the New Testament when it comes to prayer and it is the word, **"devoted."** The word gives the idea of being "all in" when it comes to prayer, to be busily engaged. We see this word in the following passages:

After Jesus had ascended into heaven the disciples, women, Mary (Jesus' mother), and Jesus' brothers gathered together. **Acts 1:14** They all joined together **constantly** (present participle) in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers.

The church as it was beginning to form is described as being:

Acts 2:42 They **devoted** (present tense) themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

When the first deacons were chosen to take care of the widows and orphans who were being neglected, it was so the elders could:

Acts 6:3-4 (NIV84) — **3** Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them **4** and will give our **attention** (same word, devoted, future tense) to prayer and the ministry of the word."

As brothers and sisters in Christ the Apostle Paul challenges the believers with the following:

Romans 12:9-12 Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. **10** Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves. **11** Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. **12** Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, **faithful** (devoted, persistent) in prayer.

The Apostle Paul urges, pleads with, begs that people pray for everyone

1 Timothy 2:1 I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone—

"urge:" present tense (to implore, urge, plead)

"be made:" present tense

This has been very challenging to me this week for I need to admit that I am not always "all in" when it comes to prayer. I need to tell you that we have some senior saints who are physically unable to attend who are "all in" when it comes to prayer. I thank God for them!! The Apostle Paul was all in when it came to prayer.

2 Timothy 1:3 I thank God, whom I serve, as my forefathers did, with a clear conscience, as night and day I constantly remember you in my prayers.

2 Thessalonians 1:11-12 With this in mind, we constantly pray for you, that our God may count you worthy of his calling, and that by his power he may fulfill every good purpose of yours and every act prompted by your faith. **12** We pray this so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Philippians 1:3-6 I thank my God every time I remember you. **4** In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy **5** because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, **6** being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

Ephesians 1:15-16 For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, **16** I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers.

SO WHAT????

How do I put this all together? If prayer is going to be a priority in my life; I need to get to know the God of the Bible better.

*Come to faith in Jesus as your Savior and Lord

*Have a plan for reading & studying the Bible

When I realize the great things God has done, I begin to see the great things God is doing, and believe that He will continue to do great things. I also realize how helpless I am in and of myself. Those who believe great things about God will attempt great things for God.

*Do a study on prayer from the Bible (look up some verses about prayer and begin a journal about prayer) Take the notes from today and look up the verses and spend some time thinking about them.

*Seek opportunities to pray for others

When you say you will pray for someone ask if you can do it right there. Grocery store, taking a walk, on the phone. Get involved in a prayer call. Ken Heise has coordinated one for men.

*Make a public commitment to get serious about prayer

QUOTES ON PRAYER:

*Prayer lays hold of God's plan and becomes the link between his will and its accomplishment on earth. Amazing things happen, and we are given the privilege of being the channels of the Holy Spirit's prayer. — *Elisabeth Elliot*

*Nothing tends more to cement the hearts of Christians than praying together. Never do they love one another so well as when they witness the outpouring of each other's hearts in prayer. — *Charles Finney*

*Worship and intercession must go together; the one is impossible without the other. Intercession means that we rouse ourselves up to get the mind of Christ about the one for whom we pray. — *Oswald Chambers*

*Men may spurn our appeals, reject our message, oppose our arguments, despise our persons, but they are helpless against our prayers. — *J. Sidlow Baxter*

*To desire revival... and at the same time to neglect (personal) prayer and devotion is to wish one way and walk another. — *A.W. Tozer*

*History is silent about revivals that did not begin with prayer. — *Edwin Orr*

*“Prayer should not be regarded as a duty which must be performed, but rather as a privilege to be enjoyed, a rare delight that is always revealing some new beauty.” — E.M. Bounds

*“We don’t drift into spiritual life; we do not drift into disciplined prayer. We do not grow in prayer unless we plan to pray. That means we must set aside time to do nothing but pray. What we actually do reflects our highest priorities. That means that we can proclaim our commitment to prayer until the cows come home, but unless we actually pray, our actions disown our words.” — D.A. Carson, *A Call to Spiritual Reformation*

*“A Christian fellowship lives and exists by the intercession of its members for one another, or it collapses. I can no longer condemn or hate a brother for whom I pray, no matter how much trouble he causes me. His face, that hitherto may have been strange and intolerable to me, is transformed in intercession into the countenance of a brother for whom Christ died, the face of a forgiven sinner.” — Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together: The Classic Exploration of Christian Community*

*“We are to pray in times of adversity, lest we become faithless and unbelieving. We are to pray in times of prosperity, lest we become boastful and proud. We are to pray in times of danger, lest we become fearful and doubting. We are to pray in times of security, lest we become self-sufficient.” — Billy Graham