

## **PRAYER: What Difference Does It Make?**

*The Purpose of Prayer*

January 8, 2023

**INTRO.:** Welcome to our first series of 2023. It sounds weird saying 2023, doesn't it? We are kicking off this new year with this 4-week series entitled, **PRAYER: What Difference Does It Make?** I want to begin dealing with the elephant in the room. We all struggle at times with prayer, don't we? Our minds wander, we get too busy, we sometimes wonder if our prayers go any higher than the ceiling. We ask God why we are going through such difficult and hard things. The Elders have been spending time on the topic of prayer and how can we encourage it individually and as a church. Do our actions communicate that we believe prayer makes a difference?

How many of you were watching the NFL football game this past Monday night? What was your first reaction? They say the actions of the medical staff were key to Damar Hamlin surviving. A huge shoutout to our first responders! What were people encouraged to do immediately as this all unfolded? **PRAY!!!** I was texting with someone, who said, "I will say I have never prayed more during a Bills game than I have tonight." For those of you who haven't heard, Damar Hamlin, plays football for the Buffalo Bills, and after having made a tackle, he stood up and proceeded to collapse. His heart stopped beating as he went into cardiac arrest. People were urged to pray and rightfully so. The family thanked all those praying. Dan Orlovsky, right on ESPN, said he heard the Buffalo Bills organization believes in prayer. He went on to say, "It's on my heart that I want to pray for Damar Hamlin, right now. I'm going to do it out loud. I'm going to bow my head, and I'm just going to pray for him." He prayed, "God, we come to You in these moments that we don't understand, that are hard, because we believe that you're God and coming to you and praying to you has impact. We pray for strength for Damar, for healing for Damar, for comfort for Damar. Be with his family. I believe in prayer. We believe in prayer."

How great it was to hear on Thursday that Damar was awake and responding. His first question, "Did we win the game?" Then, on Friday we heard the breathing tube was out and he communicated to family and teammates.

Our natural desire to pray comes from being created in the image of God and from the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives. Our lack of praying comes from the fall, as does our cynicism in wondering if prayer makes a difference. Do we believe that prayer makes a difference? What actually is the purpose of prayer? You may be able to come up with several purposes of prayer but I want to look at these three: **To Bring Glory to God, To Get To Know God Better, and To Develop Dependency on God.**

### **TO BRING GLORY TO GOD**

In their book, *Battle Plan for Prayer*, Stephen and Alex Kendrick state, "Ultimately, all prayer is for the glory of God.... Every prayer request (and every scenario that triggers a prayer request) is actually an opportunity for us to witness His glory firsthand."

Jesus gives several instructions and warnings when He speaks of prayer in the *Sermon on the Mount*. When you pray:

\*Don't be like the hypocrites who pray to be seen

\*Go into your room and close the door (it's between you and God) By the way, this doesn't mean you can't pray in public.

\*Don't babble, repeating meaningless phrases like the pagans

Then, Jesus gives a model prayer that hits on many things. Let's read this together.

**Matthew 6:9-13 (NKJV) — 9** In this manner, therefore, pray:

**Matthew 6:9b-10** Our Father in heaven, Hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

**Matthew 6:11-12** Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.

**Matthew 6:13** And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.

How does the prayer begin? There is a recognition of who God is and where He resides.

*"Our Father in heaven"*

He resides where there is no sin because He cannot look on sin.

*“Hallowed be Your name:”* this is where we get the word, “holy.” It literally means *“to treat as holy, to reverence.”* It is in the form of a command. As we pray we should desire to have the name of God lifted up, that He would receive the glory due His name.

*“Your kingdom come. Your will be done:”* The words *come* and *done* are in the form of a command. Our praying is to point us and others to God and bring glory to Him.

In the Psalms the topic of God’s glory is brought up many times.

**Psalm 34:3 (NIV84)** — **3** Glorify the LORD with me; let us exalt his name together.

**Psalm 86:12 (NIV84)** — **12** I will praise you, O Lord my God, with all my heart; I will glorify your name forever.

The word, *glory*, in the Old Testament carries the idea of weight and importance, majesty and honor.

In Numbers 14 we have the account of the twelve spies going to check out the land God had promised to deliver into the hand of His people. There was one spy from each of the twelve tribes who reported back to the Israelites. They all recognized that the land was awesome, “flowing with milk and honey.” Only two out of the twelve urged the people to go and take the land which the Lord had promised to give to them. The people began to complain and grumble.

*“If only we had died in Egypt! Or in this desert! 3 Why is the LORD bringing us to this land only to let us fall by the sword? Our wives and children will be taken as plunder. Wouldn’t it be better for us to go back to Egypt?” 4 And they said to each other, “We should choose a leader and go back to Egypt.”*

Then Joshua and Caleb responded, “The land we passed through and explored is exceedingly good. **8** If the LORD is pleased with us, he will lead us into that land, a land flowing with milk and honey, and will give it to us. **9** Only do not rebel against the LORD. And do not be afraid of the people of the land, because we will swallow them up. Their protection is gone, but the LORD is with us. Do not be afraid of them.” **10** But the whole assembly talked about stoning them.

God then tells Moses He is going to destroy them, but Moses pleads with God. “Then the Egyptians will hear about it! By your power you brought these people up from among them. **14** And they will tell the inhabitants of this land about it. They have already heard that you, O LORD, are with these people and that you, O LORD, have been seen face to face, that your cloud stays over them, and that you go before them in a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. **15** If you put these people to death all at one time, the nations who have heard this report about you will say, **16** ‘The LORD was not able to bring these people into the land he promised them on oath; so he slaughtered them in the desert.’

Moses was concerned about the name of God, about God’s glory. Jesus’ prayer for His disciples begins like this:

**John 17:1 (NIV84)** — **1** After Jesus said this, he looked toward heaven and prayed: “Father, the time has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you.

How is God glorified when we pray? We have been praying regularly for Adam, Stef, Liam, Konnor, and Jacen Hower. If you are new here, Adam and Stef and their sons are members of this fellowship. Some time after they found out that Stef was expecting their third son, (Liam) it was discovered that he had spina bifida and that he was a candidate for fetal surgery that would increase his odds of survival. If they chose to have this surgery, Stef would have to remain within 20 minutes of the hospital, post-surgery, until she delivered. They shared all this with the church and we prayed over them and have continued to do so. The fellowship jumped into action praying, providing meals for Adam, Konnor, and Jacen who remained up here, and donating to help cover the expenses. All the expenses for their stay at the Ronald McDonald House have been covered and I am so grateful for the response. How is it possible that a situation like this can bring glory to God as we pray? I have asked Adam to come and share from their perspective.

## **ADAM SPEAKING**

Those who know Jesus as their Lord and Savior will spend eternity glorifying God. Our time here on earth, as brief as it is, is an opportunity to bring glory to God, in preparation for eternity. The Apostle John, in his vision of heaven said, **Revelation 4:8–11 (NIV84)** — **8** Each of the four living creatures had six wings and was covered with eyes all around, even under his wings. Day and night they never stop saying: “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come.” **9** Whenever the living creatures give glory, honor and thanks to him who sits on the throne and who lives for ever and ever, **10** the twenty-four elders fall down before him who sits on the throne, and worship him who lives for ever and ever. They lay their crowns before the throne and say: **11** “You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being.”

Another purpose in praying is:

### **TO GET TO KNOW GOD BETTER**

How did you get to know your closest friends? You spent time with them. You can't have a relationship with anyone with small sound bites. While here on earth Jesus modeled this in His relationship with God the Father.

When Jesus was a young boy, His parents lost Him while in Jerusalem. Upon finding Him in the temple they wanted to know why Jesus treated them like this for they had been anxiously searching for Him. Jesus' response, "Why were you searching for me? Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?" Luke 2:49

The first phrase in the Lord's prayer: "our Father." It's about relationship. In Gethsemane, before He is taken away by the temple guard, He begins, "Father, if you are willing, take this cup from Me, yet not my will, but yours be done." (Luke 22:42)

When He is on the cross He says, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." (Luke 23:34)

As He is breathing His last breath on the cross, "Father, into Your hands I commit my spirit." (Luke 23:46)

Then there is the story of Mary and Martha when Jesus comes to visit.

**Luke 10:38–42 (NIV84)** — **38** As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. **39** She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. **40** But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!" **41** "Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things, **42** but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her."

Kendrick brothers: "He's wanting us to see what He is like. Our Provider. Our Healer (2 Kings 20:5). Our Sustainer (Psalm 54:4). The One who is wiser than our own wisdom (1 Cor 1:25). He wants you to know Him as your Creator, Savior, Lord, Provider, Protector, Friend, Counselor... and for you to worship Him as such with full appreciation. Not generally, but personally."

God is all about relationship. Jesus addresses God as *abba* in His prayers. Can you imagine how stunned the disciples would have been to hear God addressed in that way? No one had ever spoken to God in such an intimate way.

Paul Miller, in his book, *A Praying Life*, says, "You don't create intimacy; you make room for it. This is true whether you are talking about your spouse, your friend, or God. You need space to be together. Efficiency, multitasking, and busyness all kill intimacy. In short, you can't get to know God on the fly."

J.I. Packer wrote a book, *Knowing God*, which I would recommend people reading more than once. The thought that God wants me to know Him blew my mind when somebody shared the gospel with me. The thought that He wants me to bring everything to Him is so comforting, encouraging, and challenging.

J.I. Packer says, "The highest science, the loftiest speculation, the mightiest philosophy, which can ever engage the attention of a child of God, is the name, the nature, the person, the work, the doings, and the existence of the great God whom he calls his Father."

The purpose of prayer is to bring God glory, to get to know God better, and:

### **TO DEVELOP DEPENDENCY ON GOD**

The American culture works against this as we highly value independence. When children reach adulthood, they are encouraged to move out on their own, establish their own place and be totally independent. Not all cultures are like that. In speaking with Ebi and Esther, who are from India, they told us that Indian culture values the children remaining at home with the parents even after they are married. In fact, I believe that this theme of independence in our culture really hits home with men. A man doesn't need anybody. Just buck up and deal with it. That's why so many men are flying solo when it comes to life, it's challenges, trials, difficulties, ups and downs. The problem is that this is not Biblical. Think about the times that Jesus challenges His followers to become like children.

**Mark 10:13–15 (NIV84)** — **13** People were bringing little children to Jesus to have him touch them, but the disciples rebuked them. **14** When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. **15** I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.”

What do we know about little children? They are very dependent on their parents or other adults to care for them. Little children are really good at helplessness. Little children are very trusting of those who care for them. In order to come to know Jesus Christ as my personal Lord and Savior I must humble myself. I need to admit that I don't have it all together. In fact, I must admit that I am a sinner and totally unable to save myself. You and I are helpless to change our eternal destiny. It is a work of God!

**Colossians 2:6 (NIV84)** — **6** So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him,

*“live:”* walk, way of life. This is a present tense command. Nobody receives Jesus Christ on their own merit or goodness. Why do we think we can do life without the Lord?

Jesus uses vines and branches to illustrate our relationship with Him. He is the vine, and we are the branches. He commands us to remain (can also mean to reside) in Him.

Then He says, **“John 15:5 (NIV84)** — **5** “I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.

*“I, I am the vine:”* this is for emphasis (present tense)

*“If a man remains in Me:”* present, participle (ongoing abiding in Christ which involves prayer)

*“he will bear much fruit:”* present tense (as we walk in dependence of God)

*“apart from me you can (present tense) do (present tense) nothing*

Prayerlessness in our lives is a sign that, deep down, I believe that I can do life on my own. My stuff is enough. This is a very dangerous place to be. The Scriptures tell us our hearts are deceitful and desperately wicked.

Listen to the invitation Jesus gives in Matthew 11.

**Matthew 11:28–30 (NIV84)** — **28** “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. **29** Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. **30** For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”

*“weary:”* present tense

*“burdened:”* perfect tense

*“I will give you rest:”* future tense (to give rest, to cause to rest, to revive)

*“take my yoke:”* aorist, imperative

*“learn: from me:”* aorist, imperative

Do you think God wants to use the circumstances of your life and my life to cause us to grow in dependence on Him? Prayer should be our go to! Come to Jesus just as you are, with all your messes and challenges of life. Come to God in prayer because you recognize that you are totally helpless apart from Him.

### **SO WHAT???**

\*How is my praying bringing glory to God?

\*How have I gotten to know God better through praying?

\*How can I develop more dependency on God through praying?

The Hower family has been on a long road that will continue. Through your prayers they have seen God glorified, theirs and many others relationship with God deepen, and they have seen their dependency on God deepen.

Maybe you need to admit you have been living life like you don't need God.